

# **Institutional Design and Political Representation**

## **The Council of Immigrant Organisations in Oslo**

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### **Introduction**

On 11 October 2012, the City of Oslo arranged an election of representatives to the Council of immigrant organisations (CIO). Members from 164 local immigrant organisations in Oslo were eligible to elect ten representatives for the period from 2013 to 2016. The members of CIO were elected as representatives of the region where most members of the organisations have their background. The City administration has defined five regions. Latin America has one representative, while the other four regions - Africa; Asia east of Iran; Iran and the Middle East; and Europe, Turkey and Afghanistan - each have two representatives. In addition to this regional representation, CIO has one representative from the immigrant youth organisations. The City of Oslo also requires CIO to have at least 40 per cent representation from each gender (EMI 2012a).

The City of Oslo sets up CIO and defines it as an important political instrument in the City's integration of immigrant-origin minorities. While the City of Oslo has prescribed this detailed design of the election of CIO members, the leader is appointed by the City of Oslo. The municipality has given CIO the mandate to represent immigrant organisations in the preparation and implementation of political decisions in Oslo. CIO is obliged both to provide a common platform for the work done by the immigrant organisations in the city and to be a consultative body for local authorities. With this institutional design CIO has a double mandate, one from the City of Oslo and one from its electorate.

The question I raise in this article is how the City of Oslo's design of the Council of immigrant organisations in Oslo has an impact on its form of representation, its activities and its political position within the local government.

One way to assess the impact of institutional design is based on how a design contributes to substantive outcomes in specific situations (Goodin 1996). Institutions are designed to produce a certain outcome, and assessed instrumentally on the basis of their contribution to substantive results. Some institutions should, however, also be analysed on the basis of whether the institutional design is seen as the appropriate way of coping with certain

challenges (Olsen 1997:220). Accordingly, an institution's legitimacy is linked to properties of institutional design. One example is how support for representative institutions is a commitment to a long-term institutional design, and not to a specific outcome (Pitkin 1967). I apply these two approaches to institutional design with the aim of analysing the impact of how CIO has been designed both as a council incorporated in the City's integration policy and as a representative institution.

A growing number of cities in both Western Europe and North America are setting up immigrant councils and other institutional structures to integrate immigrants (Gsir and Martiniello 2004; Guentner and Stanton 2013). This makes it crucial to know what kind of institutional design works, and what kind of difficulties there might be. Moreover, research on representation by immigrant-origin and ethnic minorities in Europe remains at an early stage. As Bloemraad and Schönwälder (2013: 567) argue, immigrants' and ethnic minorities' extra-parliamentary and informal participation, with the exception of immigrant organisations, is an almost unresearched territory in Europe.

This analysis of CIO will be seen in the context of the immigrant population and political representation in Oslo. In 2014, the population in Oslo consists of 624 000 persons, of which 189 000 are immigrants or children of immigrants. This equates to around 30 per cent of the population. The comparable number in Norway is around 14 per cent. Two years before CIO was established, in 1983, the population in Oslo amounted to 449 000 persons, of which 26 000 were immigrants or children of immigrants (NOU 1985: 29). Over the past 30 years, there has not only been an increase in the immigrant population, but also a change in the right of foreign citizens to take part in local elections in Oslo/Norway.

Since this right was introduced in 1983, there has also been a gradual increase in the number of representatives in the local parliament of persons with an immigrant background. After the 2007 election 17 per cent of the representatives had an immigrant background, and at that time this group accounted for 23 per cent of the population. The election result in 2011 was such that 27 per cent of the representatives had immigrant backgrounds. The same year, persons with an immigrant background constituted 28 per cent of the city. This direct political representation of immigrant-origin minorities in the local parliament is crucial for the legitimacy of how CIO is designed to compensate for the immigrant-origin minorities' lack of political participation in Oslo.

The article is divided into four parts. The first part presents the methodology. The second part discusses theoretical contributions to institutional design and political representation with the aim of developing theoretical tools that are useful for the empirical

analysis. The third part presents the formal features of CIO's institutional design and discusses some consequences of its form of representation. The fourth part analyses how CIO has used its role as a representative when it performed its activities. The fifth part examines CIO's political position within the local government.

## **Methodology**

The empirical analysis concentrates on the period from the immigrant organisations elected members of CIO in Autumn 2008 until the new members started their work in Spring 2013. The reason for examining four years of CIO's 28 years of existence is the access to empirical material about CIO's activities. The way I have followed CIO closely over these years would not have been possible in previous years. Moreover, these four years cover one electoral period for the elected CIO members. In this period, CIO had its first leader with an immigrant background, while previous leaders were of ethnic Norwegian background. The leader plays a central role in CIO's activities. In the selected period, he was also a leader of the Organisation against Public Discrimination, which is a national institution working for gender equality, integration and equal public services for ethnic minorities in Norway. Due to his central position, an analysis of CIO's activities would probably have been different if I had studied another period of CIO's history. By concentrating on this election period, I can analyse what opportunities CIO's institutional design allows for, and how some members and the leader of CIO used these opportunities.

The evidence is based on documents from CIO's archives, such as minutes from meetings, correspondence, CIO's presentation of its own work, newspaper articles, pamphlets from campaigns, web pages and CIO's consultations with political authorities. I worked with these archives in summer 2012, receiving helpful advice from CIO's secretary. I have conducted four formal interviews; with the leader, secretary and one member of CIO, and with two civil servants from the City administration who work regularly with CIO. All quotes are based on my formal interviews. I have also had around ten informal conversations with each of these informants at meetings and seminars. I have followed CIO's work by attending both its internal meetings and its formal meetings with local and national politicians from Spring 2011 to Autumn 2012.

I have used three approaches to analyse CIO's activities, which are all based on a combination of studies of documents from CIO's archives, interviews and attendance of meetings and seminars. Firstly, I have examined CIO's internal meetings and contact with local immigrant organisations in the city. Secondly, I have studied CIO's external activities

such as public campaigns, appearance in the media and collaboration with other civil society actors. Finally, I have investigated CIO's relations with political authorities, such as its formal meetings with the city administration and how it functions as a consultative body within the City's political processes.

While this article's main focus is on CIO's activities, the immigrant organisations it represents are also included with the aim of comparing their interests and values with CIO's activities. I have examined how the organisations define their main purpose in statutes of 133 of the 164 immigrant organisations that took part in the election of CIO. The remaining 31 statutes were not available from the local authorities, and according to the local authorities, they probably no longer exist (EMI 2012b). Moreover, I have examined what kind of activities the immigrant organisations receive financial support for from the authorities to carry out. This empirical work gives me an overview of the immigrant organisations' interests and values, which CIO acts on behalf of.

### **Institutional Design and Representation**

The way institutions are understood in this article, they have a partly autonomous role in political life. Institutions are markers of a polity's character, history and visions and it makes a difference how they are organised (March and Olsen 1995). The idea that political actors design and redesign institutions to achieve certain goals is seen in light of the fact that political actors often have several and often inconsistent purposes and only a limited understanding of the situation (Olsen 2007: 11). Institutional design and redesign can be the outcome of processes involving competing interests and values.

As mentioned in the introduction, one can distinguish between at least two approaches to assess the impact of institutional design (Olsen 1997). One approach is to evaluate institutional design on the basis of how it contributes to an institution's immediate substantive result. An evaluation is based on the efficiency of alternative forms of design in specific situations. The aim is to secure a tight coupling between structure and performance. The political actors search for the organisational tools best suited to serve a given set of goals in an efficient way (Goodin 1996: 28). Design is based on what political actors want from an institution. The legitimising principle of a certain design is linked to the substantive outcome of an institution.

The other approach is to assess institutional design on the basis of specific properties of the institution (Olsen 1997: 220). Institutional design is seen as the appropriate way of coping with certain challenges. The aim is to secure that institutional practices and rules are

consistent with basic principles and ideas in a polity. Institutions are designed to encourage some types of behaviour and inhibit others. The legitimising principle of a certain design is linked to rules and practices that secure specific values such as the rule of law, impartiality and neutrality (Olsen 1997: 221). Accordingly, representative institutions are not designed to secure a certain outcome, but rather designed to constrain processes in certain ways and allow for different substantive outcomes.

There are, however, various forms of representation, which requires different types of institutional design. With the aim of discussing institutional design and political representation of immigrant-origin minorities in contemporary European states, Pitkin's (1967) seminal work is a good starting point. According to Pitkin (1967) political representation is the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions and perspectives present in the public policy making process. Her schematic distinction among four forms of political representation is useful in recognising various forms of political representation, and what kinds of institutional design they are based on. One is formalistic representation, which refers to two dimensions of the formal design of the principal-agent relationship. Authorisation refers to the means by which the representative obtains her position (e.g. election or appointment of representatives). Accountability is the ability of constituents to sanction their representatives for failing to act in accordance with their wishes (e.g. vote an elected representative out of office or appoint a new representative).

The remaining three forms of representation refer to how this principal-agent relationship works. The second form is symbolic representation, which is the meaning a representative has for those being represented. The third form is descriptive representation, which refers to the extent to which representatives resemble those being represented. In connection with these two forms of political representation, Pitkin (1967: 61) emphasises that being something is more important than doing something. What matters is an institutional design is that certain persons are present and heard. In contrast, the last form of representation emphasises the actions the representatives take on behalf of those represented. This is substantive representation.

Academic debates on political representation have concentrated on the proper design of formal procedures for authorisation and accountability in representative institutions within the framework of national democracies (Martiniello 2005: 3; Bauböck 2006). This is related to the basic norm of democracy that every individual potentially affected by a decision should have an equal opportunity to influence the decision (Dahl 1989; Habermas 1992).

Representative democracies are however, also based on the idea that the elected representative

should reflect the diversity of the population (Verba et al. 1995; Bloemraad & Schönwälder 2013). This idea raises the question of the extent to which the representatives need to share common characteristics with those they represent, such as territory, gender, age and ethnicity in order to understand their interests and values. In such descriptive representation it is not only the persons as such who are represented, but also some of the interests and values these persons have in common due to their common experiences (Mansbridge 1999). Over the last two decades there has been an increasing demand to design institutions in relation to descriptive representation because it introduces the social perspective and experiences of disadvantaged groups into representative institutions (Kymlicka 1995; Mansbridge 1999; Mansbridge 2000; Young 2000).

While these scholars have questioned the philosophical and theoretical reasons for descriptive representation, Bloemraad (2013: 654) aims to promote further empirical work on immigrant-origin minorities' political representation. Her normative point of departure is that in many European countries immigrant-origin minorities are not represented in parliaments, and therefore these countries experience a democratic deficit vis-à-vis their immigrant-origin population. Bloemraad (2013) argues that descriptive representation can lead to consequences for a minority group's substantive representation as those elected can work for other members of the group and serve as a spokesperson for the group's concern.

While Bloemraad's arguments are related to the representation of ethnic minorities in parliaments, this article analyses immigrant-origin minorities' extra-parliamentary participation and representation. This raises questions about how to assess the design of institutions in which minorities are represented. Because of the increased complexities in contemporary societies, one may argue, as Olsen (2013: 468) does, that the conventional emphasis on the electoral channel has to be supplemented by a renewed examination of the democratic roles of guardians and citizens. More specifically, Warren and Castiglione (2006) argue there is a need to update contemporary understanding of political representation in relation to how voluntary associations, ascriptive groups and non-governmental organisations are increasingly recognised as important for the preparation and implementation of politics. In such extra-parliamentary representation the constituents might lack the ability to sanction their representatives for failing to act in accordance with their wishes, and this might challenge the principal-agent relationship. It is thus crucial how such extra-parliamentary institutions are designed; whether they are designed to secure a certain substantive outcome or linked to rules and practices that secure specific values – such as the idea that the elected representative should reflect the diversity of the population.

The design of CIO's extra-parliamentary representation is examined within the context of the Nordic political tradition. The central characteristics of the voluntary sector in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark are such that the organisations have a broad membership base, participation in voluntary work is seen as an integral part of being a member of an organisation and they are democratically structured (Trägårdh and Vamstad 2009; Wollebæk and Sivesind 2010; Bengtsson et al. 2010). Voluntary organisations have democratic legitimacy through their members' representation, while the legitimacy of voluntary organisations in many European countries rests on their moral foundation and their ability to turn fundamental ideological ideas into practice (Lorentzen 2004). The Nordic tradition also stands in contrast to the Anglo-American model of voluntary work, in which individuals are often associated with non-profit making organisations as donors and volunteers rather than as members (Trägårdh and Vamstad 2009). In line with the Nordic tradition, membership-based voluntary organisations are established and run outside the state administration and the private sphere, but there are also huge overlapping zones. In Norway, there is a tradition of having two legitimate ways to political influence, one through the incorporation of voluntary organisations in the state administration (extra-parliamentary) and one through the election channel (within the parliamentary system) (Rokkan 1966). This tradition of organising the voluntary sector is applied to immigrant organisations, and is reflected in support schemes for these organisations (Takle 2012). CIO is designed to represent these membership-based and democratically structured immigrant organisations.

### **CIO's Double Mandate**

When the City of Oslo established CIO in 1985, it defined as CIO's main task the allocation of funding to immigrant organisations in the city. Since 1999 CIO has been designed to work to achieve a closer cooperation between immigrant organisations and the local administration. CIO no longer allocates funding to the organisations, but has gained a more central role as a consultative body for the local administration. The local authorities related these changes to a more comprehensive reorganisation of the city's work towards the immigrant-origin minorities due to increased immigration. The authorities wanted closer contact and dialogue with the organisations with the aim of including them in its integration policy, and gave CIO a role in this policy (City of Oslo 2000). Since 2005, a full time secretary of CIO has been located in the Town Hall with the aim of improving this cooperation. This location makes it possible for the secretary to follow the city administration's daily work. The municipality designed CIO as a public council in line with the Nordic tradition of voluntary organisations.

CIO is partly incorporated in the local administration, and designed to be an instrument in the city's integration policy. CIO is designed and financed by the local authorities and included in the local administration, and simultaneously based on voluntary unpaid work.

Moreover, the municipality's design on how members are authorised are detailed and decisive for CIO's descriptive representation. As mentioned in the introduction, members of CIO are elected as representatives for a defined region, whilst youth and each gender must also be represented (EMI 2012a). The requirements of regional, youth and gender representation imply the entire assembly is designed to form a microcosm or representative sample of the electorate. The representatives' characteristics are thus seen as more important than their skills (Mansbridge 1999: 631). CIO is designed to represent immigrant organisations with various ethnic or national backgrounds, composition of members, main aims, level of formalisation etc. The main common characteristic for all these organisations is that their members have a common experience of having immigrated to Norway or they are children of persons who have immigrated. The descriptive representation is seen as more important than CIO's efficiency and substantive results, as it is not obvious that these persons have similar values and interests nor that the representatives have the required qualifications.

In line with the Nordic tradition, only membership-based immigrant organisations in Oslo with a democratically elected leadership can participate in the election and thereby authorise CIO. The organisations must be registered in public records and have delivered statutes and membership lists to the local authorities (EMI 2012a). Of the around 300 immigrant organisations and networks, the municipality has categorised 164 as local, membership-based immigrant organisations with internal democratic structures. The remaining organisations are mainly looser network and foundations, and these are not eligible to vote. This implies the ten CIO members are authorised by immigrant organisations with leaders who are elected by their members. Through this design, CIO receives a mandate from the members of the immigrant organisations. In the election in 2008, 504 personal votes were given by members of various immigrant organisations (City of Oslo 2008).

Members of these organisations must either themselves have been born outside the Nordic countries, Switzerland, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand or be children of people born outside these areas. In contrast, organisations with members from those countries mentioned are not represented by CIO, or by any other public institution. It is expected that persons coming from mainly Western countries easily integrate in the Norwegian society. This means CIO mainly represents immigrant organisations with members who have their background from Latin America, Asia and Africa. However, since 2009, organisations with

members from European countries, with the exception of the Nordic countries, are included among the immigrant organisations due to the increased immigration from Eastern- and Central-European countries. Although CIO is not truly representative of all immigrants in Oslo, the City of Oslo has designed CIO on the basis of an “us/them” position.

While the immigrant organisations elect representatives to CIO, the City of Oslo appoints the leader. This means the members are accountable to the immigrant organisations, while the leader is accountable to the local administration. The leader is responsible for ensuring that CIO works as an efficient council within the local administration. The immigrant organisations seem to expect the municipality to appoint the leader, as they have never expressed any objections. This might reflect the fact that the City of Oslo appoints both leaders and members of all other Councils in the city on the basis of their specialist competence. These other councils are designed in relation to the view that specialist competence is crucial to ensure that these councils work efficiently and produce the desired results. Elections and membership-based representation is an exception, which only applies to CIO members.

However, the way the authorities have designed CIO gives it a choice of actions the other councils do not have. CIO is both a public, council incorporated entity in the administrative institutional structure and an entity which can act on behalf of the immigrant organisations. This institutional design is crucial for how CIO has performed its activities.

## **Representation and Political Influence**

CIO has not explicitly formulated any concrete aims or strategy for its activities in one single document. By making systematic analyses of CIO’s statements and activities from 2008 to 2013 one can find some patterns, which together give an overview over what kind of strategy CIO has in practice. These patterns show that CIO mainly works: (i) to change public institutions, (ii) to have influence on immigrant-origin minorities' issues, (iii) to encourage electoral participation and (iv) to gain influence at the state level.

### ***(i) Change Public Institutions***

Public institutions are important in most minorities’ lives, and a certain level of confidence is crucial to facilitate political integration (Norris 2011). Such confidence can be determined by these institutions’ handling of major public policy issues in relation to the immigrant population, such as accommodation, education and employment (City of Oslo 2012a). With the aim of overcoming inequalities CIO has both contacted and cooperated with several public

institutions. One of CIO's main activities has been to contact institutions related to the media, kindergartens, elderly care, schools and the education system, police and crime, child welfare, the labour market etc. The aim in contacting these institutions is to present proposals related to how public services could be adapted to the special needs of minorities. CIO has also invited several state and municipal institutions to meetings with the aim of discussing how they could cooperate, such as the police, members of parliament and the Norwegian equality tribunal. At all these meetings CIO has presented itself as a resource these institutions should make use of in their daily work (CIO archives 2008-2013).

Furthermore, CIO has implemented projects in cooperation with public institutions such as the fire and rescue services, hospitals and public health institutions and voluntary organisations such as the Red Cross. Through these projects CIO aims to inform its cooperation partners of the minorities' special needs as well as the minority population about how to proceed in relation to their challenges. One example is CIO's cooperation with the Norwegian Diabetes Association, and Oslo University hospital. Together they organised stands in the streets where persons with an immigrant background could test themselves. At an internal meeting (31.06.2011) CIO members summarised these stands as extremely successful. They talked about several persons who gave a positive test on diabetes, and emphasised how important their campaign was to increase the awareness of the special challenges related to this illness among some minority groups.

CIO mainly works to change the underlying majority way of thinking in the established state and municipal institutions, with the aim of adapting them to the minorities' lives and cultures. This priority was, however, hardly reflected in the immigrant organisations' activities. Analysis of the immigrant organisations' statutes shows that the organisations mainly work to maintain cultural traditions from their members' countries of origin and spread knowledge about how to adapt to Norwegian society (EMI 2012b). Moreover, the statutes show that only seven of the 133 organisations state they aim to influence Norwegian society and politics. These seven organisations have defined aims in relation to how they want to influence Norwegian society, and one of them formulates this as an aim:

To make visible the ethnic minorities' situation and the problems that minorities have in Norwegian society. To influence laws, policies and decisions, which are of particular importance for persons with a background as an immigrant or refugee (EMI 2012b).

This low level of ambitions among the organisations means that CIO had higher ambitions to influence the Norwegian public institutions than the organisations it represented. There was a broad agreement about this strategy among CIO members. As one member said in an interview:

There are a lot of hobby activities among the immigrant organisations, but CIO works for something more. We want political influence, and for this we need qualifications (07.05.2012).

The way CIO used its position as an elected representative body might imply that there was a representation gap. However, CIO members do not have a bounded mandate. CIO is designed to represent immigrant-origin minorities in local government, and not to produce a certain substantive outcome. As the authorisation is based on descriptive representation it is the persons as such who are represented, and what they might have in common due to their immigrant background. Anchored in its electoral mandate from the members of 164 immigrant organisations, CIO often emphasises that it represents all the 300 registered organisations in the city (CIO archives 2008-2013).

The CIO leader, who is appointed by the City of Oslo, influenced CIO's aim of changing public institutions. These activities were adopted from the Organisation against Public Discrimination, and the leader is an activist who has worked with these issues for several years. As the CIO leader formulated it:

CIO is not a cultural association. CIO works for equity in public services. We seek genuine political influence with desired results (04.09.2012).

With this statement, the leader emphasised that CIO wanted to see consequences of its efforts to change public institutions. These efforts were also compatible with the mandate CIO had from the City of Oslo to be a consultative body for the local administration on immigrant issues. Public institutions in Norway are obliged to offer all persons equal treatment (City of Oslo 2012a). CIO raised the question of how this should be done and by whom.

### ***Influence on Immigrant-Origin Minorities' Issues***

CIO aimed to have influence on issues related to immigrant-origin minorities' integration. CIO's general approach was that the immigrant-origin minorities must be included in all kinds of public institutions if these organisations are to succeed in performing their tasks. As the CIO leader formulated it:

If we are a part of the problem, we also need to be a part of the solution (04.09.2012).

Studies of minorities' political integration in Norway find that minorities in general agree with democratic principles, and are satisfied with how the democratic process works in practice (Tronstad and Rogstad 2012). CIO also had a general trust in the overall performance of democratic institutions, but it was more sceptical of the way the City of Oslo's anti-discrimination OXLO campaign was implemented in practice. OXLO is a permanent awareness-raising campaign that was formulated by the City of Oslo following a racially motivated murder in Oslo in 2001 (City of Oslo 2001). Within this framework, the local parliament adopted an ethical document in which it took a positive stance towards cultural diversity, inclusion and tolerance (City of Oslo 2001). Since 2004, the aim of the project has been to integrate these values into the city's work at all administrative and political levels including CIO.

CIO has raised the question of influence on OXLO at several meetings and in letters to the authorities (CIO's archives 2008-2013). These efforts to raise the question of influence on OXLO have been met with arguments from political authorities about how OXLO is an integrated part of the municipality's daily work; and neither an organisation nor a campaign (City of Oslo 2011). According to the interview with CIO leader:

OXLO to me is nothing more than a slogan. The people of Oslo don't have any ownership of OXLO, and it appears to me that OXLO is owned, used and dictated by the politicians of the municipality of Oslo (04.09.2012).

This shows CIO had tense relations with the administration. The politicians the leader referred to are the politicians in the city administration. CIO wanted more influence on public institutions than the municipality facilitated through its mandate. CIO believed the City of Oslo only referred to the statements in the OXLO campaign instead of changing the public institutions. CIO wanted influence on the OXLO campaign with the aim of using the awareness-raising campaign to change public institutions. It argued the opinions included in the framework of OXLO should be used to change people's attitudes; to create openness, closeness, tolerance, solidarity and community. CIO presented itself as an administrative resource that should be integrated in this because it represents several immigrant organisations working at the grass-roots level (CIO archives 2008-2013). These references to its descriptive representation did not convince the local authorities to include CIO in its daily work with OXLO.

CIO's criticism stands in conflict with local authorities' requirements that all immigrant organisations that apply for funding must adhere to the central values in the OXLO campaign, and use OXLO's logo at their events (EMI 2012a). This requirement for receiving funding might be crucial to understand why CIO's criticism has not been a theme discussed among the organisations. Moreover, as Esaiasson and Narud (2013: 4) argue, the representative relationship changes after the election-day, and the few elected representatives dominate the relationship. An alternative way of understanding this lack of discussion among the immigrant organisations is such that they were not engaged in these questions, but rather occupied with their own activities.

### ***Encourage Electoral Participation***

Prior to both the national election in 2009 and the local election in 2011, CIO arranged campaigns to encourage qualified voters with an immigrant background to use this political right. Studies of Norwegian local elections show lower electoral participation among persons with backgrounds from Asia, Africa and Latin America than among the majority population, and reveal the gap has widened over time (Bergh and Bjørklund 2010). CIO worked to reach these persons by touring Oslo's streets and suburbs with an 'election bus'. From this bus, CIO members played loud music and gave information about the election in different languages (Norwegian, English, Somali, French, Spanish, Russian and Italian). All CIO members took part in the bus, and their central message was to support democracy by urging persons with a minority background to use their vote. CIO members distributed flyers with a front page picture of CIO's election bus in front of the Town Hall, including a poster with the following text:

Immigrants could determine the election in 2011. Use your vote. Immigrants are often left behind and are falling behind compared to the rest of the population, when it comes to employment, accommodation and income. In order to make changes we must participate in considerable numbers and vote. Then the politicians will start listening.

CIO's use of "we" refers to persons with an immigrant background, and in these flyers the term "them" seems to refer to the politicians. As several persons with an immigrant background are politicians, and the minorities have different political views and interests, one might question how relevant this categorisation is. Also in the election campaign, CIO followed up the way the municipality had designed CIO on the basis of this distinction.

Moreover, in its flyers, CIO presented issues minorities should be aware of and should

look for in the political parties' election programmes, and encouraged them to vote in relation to how the political parties handle issues related to minorities' inclusion in Norwegian society. CIO did not give advice on which political party to support. It rather presented a political standpoint which reflected an urge for more inclusion of minorities in the Norwegian society and/or the need to offer special arrangements for minorities. Regarding safety and criminality for example, CIO argued there should be more police with an immigrant background because it is important that the police mirror the city's population. According to an interview with a CIO member, the minorities' expertise is essential for Norwegian policy in an increasingly diverse society (07.05.2012).

Also in relation to how CIO encouraged electoral participation it has a different approach than the immigrant organisations. Of the 300 immigrant organisations CIO represented, only 16 organisations gained financial support from the City of Oslo to undertake projects with the aim of mobilising political participation among members in the run-up to the 2011 local election. While these organisations worked to increase their members' knowledge of Norwegian society, CIO argued for inclusion of and special arrangements for minorities. The CIO leader used the scope of action he had because CIO was designed to represent immigrant-origin minorities in political institutions.

With reference to the outcome of the local election in Autumn 2011, CIO's leader emphasised that it is not sufficient for the formal political representation through the local parliament to reflect the multicultural composition of Oslo. He argued that persons of an immigrant background are representatives of the political parties, and work for the parties' programmes (04.09.2012). He thereby doubts that those elected will represent the interests and values of persons with an immigrant background (see Bloemraad 2013; Schönwälder 2013). By raising doubts about whether descriptive representation will lead to substantive representation in the local parliament, the leader simultaneously emphasised that there was a need for CIO to compensate for the immigrant-origin minorities' lack of political influence.

### ***Influence at the State Level***

CIO worked to influence public institutions and policies not only in the municipality, but also at state level and here it urged change in the foundation of the Norwegian political community. In October 2011, CIO invited itself to a meeting in the Norwegian parliament with the leader of the Conservative party, Erna Solberg (Prime Minister since 2013). Several issues were discussed at this meeting, and most CIO members were placed around the table. One of the issues CIO raised was that there is a need to change the citizenship law. The CIO

members argued that a substantial part of the population was excluded from the democratic process, and it would be positive for the whole of Norwegian society if they were included. The members meant that in the way Norway regulates access to citizenship, blood is seen as more important than the place of birth. This sends, according to CIO, negative signals to the younger generation who might feel excluded from the community (CIO's archive 2008-2013).

Solberg was Minister in charge of preparing the introduction of new restrictions to the citizenship law, which came into force in 2007. The political process reveals there is broad consensus about a restrictive citizenship law in Norway. The law is based on the principle of ethnic descent by birth, and this was not discussed in the political process (NOU 2000:32). A central aim of the revision was to make sure that the principle of preventing dual citizenship was followed in practice. The political process in parliament shows a widely shared perception among most politicians that the right to direct participation in a nation's polity requires loyalty to Norwegian society (Ot.prp.41(2004-2005); Takle 2006). Although the criteria for access to formal citizenship status are relevant for all persons with an immigrant background, this question was hardly raised in the Norwegian political debate.

The way CIO confronted top level politicians with its ideas about changing the citizenship law was, according to interviews with civil servants from the City administration (26.04.2012), not in line with its mandate, as it is designed to work at the local level. At the end of the meeting with Solberg, she also asked about whose interests CIO represented. The leader answered that they represented the immigrant organisations in Oslo, but that he also came as leader of the Organisation against Public Discrimination, which is a national organisation. He thereby legitimised CIO's approach towards state institutions with his double role as a local and national representative. However, the way some issues such as the citizenship law, was presented at this meeting, all CIO members acted more as a national than a local organisation. The leader's critique of the citizenship law had support from all CIO members taking part in the meeting with Solberg. Changes to the citizenship law have not been a theme in the local immigrant organisations. As CIO is designed as a descriptive representative council, neither the local administration nor the immigrant organisations are in a position to dictate a certain substantive outcome.

### **Redesigning CIO**

CIO's political position within the local government must be seen against a background where minorities are well represented in the local parliament both after the election in 2007 and

2011. According to interviews with civil servants from the City administration this formal representation has led the political authorities to raise the question of whether there was still a need for a Council as a compensatory means for minorities (26.04.2012). In 2010 the City of Oslo initiated an evaluation of CIO with the aim of redesigning it. The City of Oslo's aim with the evaluation and redesign was to adapt CIO to the changing circumstances in Oslo.

A working group was charged with the responsibility of preparing proposals for a new institutional design. The city administration and members of CIO were represented in this working group. Both CIO and the working group arranged several meetings to discuss several proposals for reorganisation. After 18 months work, the various proposals were incorporated into a report, which was signed by all parties in September 2011 (Working group report 2011). The working group proposed to strengthen CIO's ties to the city administration by formalising contact between CIO and the city administration. This formalisation should increase contact and consultation between CIO and the city administration through regular routines. Such formalisation of routines is in line with recommendations from the European Council related to the design of consultative bodies for migrants (Gsir and Martiniello 2004). Moreover, a study of migration councils in several European cities concludes that they have diverging institutional design, but a crucial challenge for all of them arises from a weak relationship between consultative bodies and mainstream political institutions (Guentner and Stanton 2013).

After the election in September 2011, the municipality's responsibility for CIO was transferred to a new vice mayor. In contrast to the working group, the new vice mayor wanted to loosen the formalised contact between CIO and the city administration, and focus CIO's activities on the immigrant organisations (City of Oslo 2012b). The core of this disagreement about CIO's design was whether Oslo should have a Council of immigrant organisations that works towards the formal state and municipal institutions with the aim of changing them, or a Council that works towards the immigrant organisations providing measures for their integration into Norwegian society. The vice mayor wanted the latter, and simultaneously redesign CIO as an umbrella organisation for the immigrant organisations. With this design, CIO would stand outside the mainstream decision-making process, and it would be up to the City administration when and how CIO should be involved. This would simultaneously give CIO an independent position outside the formal administration.

At a meeting in the Town Hall with the vice mayor and CIO in April 2012, they could not agree and the process of redesigning CIO stopped. The vice mayor's conclusion at the meeting was to wait for the election of a new CIO, as new CIO members might be more

willing to redesign CIO in line with his ideas. These political attempts to steer CIO show its ambiguous position. While the vice mayor wanted an efficient design suited to serving the aim of helping the immigrant organisations, CIO was also based on descriptive representation. The CIO members characteristics were more important than a substantive outcome. The vice mayor cannot decide to redesign CIO as an umbrella organisation without approval from CIO members. He may decide to close it down by arguing that CIO does not produce the expected results, but this is problematic because CIO also is a representative institution for immigrant-origin minorities in the city.

When the City of Oslo arranged the election of representatives to CIO in October 2012, it announced at the meeting that a new task was to be added to its mandate. The new CIO members gained the task of finding out whether the immigrant organisations wanted a Council without formalised contact with the city administration, that rather worked towards the immigrant organisations. This implies the City of Oslo gave CIO the mandate to re-start the reorganisation process. It is questionable whether the new CIO would change its opinion. However, when the City of Oslo appointed a new Council leader in Spring 2013, it simultaneously emphasised that CIO should be defined as a committee, and not a council, within the City administration (City of Oslo 2013). With this rearrangement CIO was relegated to a weaker position in the formal structures, but it remained incorporated in the city administration.

## **Conclusion**

This article shows how an ambiguous institutional design can be crucial for an immigrant council's representation, activities and political position. CIO's double mandate both as a representative institution and as a council incorporated in the City's integration policy gives CIO an ambiguous institutional platform for its activities. Ambiguity seems to be common for immigrant councils in Europe, although they have diverging institutional design (Guentner and Stanton 2013). However, CIO's institutional design gives it an ambiguous form of representation, and thereby a choice of actions. CIO can claim to be a democratic representative council as it is designed to be a descriptive representative council of the immigrant-origin minorities. Moreover, CIO can legitimately claim to be a local council as it is authorised by the City of Oslo, which decides its main tasks and appoints the leader.

Anchored in the mandate CIO has from the immigrant organisations, it can act on behalf of these organisations. CIO's activities reflect interests and values most immigrant-origin minorities have in common due to their experience of having an immigrant

background. The immigrant organisations and CIO have, nevertheless, diverging approaches to the integration process. While most of the immigrant organisations work to maintain their members' cultural traditions and help their members to adapt to Norwegian society, CIO has turned around the requirements regarding who must adapt. Instead of helping the immigrant-origin minorities to become better adapted to the Norwegian society, CIO aims to help Norwegian institutions to become better adapted to a multicultural society. This raises the question of whether the immigrant organisations perceived CIO as accountable. None of the organisations have expressed any objections to CIO's activities. This can mean that the organisations supported CIO's activities, that they did not care about these activities or they did not believe that they could have any influence. Because of CIO's design as a descriptive representative council, the organisations have only one formal possibility to sanction CIO and that is to elect new members.

CIO's activities are based on the aim of transforming the Norwegian state and municipal institutions. The principle of equal treatment of all citizens in public services is central to most of CIO's activities. This approach is adopted from the Organisation against Public Discrimination. While the CIO leader plays a crucial role in this choice of approach, it has broad support among CIO members. These efforts were also compatible with the authorities' policy as public institutions in Norway are obliged to offer all persons equal treatment. CIO raised the question of how this should be done and it wanted more influence on public institutions.

However, CIO's extra-parliamentary descriptive representation is a vulnerable position within the local government, especially in situations where persons with immigrant background gain political positions such as in Oslo's local parliament. With reference to this formal representation local authorities have raised the question of whether there was still a need for an immigrant council. The authorities have started a process of redesigning CIO. The vice mayor wants an umbrella organisation providing measures for immigrant organisations' integration in Norwegian society, and not a Council that is incorporated in public institutions and tries to transform them. Also the political attempts to steer CIO show its ambiguous position within the local government. The local authorities cannot implement a radical redesign without approval from CIO members. They may decide to close CIO down by arguing that it does not produce the expected results, but this is problematic as long as CIO also is a descriptive representative council. Consequently, the City of Oslo has used its possibility of redesigning CIO by giving it a new mandate and appointing a new leader from Spring 2013. In contrast, the immigrant organisations have not used their sanction

possibilities to vote CIO members out of office, but rather re-elected all four Council members (and two as deputies) standing for re-election in October 2012.

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