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## **Aspects of political alienation: An exploration of their differential origins and effects**

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ter afronding van zijn studie politicologie aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam. De scriptie, die 116 pagina's tekst telt en inclusief de bijlagen zelfs 152 pagina's lang is, is geschreven in het kader van de afstudeerrichtingen Nationale Politieke Stelsels en Methoden en Technieken.

De redactie van *Acta Politica* is van oordeel dat de scriptie van de heer Van der Brug blijk geeft van de vaardigheid vanuit belangwekkende politicologische theorieën over mobilisatie en participatie op creatieve wijze tot een onderzoeksprobleem te komen. De heer Van der Brug heeft de zogeheten Fluwelen Revolutie in Tsjechoslowakije als onderwerp van studie gekozen. Een dergelijk verschijnsel, dat vele kenmerken heeft van een klassieke revolutie, kan uiteraard op verscheidene wijzen worden bestudeerd. De redactie is van mening dat de laureaat het onderwerp van zijn studie op een zeer interessante wijze heeft aangepakt: hij heeft de Fluwelen Revolutie niet 'van buitenaf' bekeken, als een onderdeel van de historische ontwikkeling in de landen van Midden- en Oost-Europa, maar als het ware 'van binnenuit'. Hij heeft zich afgevraagd welke de achtergronden waren van de mensen – in zijn geval ruim vierhonderd studenten van de Karels-Universiteit in Praag – die aan het protest tegen het Tsjechoslowaakse regime deelnamen. Hij heeft zich hierbij gericht op de rol die mobilisatie speelde in het geval van de studentenprotesten in de week van 20 tot 27 november 1989.

De redactie was zeer te spreken over de wijze waarop de heer Van der Brug een klassieke onderzoeksmethode, het survey, heeft gebruikt om een zeer belangwekkende gebeurtenis te analyseren. Ook de wijze waarop hij met de antwoorden uit de enquête is omgegaan, verdient alle lof. Op uitgebreide wijze is de heer Van der Brug in zijn scriptie ingegaan op problemen van validering en betrouwbaarheidsschatting. Mede hierdoor hebben zijn analyses een zeer gedegen indruk gemaakt op de redactie.

De presentatie van de resultaten van de analyses van het theoretisch afgeleide causale model, uitgevoerd met behulp van LISREL en enige andere technieken, geeft de lezer een uitermate goed en helder beeld van de 'mobilisatie voor de Fluwelen Revolutie'. De heer Van der Brug is er hierbij in geslaagd techniek en uitleg goed te scheiden, hetgeen de leesbaarheid van de scriptie voor zowel de technisch ingevoerde als de algemeen geïnteresseerde lezer verhoogt.

## Aspects of political alienation: An exploration of their differential origins and effects<sup>1</sup>

Bas Denters and Peter Geurts

### I. Introduction

Political alienation plays an important role in explanations of political behaviour. Aspects of alienation, like political powerlessness or distrust in government, are often conceived as theoretically important intervening variables in the 'funnel of causality', leading from the citizen's personal conditions (e.g. social backgrounds) to his political behaviour (e.g. electoral participation). Empirical research has extensively confirmed the relevance of aspects of alienation for our understanding of political participation.<sup>2</sup>

The last twenty years have witnessed an ever increasing differentiation in the concept of political alienation and its measurement. Wright (1981: 35) characterizes these developments as a 'proliferation of concepts and measures'. This increase in conceptual and operational sophistication is not matched by a corresponding differentiation in the 'theory of alienation'. We have highly differentiated concepts and (sometimes even) measurements of political alienation. The theoretical arguments providing insight in the *differential* causes and effects of *various* aspects of alienation, however, are conspicuous by their absence. Theoretical arguments linking political alienation to its causes and effects are typically cast in more or less general terms, which do no justice to the conceptual subtleties introduced in recent years. One might characterize the present state in this field as 'concepts in search of a theory'. The current mismatch between theoretical development and conceptualization on the one hand, and measurement on the other, is uncomfortable. Logically there are two possibilities. The first possibility is that the causes and effects of the various aspects of alienation introduced in recent years are essentially the same. In that case, the substantial recent efforts in conceptual sophistication (and sometimes measurement) are essentially 'art for art's sake': clever but not contributing to our understanding of political attitudes and behaviour. This implies that, there is no need for a more sophisticated theory of political alienation. The other possibility, however,

is that various aspects of alienation do have dissimilar antecedents and consequences. This implies that a thorough revision of our present 'theory of political alienation' is due. Empirical research on the causes and effects of various aspects of political alienation could provide valuable information on the empirical validity of the current undifferentiated 'theory of political alienation'. In this article we shall therefore try to answer two basic questions:

- 1 Is it possible to explain each of the various aspects of political alienation with the same set of exogenous and intervening variables (like, for instance, education, gender and age)?
- 2 Do different aspects of political alienation have identical consequences for political behaviour (e.g. the inclination to vote in an election)?

The answers to these questions provide a test of the 'null hypothesis' of *identical antecedents and effects* of political alienation. This 'null hypothesis' is attractive for reasons both of theoretical parsimony and research economy. On the one hand, there is widespread consensus that if the empirical validity of two theories is more or less the same, the simpler theory is to be preferred to the more complex one. On the other hand, in the past considerable efforts have been directed to the collection of data based on traditional concepts and indicators of political alienation. We should have very good reasons for investing resources in new and more refined measurements.<sup>3</sup>

To answer our questions we shall deal with the concept of political alienation and with its measurement first (section 2). In section 3 we shall direct our attention to the theoretical arguments relevant in providing an answer to the two basic research questions. This discussion results in a theoretical model of the origins and consequences of various aspects of political alienation. Subsequently, we shall put this model to an empirical test (section 4). This test is performed on data from a survey of over 400 citizens of Zwolle.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the results of such a test on a relatively small sample in just one Dutch municipality are suggestive rather than conclusive. In the final we shall discuss the implications of our findings.

## 2. The concept of alienation and its measurement

### 2.1. Alienation

Although the term 'alienation' is often used in explanations of social and political behaviour, Wright (1981: 17) rightly claims that it 'continues to be among the more ambiguously used and ill-defined terms in all the social sciences.' Definitions of this concept vary along at least three dimensions:

the locus of alienation, the mode of alienation and the referent of alienation.

Generally, the term alienation is employed to refer to 'discrepancies' of one kind or another (cf. Heunks 1973: 1). Many differences in definitions can be reduced to the question of where the 'discrepancy' is located (*the locus of alienation*; Seeman 1975: 93). Sometimes the incongruity is defined completely in objective terms (e.g. the worker's lack of control over 'his' or 'her' means of production). Other definitions refer to a discrepancy between an objective situation and the subject's definition of this situation (e.g. in terms of 'false consciousness'). Still other definitions refer explicitly to a discrepancy between the actor's definition of a situation and the desires of this actor with regard to the same situation. In this paper 'alienation' will be defined exclusively in terms of the *psychological or subjective state of an individual* (cf. Heunks 1973: 44). So, the analyses in this paper do not bear on concepts of alienation defined completely or partly in objective terms. Neither shall we focus on the discrepancy between the actor's definition of a (future) situation and his desires with regard to this situation (Seeman 1959: 784). Nevertheless, the implication of focusing on some, rather than other domains, is surely that the actor's definition of a situation is likely to be experienced as problematic in the light of social values and underlying normative social and political 'theories', e.g. normative theories of democracy. Many measures of political alienation, including those employed in the present study, have a background in a normative theory of democracy (see Finifter 1970).

The decision to define alienation in terms of a subjective state, however, is only the start of providing this concept with a more precise meaning. Political alienation, as it is discussed in the present literature, is by no means one-dimensional. The literature distinguishes various *modes of alienation* (Seeman 1959 and 1972; Finifter 1970: 390-391; Heunks 1973: 179-195). In this article we shall deal with two modes of political alienation, powerlessness and meaninglessness. Political powerlessness refers to the individual's feeling that he or she is unable to influence government decisions. A low sense of political efficacy indicates a feeling of political powerlessness (Finifter 1970: 390-391). Political meaninglessness refers both to the individual's perception of the political process as lacking an easily intelligible pattern of political options that allows the citizen to understand the effects of his choice, and to his feelings that such choices are essentially futile (Heunks 1973: 181-185; Finifter, 1970: 390-391).<sup>5</sup>

Before turning to a more detailed analysis of these two modes of political alienation, something must be said on the *referents of alienation*. There are many political objects one may be alienated from. Political life is characterized by a multitude of political and administrative offices. Attitudes of citi-

zens might vary from one referent to another. Therefore, in a careful analysis of political alienation it is essential to specify the political agent(s) from which the respondent is or is not alienated. In this article we shall concentrate on alienation from *local government*.<sup>6</sup> At times too, a more detailed analysis, differentiating between local politicians and local civil servants, is presented.

## 2.2. Powerlessness as incompetence and lack of system responsiveness

Powerlessness and 'political efficacy', as included in classic analyses of political behaviour such as *The Voter Decides* (Campbell, Gurin and Miller 1954) and *The American Voter* (Campbell et. al. 1960), are closely related concepts. Powerlessness is defined in the present article as a sense of political *inefficacy* (see Finifter 1970: 390; Wright 1976: 4). The measure of political efficacy used in these studies has gained wide popularity, not only in the United States but also abroad. In the Netherlands, Daudt, Mokken and their associates have contributed greatly to the development of a Dutch political efficacy scale (Daudt and Stapel 1966; Daudt, Van der Maessen and Mokken 1968; Mokken 1969, 1970). On the basis of Mokken's extensive tests (Mokken 1970) this scale has been included in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study and was also adopted for inclusion in the questionnaire for the present local election study. This scale (or scale-items) is widely used in publications on Dutch political attitudes (e.g. Van Schendelen and Rosenthal 1977; Van Schendelen 1981; Suijkerbuijk 1983; Van Dijk 1987; Tops et. al. 1991; Van der Eijk, Pennings and Wille 1992; Andeweg and Irwin 1993: 238-240). It is necessary however, to recognize that the traditional concept of efficacy incorporates *two* analytically and empirically distinct basic attitudes. Lane has stressed this point conceptually. He distinguishes two components of efficacy (Lane 1959: 149). The first component, the individual's (sense of) political competence, i.e., the person's assessment of his capabilities to act politically. The second component, the (sense of) political responsiveness, refers to the individual's assessment of the openness of the political system to the citizen's needs and demands: do citizens believe that governmental authorities are truly interested in their demands and and take these into account. Lane's analytic distinction is confirmed by empirical analyses based on traditional items by e.g. Converse (1972) and Balch (1974).<sup>7</sup> For our purposes we have constructed both a competence and a system responsiveness index on the basis of traditional indicators. For details on these and our others instruments we refer to the appendix.

The referents in our competence and responsiveness indices were local political parties and politicians. Local government plays a crucial role in the provision of a host of goods and services to citizens. Local civil servants play an important role in the provision of these services. Therefore it seems warranted also to pay some attention to the popular attitudes towards local bureaucrats. For reasons of availability of data, we shall focus on administrative responsiveness. This concept refers to the citizen's assessment of the sensitivity of local administrators to the needs and demands of citizens (see the appendix for details).

## 2.3. Political meaninglessness

The second mode of alienation in our analysis, political meaninglessness, is much less than political efficacy a standard element in studies of mass political behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Following Heunks (1973: 181-185) our conception of meaninglessness comprises both elements of cognition and evaluation. First, the sense of cognitive political meaninglessness refers to the citizen's perception of the political process as unpredictable and essentially unpatterned. This is reflected in an individual's conviction that in a specific political context there are no 'real' political choices to be made. Second, the sense of evaluative meaninglessness refers to the citizen's feeling that the political options presented to him as such are essentially futile. In other words, political meaninglessness, refers to the subject's perception of clearly distinct political choices and to his evaluation of the relevance of these options.<sup>9</sup> With regard to the cognitive and evaluative aspects of political meaninglessness two indices were constructed. Both these indices relate to the political choices parties present in municipal elections (see the appendix for details).

## 3. The origins and behavioural effects of political alienation

### 3.1. The origins of political powerlessness

In the contemporary literature dealing with the origins of the sense of efficacy, generally no distinction is being made between competence and system responsiveness. In this article we shall start from the assumption (our 'null hypothesis'; see section 1) that competence and responsiveness belong to a closely related set of beliefs, which originate from the same sources (see also section 3.3).

Two complementary mechanisms foster feelings of political efficacy: political socialization and the actual lack of institutional power. Although Converse (1972: 326-327) developed these two 'models' to explain the effects of education, they apply to the effects of age and gender as well. The *political socialization model* stresses the importance of parental transmission and school education. First, in this model formal *education* contributes to a higher sense of efficacy: 'Persons with higher levels of education may better understand the political world and recognize ways to influence authorities.' (Abramson 1983: 178). Second, *age* is thought to affect the sense of powerlessness. Beliefs, like the sense of efficacy, 'are transmitted during early political socialization [...] and that lessons of one's early years probably tend to erode somewhat with age.' Consequently, 'the argument is sometimes made that political alienation should be lowest among the young and should tend to increase with age.' (Wright 1981: 39). Finally, *gender* too is thought to affect the sense of efficacy. Political socialization of women traditionally emphasized their domestic role: 'The man is expected to be dominant in action directed toward the world outside the family; the woman is to accept his leadership passively. She is not expected, therefore, to see herself as an effective agent in politics.' (Campbell et. al. 1960: 490). Although radical changes in public opinion regarding the social role of women have taken place in recent years, the remnants of traditional role patterns are still likely to affect the sense of political efficacy of women.

The '*lack-of-power model*' emphasizes the actual 'lack of power' people are likely to experience due to their social position. First, *opportunities* to be politically influential are thought to be dependent on one's social position. Second, the higher one's position in the 'social pecking order', the more likely one is to be a winner in social and political interactions (Converse 1972: 326). These *actual 'successes'* are hypothesized to contribute to one's sense of political efficacy.

This kind of argument underlies Converse's 'pecking order' model of the effects of *education* on sense of efficacy: the well-educated are, on balance, 'winners' in the political arena and poorly educated citizens tend to be 'losers'. (Converse 1972: 326-327). A lack of institutionalized power is also thought to bring about a relation between *age* and sense of efficacy. People reach old age, leave the workforce, and lose many social and institutional ties that could provide them with channels for influencing political authorities. Furthermore, they generally experience a reduction of their income and become more dependent on government provisions. These experiences are thought to erode feelings of efficacy (Abramson 1983: 182-183). Something quite similar holds true for the young. But for the young, the effects of this 'lack of power' are balanced by the still strong effects of

socialization. Finally, *gender* affects powerlessness as well. The traditional role of women in (Dutch) society implies that women after their marriage should withdraw from the workforce. Therefore, like the elderly and the very young, many women typically lack politically relevant social ties and are not likely to acquire a sense of efficacy.

Nothing so far has been said about the effects of strictly political experiences of people. In line with the general argument of the actual powerlessness-model, and the bulk of the empirical literature, it is plausible to hypothesize that dissatisfaction with political outcomes results in feelings of powerlessness.<sup>10</sup> We focus on two aspects: policy dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction with services. How well does local government, according to its citizens, perform in dealing with major local problems? And how satisfied are the citizens with local government service provision?

Following Farah, Barnes and Heunks (1979), we hypothesize that dissatisfaction is affected by age and education. *Age*, according to Farah et. al. affects satisfaction: the young are thought to be more postmaterialistic and anti-establishment in their political orientations (Farah, Barnes and Heunks 1979: 424), while both orientations are presumed to foster dissatisfaction with current government policies. Education, as an indicator for one's place in the social 'pecking order', is also seen as linked with policy dissatisfaction: 'we would expect to find people low on the socio-economic ladder likely to be dissatisfied with government policy performance because the political system is not perceived to be structured to protect their interest.' (Farah, Barnes and Heunks 1979: 422).<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2. The origins of political meaninglessness

Literature on the origins of meaninglessness is virtually non-existent (for an exception, see Heunks 1973). The concept of meaninglessness, however, is closely related to the concept of political interest. Political interest can be defined as 'the degree to which politics arouses a citizen's curiosity' (Van Deth 1990: 278). If citizens perceive the political process as essentially unpredictable and feel that the political choices the system offers, are essentially irrelevant (i.e. they have a high sense of cognitive and evaluative meaninglessness) they are not likely to be politically interested: most people are unlikely to be curious about a phenomenon they believe to be both chaotic and irrelevant.

From Van Deth's treatment of socioeconomic determinants of political interest it becomes evident that the effect of these exogenous variables on political interest runs, at least partly, through 'political meaninglessness'.

He discusses the effects of three variables: education, age and gender. The effects of *education* on meaningfulness result from both parental transmission and formal education in the individual's early life and the actual experiences of individuals in later life. First, the higher one's formal education, the more likely a person is to acquire a basic understanding of the political system. Moreover, to an important extent one's place in society is dependent upon one's education. People in positions higher in the social 'pecking order' are more likely to possess or acquire the knowledge and skills to perceive and understand the relevance of the political dimensions of societal problems and conflicts. This ought to be reflected in a lower sense of meaningfulness among the better educated.

The effects of *age* on political interest are interpreted as the result of two life cycle effects (cf. Van Deth 1992: 302). According to Van Deth, young people lack both time for non-domestic concerns (social ageing) and maturity (psychological ageing) to develop more subtle political attitudes and a better understanding of the relevance of politics for their lives. *Gender* is hypothesized to affect the sense of meaningfulness as well. Women's traditional role is essentially domestic. This results in isolation from public and political life, which impedes the development of a sense of political awareness. This is not to deny the changes in public opinion regarding the social role of women in recent years. But the remnants of traditional role patterns are still likely to affect the sense of political meaningfulness of women.

### 3.3. The interrelations between aspects of alienation

In order to develop a complete model of political alienation it is necessary to specify the relations between its different aspects. The current theoretical literature is not very helpful in this respect. It is therefore unclear whether empirical correlations between these aspects should be interpreted as spurious correlations due to the effects of exogenous variables, or as the (partial) effects of possible causal relations between these dimensions. In the following discussion we argue that the subdimensions distinguished within each of our two *modes of alienation* are mutually reinforcing. One might argue that cognitive meaningfulness (perceiving no choices) induces one to evaluate these political options as irrelevant. But an effect in the opposite direction is equally plausible. Similarly, the perceptions of political and administrative responsiveness are likely to affect each other. Finally, we argue that the perception of a responsive system is bound to affect the sense of personal competence and vice versa.<sup>12</sup> As for the relation *between the modes of alienation* we

hypothesize that a high sense of meaningfulness affects the various aspects of the sense of efficacy in a negative way. We argue that a feeling that the outcomes of local political processes are unpatterned, unpredictable and irrelevant is conducive to neither the citizen's sense of competence nor to his perception of local government as responsive to his demands.

### 3.4. The effects of powerlessness and meaningfulness on electoral behaviour

The relation between powerlessness (sense of efficacy) and the propensity of voters to vote in elections is one of the best documented in political science. As Wright puts it: 'It is no exaggeration to say that the tendency for the alienated to participate less, at least in conventional channels of political behaviour, has been reported by virtually every investigator who has ever inquired into the matter.' (Wright 1981: 58).<sup>13</sup> There are also sound theoretical reasons to expect such an empirical relation. For some, politics is a realm beyond the control of ordinary citizens. On the one hand, these people feel that they are unable to influence the outcome of political decisions. On the other hand, the political system is deemed unresponsive to the demands of common people. One would be surprised if people with such a set of attitudes would participate as much in an election as people with a higher sense of competence and system responsiveness (see e.g. Campbell c.s. 1960: 103-105).

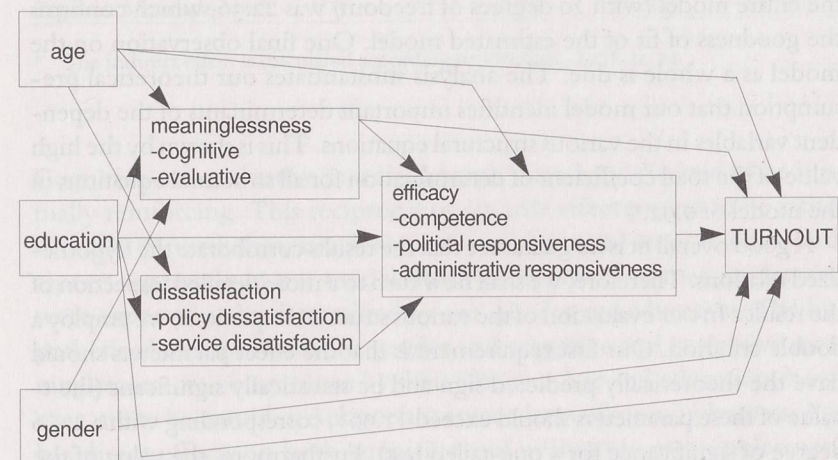


Figure 1

As mentioned before, the effects of political meaningfulness are not nearly as widely investigated as those of the sense of powerlessness (for an exception, see Heunks 1973). Heunks hypothesizes that both cognitive and evaluative meaningfulness negatively affect the tendency of voters to participate in an election (Heunks 1973: 228). If a voter feels that the political choices offered by the local political parties are irrelevant for him, or if he feels that (for whatever reason) he is unable to perceive any substantial differences between these parties, he lacks an incentive to vote.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, we predict that a lower sense of both cognitive and evaluative meaningfulness lead to a higher propensity to vote in local elections.

#### 4. Test of the theoretical model

In order to test the complex model developed in section 3 we need a multivariate technique that is capable to estimate both direct and indirect effects of variables. LISREL satisfies these requirements. Before we turn to the results obtained with this technique we first must evaluate some of the characteristics of the estimated model as a whole. In the maximum likelihood estimations of the model's parameters performed by LISREL, each of these parameters can be interpreted, provided that the theoretical model exhibits a good overall fit of the data. An indicator for the goodness of fit is the so called 'adjusted goodness of fit' (AGFI). In our case, this coefficient is 0.96, which indicates a good fit by conventional standards. Moreover, none of the standardized residuals exceeded  $|1.96|$ , this indicates that the model contains no specification errors. Furthermore, the Chi-Square for the entire model (with 20 degrees of freedom) was 22.36, which confirms the goodness of fit of the estimated model. One final observation on the model as a whole is due. The analysis substantiates our theoretical presumption that our model identifies important determinants of the dependent variables in the various structural equations. This is shown by the high value of the total coefficient of determination for all structural equations in the model of 0.92.<sup>15</sup>

A good overall fit is no guarantee that the results corroborate the hypothesized relations. Therefore, we shall now turn to a more detailed inspection of the results. In our evaluation of the various structural equations, we employ a double criterion. Our first requirement is that the effect parameters should have the theoretically predicted sign and be statistically significant (the *t*-value of these parameters should exceed  $|1.96|$ , corresponding with a 2.5% degree of significance for a one-tailed test). Furthermore, the value of the effect parameter itself should be of substantive interest. As a rule of thumb, we

ignore coefficients of  $|0.099|$  and lower in our interpretation, even if these should be statistically significant.

We start the discussion of the results with the first of our two research questions (Are different aspects of political alienation explained by an identical set of variables?). We will first address the relatively simple structural equations for *cognitive and evaluative political meaningfulness*. The main results are summarized in figure 2 and in table 1.<sup>16</sup>

Table 1: Decomposition of effects on cognitive ( $R^2 = 0.79$ ) and evaluative meaningfulness ( $R^2 = 0.73$ )

|                                    | <i>H0</i> | <i>total</i> | <i>direct</i> | <i>indirect*</i> |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| <i>COGNITIVE MEANINGLESSNESS</i>   |           |              |               |                  |
| <i>Gender</i>                      | +         | 0            | 0             | 0                |
| <i>Age</i>                         | +         | -0.25 (NS)   | -0.32 (S)     | 0.07 (NS)        |
| <i>Education</i>                   | -         | -0.44 (S)    | -0.27 (S)     | -0.16 (S)        |
| <i>Evaluative Meaninglessness*</i> | +         | 0.98 (S)     | 0.61 (S)      | 0.37 (S)         |
| <i>Cognitive Meaninglessness</i>   | +         | 0.60 (S)     | 0             | 0.60 (S)         |
| <i>EVALUATIVE MEANINGLESSNESS</i>  |           |              |               |                  |
| <i>Gender</i>                      | +         | 0            | 0             | 0                |
| <i>Age</i>                         | +         | 0.11 (NS)    | 0.27 (S)      | -0.15 (NS)       |
| <i>Education</i>                   | -         | -0.27 (S)    | 0             | -0.27 (S)        |
| <i>Evaluative Meaninglessness</i>  | +         | 0.60 (S)     | 0             | 0.60 (S)         |
| <i>Cognitive Meaninglessness*</i>  | +         | 0.98 (S)     | 0.61 (S)      | 0.37 (S)         |

\* The indirect effect is calculated according to Jöreskog, 1988, p. 35.

Cognitive and evaluative meaningfulness were hypothesized to be mutually reinforcing. This reciprocal or circular effect proves to be rather strong.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, as will be seen, it makes good sense to enter both aspects separately in our model. Both components of meaningfulness were expected to be determined by age, gender and education. The hypothesized relations between gender and cognitive and evaluative meaningfulness are conspicuous by their absence. Age and education, however, are to be considered important antecedents of meaningfulness. Age has direct effects on both cognitive and evaluative meaningfulness. However, contrary to what was hypothesized, evaluative meaningfulness

increases with age. The direct effect of age on cognitive meaningfulness, on the other hand, is, as expected, negative. These differential consequences do not corroborate the 'null hypothesis' of identical antecedents of alienation.

Education is directly linked to cognitive meaningfulness. As was expected, the better educated are more likely to perceive electoral options than (formally) less-well educated citizens. Contrary to our expectations, there is no direct impact of education on evaluative meaningfulness. This, however, is not to say that education plays no role in the explanation of this aspect of alienation. Education affects evaluative meaningfulness via cognitive meaningfulness. This indirect impact is both statistically significant and negative, as expected. The different aspects of meaningfulness are explained by different sets of exogenous variables. This finding contradicts our 'null hypothesis' of identical antecedents.

The structure of the model for the three facets of powerlessness, or *sense of efficacy*, is more complicated. In addition to the impact of gender, age and education, the dissatisfaction of citizens with the policies pursued, and the services provided by their local government were also expected to cause feelings of powerlessness. Moreover, it was hypothesized that political meaningfulness would exert a negative influence on the sense of efficacy. Finally, we assumed reciprocal relations between each of the three facets of efficacy. The empirical results for the second mode of alienation are presented in table 2 and figure 2.

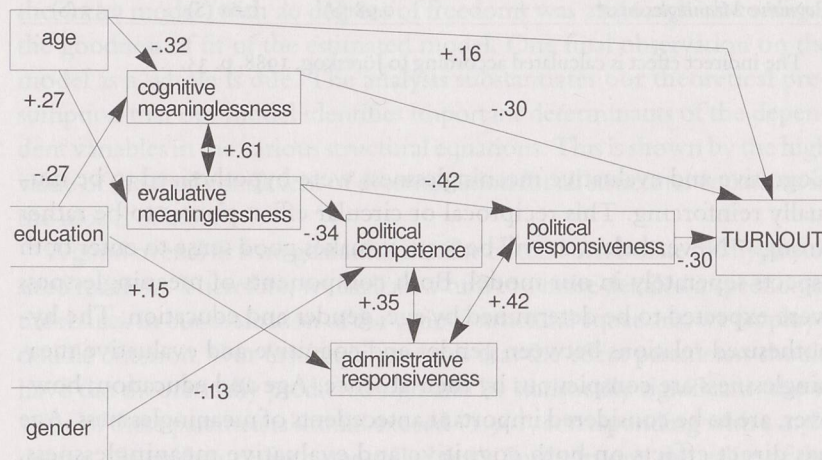


Figure 2

Before we turn to a detailed inspection, one general observation is called for. For all three aspects of efficacy the *dissatisfaction* of citizens with local policies proved to be inconsequential.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, dissatisfaction with political outcomes was excluded from our final analyses.

Table 2 demonstrates that the *sense of political competence* is directly related to only one of the exogenous variables, namely gender. Women, as was expected, feel considerably less competent than men. Contrary to our expectations, age plays no role in the explanation of political competence, neither directly, nor indirectly. Education does not affect the sense of competence directly either. Indirectly, however, this exogenous variable is anything but inconsequential. Through various paths a relatively high level of formal education produces a high sense of political competence. Furthermore, table 2 clearly establishes the importance of evaluative meaningfulness in the explanation of political competence. As a direct consequence, evaluative meaningfulness diminishes the sense of political competence. The total effect of this facet of political meaningfulness is even stronger, reflecting additional indirect effects by way of the subject's sense of political and administrative responsiveness. The impact of cognitive meaningfulness is only indirect (through evaluative meaningfulness). Finally, table 2 shows that the sense of competence is enhanced, both directly and indirectly, by trust in the responsiveness of the local administrators.<sup>19</sup> Contrary to our expectations, the association between political competence and political responsiveness, proved to be spurious when appropriate controls were introduced. The hypothesis of a reciprocal effect between these two facets of efficacy was therefore not supported empirically.

Table 2 also presents the results of the estimation of the structural equation for the *sense of political responsiveness*. None of the three exogenous variables has a direct influence on this dependent variable. The indirect effect of gender is negligible in substantive terms, although the effect parameter was negative as expected and statistically significant. The indirect effect of age is not statistically significant. Of the three exogenous variables, education, is the only major determinant of the sense of political responsiveness (though its effects are only indirect). Clearly the most important variable determining the sense of political responsiveness is the subject's sense of evaluative meaningfulness. The more respondents deem local political alternatives irrelevant, the less they are confident that the local political system will be responsive. This effect is both direct and indirect. The substantial total impact of cognitive meaningfulness is entirely indirect (via evaluative meaningfulness). Finally, the sense of political responsiveness is affected by the faith citizens have in the responsiveness of the local civil service. As before, the

Table 2: Decomposition of effects on political competence ( $R^2 = 0.55$ ), on political system responsiveness ( $R^2 = 0.70$ ) and on administrative responsiveness ( $R^2 = 0.77$ )

|                                      | <i>H0</i> | <i>total</i> | <i>direct</i> | <i>indirect</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <b>POLITICAL COMPETENCE</b>          |           |              |               |                 |
| <i>Gender</i>                        | -         | -0.15 (S)    | -0.13 (S)     | -0.02 (S)       |
| <i>Age</i>                           | -         | -0.06 (NS)   | 0             | -0.06 (NS)      |
| <i>Education</i>                     | +         | 0.21 (S)     | 0             | 0.21 (S)        |
| <i>Evaluative Meaninglessness</i>    | -         | -0.78 (S)    | -0.34 (S)     | -0.44 (S)       |
| <i>Cognitive Meaninglessness</i>     | -         | -0.48 (S)    | 0             | -0.48 (S)       |
| <i>Political responsiveness</i>      | +         | 0.22 (S)     | 0             | 0.22 (S)        |
| <i>Administrative responsiveness</i> | +         | 0.51 (S)     | 0.35 (S)      | 0.16 (S)        |
| <i>Political competence</i>          | +         | 0.18 (S)     | 0             | 0.18 (S)        |
| <b>POLITICAL RESPONSIVENESS</b>      |           |              |               |                 |
| <i>Gender</i>                        | -         | -0.03 (S)    | 0             | -0.03 (S)       |
| <i>Age</i>                           | -         | -0.07 (NS)   | 0             | -0.07 (NS)      |
| <i>Education</i>                     | +         | 0.25 (S)     | 0             | 0.25 (S)        |
| <i>Evaluative Meaninglessness</i>    | -         | -0.97 (S)    | -0.42 (S)     | -0.55 (S)       |
| <i>Cognitive Meaninglessness</i>     | -         | -0.60 (S)    | 0             | -0.60 (S)       |
| <i>Political responsiveness</i>      | +         | 0.26 (S)     | 0             | 0.26 (S)        |
| <i>Administrative responsiveness</i> | +         | 0.61 (S)     | 0.42 (S)      | 0.19 (S)        |
| <i>Political competence</i>          | +         | 0.22 (S)     | 0             | 0.22 (S)        |
| <b>ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIVENESS</b> |           |              |               |                 |
| <i>Gender</i>                        | -         | -0.07 (S)    | 0             | -0.07 (S)       |
| <i>Age</i>                           | -         | -0.05 (NS)   | 0             | -0.05 (NS)      |
| <i>Education</i>                     | +         | 0.33 (S)     | 0.15 (S)      | -0.18 (S)       |
| <i>Evaluative Meaninglessness</i>    | -         | -0.69 (S)    | 0             | -0.69 (S)       |
| <i>Cognitive Meaninglessness</i>     | -         | -0.42 (S)    | 0             | -0.42 (S)       |
| <i>Political responsiveness</i>      | +         | 0.61 (S)     | 0.42 (S)      | 0.19 (S)        |
| <i>Administrative responsiveness</i> | +         | 0.44 (S)     | 0             | 0.44 (S)        |
| <i>Political competence</i>          | +         | 0.51 (S)     | 0.35 (S)      | 0.16 (S)        |

hypothesized reciprocal effects of competence and political responsiveness proved to be spurious.

Finally, table 2 deals with the explanation of the *sense of administrative responsiveness*. As hypothesized, a high level of education 'produces' faith in administrative responsiveness. This direct effect is supplemented by an in-

direct effect through various paths. Age has no significant impact, neither direct nor indirect. Women, as was expected, have less faith in administrative responsiveness than men. But this statistically significant effect is rather weak in substantive terms. Political meaningfulness has no direct links with the sense of administrative responsiveness. Nevertheless, both cognitive and evaluative meaningfulness have a considerable indirect impact, via the other components of the sense of efficacy. Finally, through the hypothesized reciprocal effects, administrative responsiveness is linked to the two other components of efficacy.

The final conclusion with regard to our first research question is that contrary to our 'null hypothesis' different aspects of alienation are explained by different sets of variables.

Table 3: Decomposition of effects on turnout ( $R^2 = 0.29$ )

|                                      | <i>H0</i> | <i>total</i> | <i>direct</i> | <i>indirect</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <i>Gender</i>                        | -         | -0.01 (S)    | 0             | -0.01 (S)       |
| <i>Age</i>                           | +         | 0.21 (S)     | 0.16 (S)      | -0.05 (NS)      |
| <i>Education</i>                     | +         | 0.21 (S)     | 0             | 0.21 (S)        |
| <i>Evaluative Meaninglessness</i>    | -         | -0.58 (S)    | 0             | -0.58 (S)       |
| <i>Cognitive Meaninglessness</i>     | -         | -0.65 (S)    | -0.30 (S)     | -0.36 (S)       |
| <i>Political competence</i>          | +         | 0.06 (S)     | 0             | 0.06 (S)        |
| <i>Political responsiveness</i>      | +         | 0.37 (S)     | 0.30 (S)      | 0.08 (S)        |
| <i>Administrative responsiveness</i> | +         | 0.18 (S)     | 0             | 0.18 (S)        |

Now, we shall turn to our second research question: do different aspects of political alienation have identical consequences for political behaviour here: election turnout? Table 3 presents the relevant data, while the structure of the complete model is presented graphically in figure 2. Our explanation of *turnout* features two groups of variables. Firstly, gender, age and education, as exogenous variables, are hypothesized to produce variations in the sense of efficacy and meaningfulness. These modes of alienation, are thought to affect the citizen's propensity to vote in local elections. This implies that we expect the exogenous variables to have no direct impact on turnout. The entire effect of these variables is expected to run through efficacy and meaningfulness. Table 3 demonstrates that this prediction is correct for both gender and education. Women are less inclined than men to vote in local elections. And, this effect runs entirely through the alienation variables included in our model. Although this effect is sta-

tistically significant, it is of minor importance in substantive terms. The impact of education on the propensity to vote is substantial. As was predicted, this effect proved to be positive and entirely indirect. All of the impact of education runs through either meaninglessness or sense of efficacy. The third exogenous variable, age, is a different matter. As was expected, the total effect of this variable on turnout was positive. This effect, however, was almost exclusively direct. Although age has an impact on both aspects of meaninglessness, these effects neutralize one another, producing a statistically insignificant net indirect effect of age.

Secondly, turnout is affected by a set of endogenous variables as well. Political meaninglessness was hypothesized to affect the propensity to vote both directly and through the various aspects of the sense of efficacy. Table 3 demonstrates that the impact of the two facets of meaninglessness is quite different. Whereas cognitive meaninglessness has the expected substantial negative direct effect on turnout, the negative effect of evaluative meaninglessness is completely indirect. The entire influence of evaluative meaninglessness runs via sense of efficacy (more specifically through political responsiveness) and through cognitive meaninglessness.<sup>20</sup> Finally, we turn to the 'efficacy'-triplet. Only one of this triplet has the predicted positive effect on turnout, namely the sense of political responsiveness. The indirect effects of the other two facets of efficacy are 'transmitted' via this variable. The indirect effect of administrative responsiveness is positive as was expected, statistically significant and of substantive interest. The impact of the sense of political competence, however, was so weak as to be of no substantive interest (though its sign was positive as expected, and the parameter statistically significant).

## 5. Conclusions

In this article we started with two basic questions:

- 1 Are different aspects of political alienation explained by an identical set of variables?
- 2 Do different aspects of political alienation have identical consequences for political behaviour (e.g. the inclination to vote in an election)?

In answering these questions we have concentrated on two modes of political alienation, the citizen's sense of political powerlessness (or lack of efficacy), and the citizen's sense of political meaninglessness. With regard to either of these modes of political alienation further subdivisions were deemed necessary. First, with regard to the sense of efficacy, a distinction was made

between the citizen's sense of political competence (the self-confidence of the citizen as a political actor) and his trust in the responsiveness of the local system. This concept of responsiveness refers in the present study to local parties and politicians (political responsiveness), and to the local administrative system (administrative responsiveness). Second, the concept of political meaninglessness refers, on the one hand, to the citizen's perception of the absence or presence of local political alternatives (cognitive meaninglessness); on the other hand it relates to the citizen's judgement of the (ir-)relevance of any such local political options (evaluative meaninglessness).

In this section we shall not try to summarize all the findings with regard to our research question. Inspection of figure 2 is far more informative than a lengthy summary. Instead, we make some concluding remarks on the implications of our findings for future research. Before doing so, however, we would like to make two general observations. First, we have to conclude that contrary to our theoretical expectations, *dissatisfaction with political outputs* proved to be of unimportant in the explanation of the sense of efficacy (and turnout). This is a remarkable finding. In a comprehensive survey of the literature on political alienation Wright claims, for instance, that 'virtually all serious empirical inquiries into the causes of the alienation trends' sustain the relevance of dissatisfaction with political outcomes as a major source of political alienation (1981: 50). We feel that it is too early to discard the dissatisfaction-explanation altogether. For one thing, caution is due in view of the provisional nature of our test (based on a small sample in just one municipality). Moreover, it should be obvious that we employed rather crude measures for the satisfaction with local political outcomes. A more sophisticated measurement of policy and service dissatisfaction is necessary for more definitive conclusions in this respect.

A second general observation is that the test of our model for voting turnout shows that meaninglessness and powerlessness are both important determinants of the propensity to vote. Almost all of the effects of the traditional exogenous variables (gender, age and – last but not least – education) on turnout 'run through' these aspects of political alienation. This suggests that the study of causes and effects of political alienation might be rewarding in terms of a better understanding of electoral behaviour.

As we have observed in the introduction, it is rather unfortunate that the literature on political alienation is characterized by a mismatch between conceptual and theoretical sophistication. What are the implications of our findings for the answer to the question: what should we do to achieve the right balance between theoretical and conceptual sophistication? Of course, our findings as such, only relate to a relatively small sample from just one Dutch municipality and are therefore suggestive rather than con-

clusive. Nevertheless, our results concur with the findings of a growing body of international empirical research on the differential causes and effects of aspects of alienation (notably of 'competence' and 'responsiveness').<sup>21</sup> In conjunction with these rather similar results elsewhere, our findings suggest that the recent conceptual refinements have proved essentially gratifying.

On the one hand, the results show that the *origins* (see question 1) of the various facets of both meaninglessness and efficacy differ substantially. For instance, gender proved not to have the hypothesized negative effect on political and administrative responsiveness. Yet gender did have an important negative direct effect on the third of this conceptual triplet, the sense of political competence. Women appear to feel less confident than men in this respect. A traditional analysis in which political competence and political responsiveness are included in an allegedly unidimensional scale, would have obscured these differences.

On the other hand, the various facets not only differ in their antecedents, but also in their *consequences* (see question 2). Our analyses provide two interesting examples of these differential effects. The first example relates to cognitive and evaluative meaninglessness. As is evident from a quick look at figure 2, these two facets of meaninglessness are at the core of our causal model. Yet these closely related concepts apparently play different roles in the model, even though the correlation between both aspects is considerable. Evaluative meaninglessness has an important role as an intervening variable. This variable has, as was theoretically expected, substantial direct effects on both political competence and political responsiveness and as such conveys effects of education, age, and its 'cognitive' twin-brother, to various aspects of political powerlessness. Meanwhile, this variable does not have the hypothesized substantive direct effect on turnout. For cognitive meaninglessness the picture looks quite different. This variable has none of the hypothesized direct links to the efficacy variables. On the other hand, this variable is directly related to turnout, as was expected beforehand. A second interesting example relates to the differential consequences of political competence and political responsiveness for turnout. Whereas our analyses revealed that faith in political responsiveness had a direct positive effect on turnout, this hypothesized effect was absent for political competence. Here too, our examples provide evidence that a multifaceted approach to the conceptualization of political alienation is necessary.

If these results were to be confirmed in a more definitive test, this implies, however, that we should direct future research to a thorough revision of our 'theory of political alienation'. There are at least two areas that

need special attention. Firstly, most researchers in this field settle for the observation that alienation is a multifaceted phenomenon. Sometimes references are made to the interrelatedness of these facets. But in general, no explanation for the origins of the correlations between modes of alienation is offered. Secondly, in the present theoretical literature on the antecedents and consequences of political efficacy and political meaninglessness, arguments connecting causes and effects are normally presented in general terms. The results of our provisional test suggest that such an undifferentiated approach is unsatisfactory and that a more complex and differentiated theory of political alienation is asked for. This forms a major challenge for both theory and research. In this respect our results are only the first step towards a better understanding of political alienation and its causes and effects.<sup>22</sup>

A second concluding remark relates to some *methodological issues*. It is without doubt not very difficult to criticize several of the indices employed here. For most of the theoretical concepts we had to settle for single- or two-item-based measurements, based on traditional indicators for aspects of alienation, e.g. political efficacy.<sup>23</sup> Our results, combined with similar findings reported elsewhere, clearly suggest that an investment in alternative measures for some of the key-concepts of political alienation may be rewarding.<sup>24</sup> In this respect too, we do not claim that our current findings are anything more than 'some preliminary results' on the road to a better understanding of various aspects of political alienation.

## Notes

1. This is a thoroughly revised version of a paper presented at the Workshop on 'Local Government and the Citizen', ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, april 1992, Limerick Ireland. The authors wish to thank prof. G. Johnson (Auburn University, Texas) for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2. This can be illustrated with the example of the concept of 'political efficacy', one of the most widely studied aspects of political alienation. In 'The American Voter' (1960) Campbell et. al. show that individuals with less formal education and females generally, have a lower sense of political efficacy than people with more formal education and males (p. 479 and 490-491). Furthermore, they found that citizens feeling, politically 'powerless' (having a low sense of efficacy) exhibit a much lower rate of voting turnout than citizens that feel less inefficacious (Campbell. et. al., 1960: 105).

3. This concern is even more warranted if new instruments replace old ones. The deletion of traditional indicators is extremely unattractive because it precludes cross-national or time-series-analyses.

4. The Zwolle survey is part of a seven-city study on local democracies (Tops et.al. 1991). For methodological reasons, we only used the data for Zwolle in the present paper. If the test in Zwolle should result in a rejection of the 'null-hypotheses' of 'no diffe-

rences', we have the data from the other six cities to test a more differentiated theoretical model. In Zwolle, a gross probability sample of 1,200 persons was taken. To realize the required minimum number of 400 interviews per municipality, 898 citizens were approached, resulting in 431 actual interviews. This implies a response rate of 48 percent. Analysis of non-response showed that, notwithstanding this rather low response rate, the response group was representative for the local electorate with respect to gender, age, civil status, and place of residence (neighbourhood) in Zwolle.

5. Both feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness are likely to be experienced as problematic in the light of social values and normative theories of democracy. Powerlessness is difficult to reconcile with the democratic creeds of competent and self-confident citizens necessary for democratic political participation on the one hand and the confidence in the democratic government's responsiveness on the other hand. Political meaninglessness is problematic since it suggests flaws in the operation of the representative democratic system in which political parties should structure the electoral choice (Janda, Berry & Goldman, 1992: 268-269).

6. In the U.S.A. and Canada researchers report differential orientations of citizens towards different levels of government (see e.g. Wright, 1981 and Stewart et. al., 1992). Whether this is the case in the Netherlands as well, is a question beyond the scope of this article. This issue will be addressed in a separate article.

7. The two-dimensionality of the traditional efficacy measure is now widely acknowledged. See e.g. Barnes and Kaase et. al., 1979; Miller, Miller and Schneider, 1980; and Abramson, 1983, chapter 8; cf. also Heunks (1973: 185-186) and Suijkerbuijk (1983: 30-33). Recently major changes in the measurement of these two components of political efficacy in the U.S. National Election Study have been introduced (cf. Niemi, Craig and Mattei, 1991; Craig, Niemi and Silver, 1990).

8. However, an item indicating an aspect of 'meaninglessness' was included in the political efficacy scale employed in the University of Michigan Survey Research Center election studies: 'Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.'

9. It is important at this point to distinguish the concept of meaninglessness from related concepts like political knowledge, level of conceptualization and political interest. Both political knowledge and level of conceptualization refer to the individuals 'performance' on 'tests' developed by the researcher to measure the individual's objective knowledge or the (sophistication of the) frames of reference actually employed by citizens in assessing political events.

10. Moreover, as Wright concludes in his excellent survey of the literature on political alienation: 'virtually all serious empirical inquiries into the causes of the alienation trends sustain this explanation. That is, what the rising levels of political alienation indicate is simply a rising dissatisfaction with the quality of American political life.' (1981: 50).

11. Farah, Barnes and Heunks employ an index for objective deprivation to measure one's place on the socio-economic ladder. Moreover, we generalize their arguments to both policy and service dissatisfaction.

12. Since we have no theoretical arguments to the contrary, we hypothesized that these mutual effects between the various aspects are equally strong.

13. Wright's concept of alienation includes both 'powerlessness' (efficacy) and 'distrust'.

14. Of course there may be other non-instrumental reasons why the voter might nevertheless cast his vote.

15. In this article we follow Jöreskog and Sörbom (1989) and Verschuren (1991: 466-475) who provide criteria to evaluate the quality of LISREL-models.

16. In this table, and all the other tables to follow, a coefficient of 0 refers to a model parameter that is fixed at 0. This fixation of coefficients was employed whenever a coefficient turned out to be statistically insignificant different from 0.00 in the analysis including this variable.

17. The effect parameter is 0.61. These reciprocal effects were forced to be identical in the estimation on theoretical grounds. Empirically the effect of the cognitive aspect on the evaluative aspect of meaninglessness proved to be stronger than the effect in the opposite direction. This might affect the significance of the direct effects of these aspects of meaninglessness on turnout.

18. The dissatisfaction with services was found to have not enough variation. Therefore we excluded this variable from the analysis.

19. This was hypothesized to be a mutually reinforcing effect.

20. The correlation of these two aspects of alienation in the structural model is very high. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the total effects of these variables on turnout are about the same. Besides, the absence of a significant direct effect of evaluative meaninglessness on turnout might be the result of this high correlation.

21. For two classic statements see Converse (1972) and Balch (1974); see also Heunks (1973). A recent confirmation of these results is provided by Hayes and Bean (1993).

22. In an article we are currently working on, we try to develop and test a more differentiated theoretical model of the causes and effects of aspects of political alienation. We shall test this model on the data for all seven municipalities in our survey.

23. In our model we have taken the estimated measurement errors of these indices into account, but we have not yet specified a measurement model in addition to our structural model. The reliability of the endogenous variables were estimated as the square root of their Cronbach  $\alpha$ 's. There are two exceptions to this. First, the reliability of the policy dissatisfaction index, which was not based on multiple indicators, was fixed at 0.92 (the square root of 0.85, the conventional minimum value for Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ). And secondly, the reliability of political responsiveness was estimated as the square root of Loevinger's  $H_{ij}$  - coefficient, because of the nonlinear relation between the items involved. Furthermore, the reliability of turnout, the dependent variable, was fixed at 0.92, for the same reasons as applied to the measurement of policy dissatisfaction. We are considering the possibility of adding a measurement model to the more differentiated structural model we are currently working on.

24. In a recent survey of the population of Enschede (approximately 500 respondents) we have included an extensive set of both traditional and newly proposed indicators for responsiveness and personal competence (Denters and Geurts, 1993). A research report on this survey will become available in 1994.

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## Appendix: Measurement instruments

The *local political competence index* is based on two items:

- 1a. People like me have no say in what local government does.
- 1b. So many people vote in municipal elections that my vote does not matter.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with these statements. Explicit disagreement with an item was coded as a score 1 (=high competence), agreement and don't know were coded as a score 0 (=low competence). There is some debate on whether item 1a (see e.g. Craig and Maggionto, 1982) taps the competence or responsiveness dimension. Because this item, by putting the personal referent ('People like me') right at the start of the stimulus, stresses the personal competence we included this item in the competence index, as did e.g. Miller, Miller and Schneider (1980) and Barnes and Kaase (1979). The association between the items was asymmetric. Loevinger's  $H_{ij}$  between these items was 0.38. The score on the competence index was determined as the sum of both item-scores (ranging from 0=low competence to 2=high competence).

The *local political system's responsiveness index* is based on two items as well:

- 1c. Members of the municipal council do not care about the opinions of people like me.
- 1d. The political parties in this municipality are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.

The scoring procedure for these items was the same as the one for the competence index. The relation between these two items was asymmetric. Loevinger's  $H_{ij}$  for this pair of items was 0.56. The items 1a to 1d taken together form a Mokken-scale (Mokken, 1970). The scale-coefficient  $H_T$  for this four-item scale was 0.43. The item-scaleability coefficients  $H_i$  ranged from 0.35 and 0.49 and no major violations of the assumption of double monotony were found. For the theoretical reasons stated before, the two separate subscales will be used in the analyses instead of the four-item 'sense of local political efficacy'-scale.

The *index for local administrative system responsiveness* is based on three items:

- 2a. Local civil servants are only interested in regulations and forms.
- 2b. Local civil servants are much too busy to listen to my problems.
- 2c. Local civil servants think themselves superior to common people.

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with these statements. Explicit disagreement was coded as a score 2 (=high responsiveness). Explicit agreement with a statement was coded as a score 0 (=low responsiveness). Respondents who indicated they did not know an answer were given a score 1. The index score was computed as the mean score for the three items. These three items form a Likert-scale. The reliability of this scale was reasonable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.64$ ). All three corrected item-total correlations were above 0.40. A Likert-scale for these three items was preferred over a Mokken-scale because the popularities of these three items were very similar. Consequently the measurement model underlying the Mokken scale, which is based on the assumption of variations in the 'difficulty' of items, was deemed inappropriate.

The *index for cognitive political meaningfulness* index is based on two items:

- 3a. To be honest, I am never very sure about what is at stake at municipal elections.
- 3b. I hardly see any differences between the political parties represented in the municipal council in this town.

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they completely agreed (score 4), agreed a little (3), disagreed a little (2) or disagreed (1) completely with these statements. The correlation between these two items was 0.31. The index-score was computed as the mean score for both items.

The *index for evaluative political meaningfulness* (IEPM) is based on two items:

- 3c. For me, it does not matter, which political parties control the municipal council in this town.
- 3d. Party political differences are hardly important in municipal politics.

Response categories for these items were identical to those of the items 3a and 3b. The scoring procedure for this index is identical to the cognitive-index. The inter-item-correlation was 0.40. These four items taken together formed a Likert-scale, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.73. Because of the two conceptual dimensions both indices are analysed separately.

The *index of policy dissatisfaction* was based on a combination of the answers to three questions. First, respondents were asked to mention what they thought to be the most important local political problem. Then, they were asked to indicate whether they thought that local government could do little (or nothing) or (very) much to solve this problem. Finally, they were asked to say whether they thought local government did enough or did not enough to solve this problem (given its more or less limited possibilities to solve the particular problems). Respondents who mentioned an important local political problem were assigned a dissatisfaction score on the basis of a combination of the perceived capabilities of local government and the evaluation of its performance, according to the recode table below. The evaluation of local performance is weighted by the degree to which the citizen is likely to hold local government responsible for (not) solving the problem.

|                      | <i>Municipality does enough</i> | <i>Municipality does too little</i> | <i>Missing data</i> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Can do a lot</i>  | 0                               | 3                                   | MD                  |
| <i>Can do little</i> | 1                               | 2                                   | MD                  |
| <i>Missing data</i>  | MD                              | MD                                  | MD                  |

This procedure was inspired by a rather similar procedure employed in Barnes, Kaase et al. (1979: 571-572). Respondents who explicitly stated that there were no major local problems were assigned a score of 0.

*Service dissatisfaction* was measured by a single question. Those respondents reporting experiences with local government service provision (90 percent of the respondents) were asked whether they were content with the quality of service provision (always content: 1, content most of the time: 2, not content most of the time: 3, never content: 4).