

## Changing role of government

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### Summary

The transition to a society in which inhabitants are expected to display self-sufficiency and responsibility takes time and is difficult. The expectations of government and participants will have to meet. People want results quickly and can drop out because of a long and formal decision-making process, broken promises, lack of time, etc. The local government has to set the frameworks within which inhabitants can operate and take decisions. This new role of the government demands adaptability and flexibility of the organisation. The transition to a different organisation is by learning from the projects started, training and a change of culture.

### Issue/Problems

In theory things look easy; the reality is more difficult. Working together with inhabitants, acknowledging their capabilities and knowing and accepting that they know more about their environment than civil workers, require a different attitude. Not only the local government has to work and communicate in a different manner; also the local council must adopt this change. This needs a lot of time and effort.

### Background

The trend in The Netherlands is decentralisation. At the same time local government has to make considerable savings on the available budget. The idea that the government is fully responsible for the environment, healthcare, care for elderly etc. gives way to a more modern vision of self-sufficiency and responsibility. People have become more critical and outspoken over the past decades. They want to get involved in decision making. The expectations of government and participants will have to meet. Working together with inhabitants is also for the government a learning process and asks for a different way of thinking and acting.

### Interests in the issue

When people are involved in a project in their area, there is a much better chance of success and sufficient popular support. The profits are evident. People know more about their direct environment than the local government. They bring in their own specialized knowledge and know-how and are willing to spend a lot of time to improve the liveability in their neighbourhood. The government must have faith in participation of inhabitants. That is the base of the partnership. Our society must learn how to optimize partnerships. We experienced that it is not possible to have one blueprint for all kinds of projects. People must not only believe in the objective; they must also keep trust in the local government and other parties. The local government must show decisive action and try to accelerate processes.

## Existing Policies

'Regisserend Lochem' is the project of changing the organisation into a flexible and innovative government that participate with civilians in projects for a better result. The council of Lochem asked the local government to work out this vision and take concrete measures. A 'change director' will be appointed to direct the transition process.

A process facilitator is important for the success of participation projects. Not only because his or her knowledge about managing processes, but also to operate as a bridge between the culture of the government and that of the inhabitants.

## Policy Options

A participative government demands a flexible, adaptive organisation. The ambitions in the community are a valuable asset. We have to embrace the initiatives and facilitate them to get the best results. The 'new' government knows how to make a good and accepted framework for the participants. They give the participants room to find their own solutions. Within the democratic rules and common interests decision-making should be as quick as possible. The government accepts that participants have mandate for taking decisions within the framework. All the employees working at the local government should be trained how to work, react and communicate in the transition society.

For the transition society also industry and social organisations have to work together with inhabitants. The local government should facilitate this learning process.

## Recommendation

The local government must spend a lot of time and make effort to change the internal culture. It ask for a different way of thinking and communication with inhabitants and companies. The role of the local council is important and here also a change of culture is necessary. The local government must show decisive action and try to accelerate processes.

## Sources

'Regisserend Lochem'

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