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Preaching Empowerment, Practicing Participation

The use of empowerment and citizen participation in Dutch local democracies

EGPA 2010, Toulouse, France

Studygroup IV: Local Governance and Democracy

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Abstract

The papers main thesis is based on the idea that local governments view of empowerment is rather narrow minded and strongly based on the idea of citizen participation. However, the academic debate and empowerment in practice show that empowerment is more than citizen participation alone. By focusing on the meaning of empowerment from a citizen participation perspective, we lose the richness of the empowerment concept. Moreover, the central idea in this paper is: empowerment has a broader connotation and is more valuable than narrowly approaching from a citizen participation perspective. The paper answers the following question: What is the relationship between empowerment and citizen participation in Dutch local democracies? We do this both conceptually and empirically. To empirically explore this question we selected four studies that we recently conducted. We analyse the nature of the relationship between empowerment and citizen participation in each study. Based on the empirical exploration we must conclude that empowerment has been overshadowed by citizen participation in Dutch local democracies. A practice that sees citizen participation as the foremost goal is probably blind for the potential that empowerment citizen participation can give.

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, citizens in most West European countries have gained influence in policy making. Many countries have gained experience with collaborative governance, citizens' advisory committees, and participatory budgeting (Cain, Dalton& Scarrow, 2006). From a democratic perspective, citizen participation is considered a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making. In recent years, it also has become clear to many professionals and policy-makers that in order to solve the many problems in city neighbourhoods, the local inhabitants have to play their own part as well. 'Empowerment' then is the process that prepares citizens for this role. Schwerin (1995) defined empowerment as a process that links capabilities and attitudes of individuals. In other words: empowerment is the process in which what people want (attitudes) meets with that what people actually can do (capabilities). In practice, we see a different conception of empowerment.

Empowerment is viewed as 'the road towards good citizenship.' Normative ideas about good citizenship thus frame the empowerment process, but without acknowledging the ideological backdrop of good citizenship as citizen participation, let alone discussing this backdrop. The participation of citizens has become more important in recent years. The role citizens play in local democracy is growing rapidly. Policymakers are more aware of the potential gain of citizens participating in political decision making as well as participating on the local level in small scale projects and citizens' initiatives (Beukenholdt-ter Mors, Daemen & Schaap, 2002; Davelaar, et al., 2002; ROB, 2005; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). The result of this is that empowerment at its maximum has become an instrument for equipping citizens with the necessary tools they need in order to participate in *political* and *policy* processes, the minimal conception of empowerment however (which is much more frequently adhered as we will see) sees empowerment as a mere side-effect from citizen participation.

The papers main thesis is based on the idea that local governments view of empowerment is rather narrow minded and strongly based on the idea of citizen participation. However, the academic debate and empowerment in practice show that empowerment is more than citizen participation alone. By focusing on the meaning of empowerment from a citizen participation perspective, we lose the richness of the empowerment concept. Moreover, the central idea in this paper is: empowerment has a broader connotation and is more valuable than narrowly approaching from a citizen participation perspective. The paper will focus on the following question:

What is the relationship between empowerment and citizen participation in Dutch local democracies?
Based on this central question, this paper will address smaller questions such as:

1. What is citizen participation and what is its purpose according to local government?
2. What is empowerment and how is it used by Dutch local government?
3. How is empowerment used for citizen participation by Dutch local government?
4. What else can empowerment offer to citizen participation?

The aim of this paper is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between empowerment and citizen participation (section 2 and 3). This paper contributes to this year's theme of EGPA Studygroup IV. It contributes to discussions on grassroots democracy, e.g. spontaneous participation in grassroots organisations versus invited participation trough traditional democratic channels.

The methods that are used in the empirical part are mainly based on academic literature with regard to empowerment and citizen participation. We also analyse empirical data that we collected in Dutch local democracies. We use a qualitative research design, such as document analysis, in depth interviews and observation with regard to empowerment and citizen participation in several Dutch local democracies.

2. Citizen participation and participatory democracy

This section addresses the following question: What is citizen participation and what is its purpose according to local government? In many European countries, there is a loud call to invite and involve citizens in decision making (Denters and Rose 2005; Michels 2006; Durose *et al.* 2009). There is an increasing variety of instruments that local governments are using, such as citizens' juries, citizens' panels, participatory budgets and so on. The use of citizen participation has traditionally been used in urban and regional planning (Healy 2005), but is increasingly used in social and safety policies as well (Van de Wijdeven *et al.* 2008; Durose *et al.*, 2009).

Political scientists heavily discussed the concept of political participation in the 1960s and 1970s (Macpherson 1977; Milbrath 1966; Pateman 1970). It is connected to a relatively modern notion of democracy, but it is based on classic democratic principles (Held 2002: 263-273). Currently, political participation is still under discussion and mainly relates to discussion on participatory democracy (Edelenbos and Klijn 2005; Held 2002; Hendriks 2006; Saward 2003). Saward (2003: 149) describes participatory democracy as 'any form of democracy which emphasizes or enables extensive participation in decision-making by members of the whole group concerned.' Hendriks (2006: 124) simply states that participatory democracy is 'bottom up democracy. The democratic process is driven by participants from the public domain. It is a process of social interaction'. Held (2002: 5) based his 'model of participatory democracy' on Macpherson (1977) and Pateman (1970) and argues that participatory democracy is linked with the more classical model of direct democracy and that it is pluralistic. Lowndes (1995: 165) also stresses the local practise of participatory democracy, 'participation is most likely to take place at the local level where people live and work and socialize, raise their families, and draw upon the services and benefits of the state.' It often depends on the receptiveness of the local government how participatory democracy is institutionalised in its daily practise. However, since the introduction of Stokers (*et al.,* 2006) CLEAR (Can do, Like to, Enabled to, Asked to and Responded to) model there is a larger call for governments to use participation in a more flexible way. Lowndes and Pratchett (2006) argue that this 'model recognizes that participation

strategies need to be sensitive to local contexts and dynamics.' By saying this, they warn for participative processes that are too institutionalised.

Local governments may have various purposes to use citizen participation. The main argument is that involving (groups of) citizens at an early stage of the policy process rather than consulting them immediately before the implementation phase, can create a broader support for policy decisions and, therefore, make government policy more effective and legitimate (De Graaf, 2007). However, other arguments are also heard. Engaging citizens in policy making allows governments to tap into wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions, and improves the quality of the decisions reached. These arguments are rather instrumental. From a (local) government perspective citizen participation can also contributes to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity (OECD, 2001:11). This perspective is more based on the intrinsic value of citizen participation, i.g. the democratic value. In short, citizen participation is expected to increase democratic legitimacy, narrow the gap between citizens and government, enlarge the problem- solving capacity, increase the support for policy, and improve the quality of policy (Edelenbos, 2000).

3. Empowerment

This section will answer the following question: What is empowerment and how is it used by local government? Since the last decade 'empowerment' has become a buzzword in local politics and policy. The empowerment of its citizens seems to crawl higher and higher up on the agendas of Dutch municipalities (Vos & Van Doorn, 2004). This begs the question: what exactly is empowerment? What does it mean when policymakers say that the citizens in urban areas should be empowered? Are there different types of empowerment? These questions will be addressed in this part of the essay.

First we will describe the broad perspective that exists in literature on empowerment. It seems as though every social science has its own definition and conceptualisation of empowerment. By exploring the different spheres those sciences cover, we can make a choice for a specific sphere and a specific view on empowerment, namely *citizen empowerment in relation to citizen participation in local democracies.* The second part of this section then explores the nature of this relation. We will see that empowerment can be interpreted as a goal, a mean and an effect, in relation to citizen participation. Furthermore we argue that the focus in local democracy on stimulating citizen participation and thus on empowerment as a mean, does not fully utilize the potential citizen empowerment can have for local democracy.

3.1 Empowerment: pushing and pulling

In order to understand the way empowerment is commonly viewed we have to explore its origin. The origin of the empowerment concept is hard to determine. In literature three more or less distinct origins are revealed. The first author associated with the concept is Paolo Freire, who in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2000 [1970])* rooted for a new educational system in South America. He described the contemporary practices with the term *banking approach:* A student is seen as an empty bank account which teachers fill up with valuable knowledge and skills. Freire's argument against this approach was that it creates passive citizens who are unable to adapt to the changing circumstances in a time and place where creativity and innovation were what was called for (Delahaij, 2004; Freire, 2000 [1970]). The oppressed simply become the new generation of oppressors, but the contradiction in itself is not solved. What was needed was empowerment of the oppressed, in such a way that the system of oppressor and oppressed would collapse, so that people would be really free (Freire, 2000 [1970]).

Another historical movement that is important for understanding empowerment policies is the American civil rights movement in the 50's and 60's. (Rappaport, 1981, 1987). The empowerment of black people was the main goal of this movement: to be acknowledged as citizens with all the rights (and duties) that come with this acknowledgement. The same can be said for the feminist emancipation movements. The third source is the development of social work in the 19th century. In so called 'settlement houses' people were assisted in finding solutions for their social and individual problems "People were supported in strengthening their bearing capacity and were stimulated to take action to improve their situations" (Delahaij, 2004).

In this brief history of the concept, we see the essence of how empowerment is perceived: empowerment in these cases is all about helping others to help themselves. In order to truly help people, you don't give them a fish, but you give them a fishing rod and teach them how to fish. This is the meaning of the term empowerment that is the most common in literature and policy. It leads to the following definition of empowerment: "Empowerment is viewed as a process by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their lives" (Rappaport, 1984). In local governance this definition of empowerment is projected on those groups in society that are presumed to lack this mastery. These groups, who are hard to reach for social workers, policy makers or any other institutions, are viewed as being in need of little *push*, in order to take control over their lives. Something or in most cases quite a few things on an individual level need to change before people can control their own lives. It is the task of professionals to make those changes, so that in the end they may leave another empowered client. This approach, which we call *pushing the citizen*, is only one of two perspectives on empowerment, one in which the individual is of central concern. But especially when linking empowerment to citizen participation in a local government context, another perspective reveals itself. That is: the perspective of a government that feels the urge to bridge the gap between politicians and citizens for administrative reasons. Apart from improving the lives of its constituents, empowerment

can also be used by local governments for improving its own administrative quality, as we have seen in paragraph 2. In this view empowerment is a mechanism to ensure citizen participation and thus strengthening local democracy. Based upon the struggle to overcome the problems associated with the democratic deficit in local government, governments try to find ways to activate citizens in decision-making. This is the field in which the participation ladder by Arnstein (1969) still plays an important role in the way policymakers view citizens. Here, empowerment has less to do with the individual's ability to control his or her own life, but more in making sure the individual is able to influence local decision-making and policies regarding his or her community or neighbourhood. Of central concern is not the individual, but the quality of the institutional environment in which citizens participate. We call this perspective *pulling in the citizen*. The environment of decision-making is so altered that it becomes interesting for citizens to participate: they are pulled into the process. The reasons for government to involve citizens in the decision-making process will be discussed elsewhere in this paper. For this section it is relevant to look at the consequences this mindset has for citizen empowerment theory and practice. But first we must turn to the locus of empowerment strategies and actions: in which spheres of life are or can empowerment processes be found and what does empowerment mean in these different spheres?

3.2 The four spheres of empowerment

There are two major differences between the two main approaches (pushing and pulling) to citizen empowerment in the Netherlands. The first difference has to do with the sphere in which empowerment is supposed to take place. The first approach, which has been described as 'pushing the citizen, focuses on the private sphere of an individual's life. Empowerment in this sense is all about making people able to stand on their own two feet, indeed to gain mastery over their lives (Rappaport, 1984). The second approach focuses on structuring processes so that power is transferred from those who had it before, to citizens who participate in formal decision-making.

These two spheres, however, do not comprise the whole variety of connections, networks and communities an individual is or can be a part of. Figure 1 shows the two already mentioned spheres but adds two other spheres. The four spheres combined cover up the rich and varying world of individuals in their private and political contexts.

Figure 1: Four spheres of Empowerment

| Private		Political	
Personal	**Social**	**Civil**	**Institutional**
The personal life, mental an physical health	Social networks, friends, sporting clubs	Volunteers, citizens' initiatives.	Local democratic decision-making

The two political spheres deal with actions that are focussed on the common good. The private spheres deal with actions that are focussed on the private life of citizens and the things they do for personal gain, for leisure or pleasure. The private sphere is divided in the personal and the social. The personal is the sphere that is all about individual traits. It is about skills, attitudes and that which affects persons as individual beings. The social sphere comprises all the different relationships individuals can have with one another for the purpose of friendship, leisure, pleasure etc, like sporting clubs, churches etc.

When people meet in order to discuss or influence what is going on in their neighbourhood, we label that as actions in the political sphere. Here the main goal is to get together as a people (demos) in order to reinstate, support or change what is seen as the common good. The political sphere is dived into the civil sphere and the institutional sphere. The civil sphere is the area in which people come together as citizens for the common good. The institutional sphere is the sphere in which the people actively engage in politics and formal forms of government. This is where the second main approach to empowerment and citizen participation in the Netherlands can be put. It is also the sphere in which the remainder of this paper will focus on. We are dealing here with participation in the political sphere or, more precisely: in formal institutional procedures of decision-making.

However, these boundaries between the different spheres are, for analytical reasons, in reality not that rigid. We assume, for example, that for empowerment in the civil or institutional sphere a certain amount of personal empowerment is necessary. There is a certain level of overlap and interdependence between the spheres. Figure 2 shows this.

Figure 2: Overlapping spheres of Empowerment
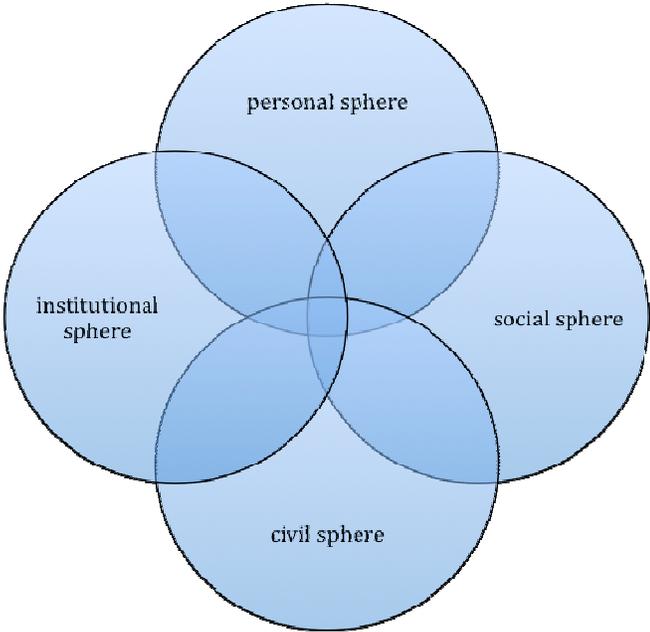
These then are the four spheres in which empowerment processes take place. These are also the spheres in which policymakers can target their empowering processes. As we mentioned before, the two main narratives on empowerment mainly focus on either the personal or the institutional sphere. The explanation for this is twofold: empowerment in the personal sphere has a long history already. In literature, whenever empowerment as a concept is used, it is described in terms that have a long standing history in social work (Adams, 2008) and community psychology (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Peterson & Reid, 2003; Rappaport, 1981, 1984, 1987; Zimmerman, 1990, 2000; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). The personal sphere is inside the mainstream view of empowerment. Although collective empowerment (neighbourhood empowerment, community empowerment, organizational empowerment) is coming more and more to the forefront of empowerment research (Adams, 2008; Peterson & Reid, 2003; Saegert & Winkel, 1996; Zimmerman, 1990, 2000), it is ultimately the individual's personal life that is the object of the empowerment process. A second explanation can be found in the institutional view that policymakers have when looking at local decision making procedures. In their context it is not so strange that when discussing the concept of empowerment policymakers instantly link empowerment to the way people participate in local government. Empowerment means a power shift (Boehm & Staples, 2002). In democracy power shifts from a voice that was not being heard before to a voice that can now influence the policy process. Hence, empowerment has to do with preparing and enabling people to participate in formal procedures.

Though the pushing and pulling strategies can be very helpful in empowering the citizen, the way empowerment focuses on the personal and the institutional sphere has the danger in it that the potential of empowerment is overlooked. Different spheres are possibly not only overlooked, but also the use of both *pushing* and *pulling* strategies within each sphere might have great empowerment potential that is not tapped yet by local governments. Though more and more projects and experiments in local democracies and citizen participation acknowledge for example the civil sphere (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993; Oude Vrielink & Van de Wijdeven, 2007; Van de Wijdeven & Van Ostaaijen, 2006) or the social sphere (Blokland-Potters, 1998; Lelieveldt & Kolk, 2002; Putnam, 2000) a more integrative perspective on empowerment might shed new light on the idea of empowered citizens in the context of local democracy in general and the context of citizen participation in particular. The potential that these spheres have for citizen participation will be discussed in paragraph 4. First we turn to the nature of the relationship between citizen participation and empowerment. Now we know in which spheres citizen empowerment can be found or used, there is another distinction regarding empowerment we have to take into account. This distinction has to do with the role empowerment plays in the citizen participation process – or, as we will see: the role citizen participation plays in the empowerment process.

3.3 Empowerment as a goal, a mean and a side effect

This second distinction in empowerment processes can be made by classifying the role empowerment plays in relation to citizen participation. Here we distinguish three roles. Firstly, empowerment can be *a goal* in itself. Citizen participation is then seen as a mean through which individuals acquire skills and attitudes that are needed and used in these processes. These skills and attitudes, in their turn can be used to enter new [political] participation processes and strengthen the individuals self-esteem, self-efficacy and sense of community (Schwerin, 1995).

Secondly, as is also very common as we have already seen, not empowerment, but citizen participation is seen as the goal for which empowerment is *a mean.* Empowering citizens is a mean to organize and guarantee the quality of local democracy because citizens are only then able to participate and through citizen participation they improve the policy process. When empowerment is viewed as a mean, it also gets strategic value. Empowerment then becomes a strategy for bettering citizen participation both in quality and in quantity.

Thirdly, empowerment can be seen as a *side effect* of citizen participation. This means that though empowerment is a result, it was never the prime intention of the participation process to empower people. This is the case in many projects where empowerment is not considered to be an issue, like organizing a neighbourhood barbecue that is all about getting together with the neighbours.

3.4 Empowerment as mean for citizen participation: a theoretical possibility

In local governance and neighbourhood discourses, empowerment is more and more mentioned as being a goal in itself. In practice, however, projects where citizen participation in the institutional sphere is central, empowerment is implicitly seen as an effect. Though mentioned in project plans no practical follow-up or agenda is given on how to achieve this goal. This leaves empowerment out there as being an effect (or not) of the specific project. We have seen that it is reasonable to believe that empowerment has an important role to play in stimulating citizen participation. Many projects or processes struggle with a lack of citizen participation and focus on new ways to *pull* people into the process (for reasons discussed elsewhere in this paper). This opens up an array of possible perspectives. Not only is it possible to view empowerment as a goal in itself, it also is possible to keep the view of citizen participation as a goal, but empowerment as a mean to achieve this goal. This shifts the narrative surrounding projects from a lack of citizen participation (in quantity) to a lack of citizen empowerment (in quality). The focus then is not so much on citizen participation, but on that which precedes participation, namely citizen empowerment.

A fine example that illustrates the implicit role empowerment plays in relation to participation is the CLEAR framework, introduced by Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2006). The framework shows factors promoting citizen participation. Like Brady, Verba & Schlozman (1995) they seek to find factors

that influence the level of participation of citizens. Brady et al. (1995) inversed the question why people participate and instead answered the question why they don't. The answers were that people cannot participate, they do not want to participate or they are not asked to participate. The CLEAR framework consists of three factors also found by Brady, Verba & Schlozman (1995) and two added factors. The CLEAR factors are:

Can do – that is, have the resources and knowledge to participate;

Like to – that is, have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation;

Enabled to – that is, are provided with the opportunity for participation;

Asked to – that is, are mobilised by official bodies or voluntary groups;

Responded to – that is, see evidence that their views have been considered.

(Lowndes, et al., 2006, p. 286)

It is striking that each factor is a verb. Each verb describes the prerequisite for participation. Each factor presumes a certain amount of (inter)action. Besides this fact that it requires action, the acronym CLEAR also pleas for clarity. The idea behind the CLEAR model is based on a coherence of the five factors. So, it is less an ideal type, but more an instrument to check whether participation fits the local context: 'the [CLEAR] model recognizes that participation strategies need to be sensitive to local contexts and dynamics over time' (Lowndes&Pratchett, 2006). Figure 3 explains the five CLEAR factors and how they relate to policy targets.

Figure 3: Five CLEAR factors that promotes participation

Key factor	How it works	Policy targets
Can do	The individual resources that people have to mobilise and organise (speaking, writing and technical skills, and the confidence to use them) make a difference	Capacity building, training and support of volunteers, mentoring, leadership development
Like to	To commit to participation requires an identification with the public entity that is the focus of engagement	Civil renewal, citizenship, community development, neighbourhood governance, social capital
Enabled to	The civic infrastructure of groups and umbrella organisations makes a difference because it creates or blocks an opportunity structure for participation	Investing in civic infrastructure and community networks, improving channels of communication via compacts
Asked to	Mobilising people into participation by asking for their input can make a big difference	Public participation schemes that are diverse and reflexive
Responded to	When asked people say they will participate if they are listened to (not necessarily agreed with) and able to see a response	A public policy system that shows a capacity to respond – through specific outcomes, ongoing learning and feedback

Source: (Lowndes, et al., 2006, p. 286)

Within these factors we see the distinction we have come to call the difference between push and pull approaches. The *Can do* and *Like to* parts of the framework are focussed on the individual and his skills

and individual resources as well as identification with the public entity. In other words: the C and the L focus on the citizen as a person. The factors E, A and R focus on the environment of this individual. Civic infrastructure, community networks, public participation schemes and the public policy system are mainly the objects of policy that focuses on these factors.

The framework is of course an instrument for administrators to find out whether enough is being done in order to stimulate citizen participation and which area(s) need further attention. On a deeper level, the framework indicates the quality of the relationship between empowerment and citizen participation. The CLEAR framework not only functions as a checklist for stimulating citizen participation, but also relates to different spheres in which empowerment can take place – i.e. *Can do* focuses on personal qualities and skills, *Enabled to* questions the institutional environment. In order to stimulate citizen participation through the CLEAR-factors, these factors have to be stimulated by empowerment. This framework then is an example of an emerging view that empowerment, though not yet explicitly mentioned, can be used as a mean for stimulating citizen participation.

4. Empowerment and citizen participation: an empirical exploration

Now we have seen that in theory empowerment can function as a mean to stimulate citizen participation, we turn to empirical research on the matter of citizen participation. We will formulate an answer to the following question: How is empowerment used for citizen participation by Dutch local government? We selected four studies that we recently conducted. In each study (ideas about) empowerment played an important role, though not always at the forefront. Moreover, we selected studies on empowerment in each of the four spheres (figure 4). In each sphere we explored the place of empowerment and the way empowerment was related to the other spheres.

Figure 4: Four empirical studies in Dutch local democracies and the spheres of Empowerment

	Private		Political	
Sphere	**Personal**	**Social**	**Civil**	**Institutional**
Study	Can do ['Kan Wel'] in Dutch Municipalities	Empowerment in Eindhoven	Empowerment in Dordrecht	Local policy documents with regard to participation and empowerment

We also analysed the nature of the relationship between empowerment and citizen participation in each study. Our aim is to explore whether empirical data support the aforementioned theoretical perspectives on empowerment and citizen participation. We start with a section on citizen participation in The Netherlands.

4.1 Citizen participation in The Netherlands

The Netherlands has broad experience with various forms of citizen participation at the local level (Denters & Klok, 2005:79-82, De Vries, 2008; Michels, 2006). Although Denters (2005) argues that, where citizen participation is concerned, citizens should not merely be 'followers', but also initiators, in most cases it is the local government that takes the initiative and leads the process. This practice of citizen participation and cooperation, in which the political elites play a leading role, is part of a long tradition of cooperation and consensus forming in the Netherlands, that goes back to the era of pillarization during which government and social organisations cooperated in corporatist structures (Duyvendak & Krouwel, 2001; Michels, 2007). Participatory projects often focus on the development of city centres, the revitalization of old neighbourhoods, and the construction of public works. Participatory projects operates under the premise that citizens and other stakeholders take an active role in the policy process at an early stage.

4.2 The personal sphere: Can do ['Kan Wel'] in Dutch Municipalities

Kan Wél! (Can Do!) is a program in The Netherlands in which citizens can apply for money and support for the execution of an idea they have for improving the neighbourhood. The core principle of the program is the support of citizens who want to take action in their neighbourhood. This support is given by 'coaches' whose sole task is to help the citizens (project-owner) when necessary. It is the citizen who is in total control of the project, and who, together with one or more neighbours executes the project. In the evaluation study of the Kan Wél!-pilot, Oude Vrielink and Van de Wijdeven (2007) concluded that this project led to new social contacts. This happened in the execution of the projects as well as when projects were finished. For example in the city of Venray citizens took to cleaning and renovating an existing playground for kids. In the process the project-owner worked together with some friends, but when the playground was finished and a party was held to open the newly renovated playground, a lot of other citizens came to see what was achieved, which resulted in new contacts and new ideas for cooperation.

This example shows that the program is an example of empowerment in the personal sphere, with results in the *social and civil sphere* as well. When people learn new skills and find out what they can achieve when they use these skills, this personal empowerment functions as lever for empowerment in the social sphere. The program challenges citizens to work together on very concrete projects, and organizes contacts around specific issues in the neighbourhood.

The Kan Wél! Program shows that in relation to citizen participation empowerment can be the central goal in neighbourhoods, but more than that it shows some of the requirements for achieving empowerment. In the light of this paper, the most interesting finding in the evaluation is that even though the project is based on the power of citizens themselves, empowerment needs continuous attention from professionals. It was in the guiding work of the coaches, who functioned as a back-up for

the project-owners that really taught citizens how to deal with certain situations of what was needed in order to get certain wishes granted by, for example the municipality. In Kan Wél! It was realised that empowerment can be more than just a side-effect, but that it needs continuous attention.

Empowerment in the personal sphere led to empowerment in the social and civil sphere as well. Citizens met new neighbours and got to know each other better (social sphere) and at the same time, the projects were proof of what a group of individual citizens can do (hence the name of the project) for their own neighbours and neighbourhoods (civil sphere). Though the evaluation did not focus on institutional sphere, we can safely assume that because of these experiences, citizens are better equipped for participating in institutional settings.

Regarding the relation between empowerment and citizen participation the Kan Wél! study shows that when empowerment is the central goal, citizen participation can be a side-effect of empowerment. But people who then participate are better equipped and increase the quality of the participation process as well as the decisions made (see paragraph 2).

4.3 The social sphere: the case of neighbourhood websites in Eindhoven

The city of Eindhoven has 210,000 residents and is situated in the south of The Netherlands. It is the country's fifth largest city and is commonly known as 'the Brainport', due to the presence of the prestigious Technical University, Royal Philips Electronics, and its various partnerships with regional cities and companies. Eindhoven was the (Netherlands) Design Capital of 2006, and the Eindhoven region promotes itself as the most innovative region of The Netherlands.

In 2009 we conducted a research on a wide variety of 69 neighbourhood websites in Eindhoven (Boogers, De Graaf, Van de Wijdeven, Hendrikx and Krieken, 2010). The local government asked us whether neighbourhood websites should be facilitated or even financed by local government. One of the question we asked was: what social impact do these website have in neighbourhoods? This research is interesting to mention in this respect, because it gives empirical insight in empowerment in the social sphere.

We studied the social dynamics of residents and studied whether the amount of social contacts was extended with new contacts. We also looked whether the quality of current social contacts was improved. In studying these websites, we found a typology of four neighbourhood websites, such as a virtual neighbourhood newspaper, a virtual neighbourhood guide, a virtual neighbourhood cafe and a virtual community centre. One of our conclusions was that the real life social contacts that already existed were strengthened through the neighbourhood websites. The online activities are facilitative for offline labour that communities do. The websites helps residents to be informed about progress of future and former projects or activities. Actually, the neighbourhood websites helps residents to find their way in the (online) neighbourhood and city. Another striking conclusion is that mostly women, elderly and young people are active as webmaster. On being interviewed, residents say that

neighbourhood websites are important, but not indispensible. Our main conclusion was that patterns of (social) participation in the offline world correspond with (social) participation in the online world.

This study shows that the social contacts in a neighbourhood can be facilitated by neighbourhood websites, although a selective amount of people will use it. These people belong to similar groups that are, traditionally, active in community work or voluntary work. Empowerment in the social sphere leads to empowerment in the civil and personal sphere. It shows that empowerment is an implicit goal but an explicit mean to stimulate citizens participation. People who are active in these websites are better equipped to contact others and to improve their personal circumstances.

4.4 The civil sphere: The case of empowerment in Dordrecht

In the town of Dordrecht an experiment was conducted with participatory budgeting. In two neighbourhoods citizens got a say in the distribution of a budget allocated to their neighbourhood. In Nieuw-Krispijn citizens were asked for their ideas on how to spend 100.000 euro, which were an extra budget, on top of the regular budget. The ideas were pooled and selected in different rounds, so that in the end an election was held to vote for one of 17 idea's. 8 idea's were chosen to be transformed to actual projects. In the second neighbourhood, Stadspolder, citizens were asked to redistribute the entire budget available for the year 2009-2010, through a game-like system where dilemma's concerning different trade-offs were made explicit.

It was believed that through this system of participatory budgeting, a sense of community would develop that would strengthen social cohesion. Here we see that empowerment mostly was to be expected in the *civil sphere* as an effect of actions that were aiming at creating social cohesion. By valuing the project by the standards of democratic value of citizen participation the project leaders steered the project away from its original goals. When citizen participation was low this was considered a representational problem and a plan was devised for citizens to vote online on the collected ideas. The quantity of citizen participation indeed increased, but the quality of the debate declined: instead of a community discussing what would be best for their neighbourhood, individuals voted in their homes, online, for the idea that appealed them personally the most. The goal of social cohesion through deliberation was not met.

The effect of empowerment in the civil sphere was not created and empowerment in different spheres did also not occur. A lot of attention was given to pulling the citizens into the project by facilitating ways in which they could participate. This biased the project leaders' view of the project and led them to believe the project was failing because not enough people were participating.

The relationship between empowerment and citizen participation also changed: from the goal of the project, empowerment was reduced to a side-effect of citizen participation, with the result that empowerment did not occur and citizen participation declined in quality.

4.5 The institutional sphere: Empowerment and citizen participation in local policy documents

The second example of empowerment in the political sphere is a set of policy documents that we studied in 2010 (De Graaf, Van Ostaaijen and Hendrikx, 2010). The documents address participation in 31 Dutch municipalities. The selection of these documents was based on the digital availability of the document on the internet. Each policy document was written by local government with the aim to enhance citizen participation and to stimulate local democratic decision making. These documents show how people can actively and formally be engaged in politics. This means that the results of this study must be classified in the institutional sphere of empowerment.

Our main conclusion was that the status of the document is ambiguous. It can be policy but also a discussion document. We found three types of documents. There are documents which are a manual for civil servants how to organise and deal with citizen participation in practice. There are documents which present a vision on citizen participation. The third type of document has a formal local legislative status in which the formal responsibilities are formulated with regard to citizen participation.

Each document presents a definition of citizen participation, but we encounter a wide variety of (12 different) meanings of it. Sometimes participation is based on the idea of participatory policymaking. There also documents in which participation is related to active citizenship and social cohesion. Other documents see participation mainly as citizen participation. Although there were some documents that mentioned community development, none of the documents is explicit about empowerment. It seems as if empowerment is not an explicit goals or mean in these documents. It is only considered a potential side- effect for citizen participation.

We analysed all documents based on the CLEAR model and found that *Like to* and *Can do* are lacking and that *Enabled to* is dominant. Strikingly enough, participation is something that a local government initiates and organises and empowerment is rarely assumed and not explicitly mentioned.

Figure 5 summarises the empirical findings of this section.

Figure 5: Empirical meaning of empowerment

	Can do ['Kan Wel'] in Dutch Municipalities	Neighbourhood websites in Eindhoven	Empowerment in Dordrecht	Local policy documents with regard to participation and empowerment
Sphere	**Personal** which also leads to social, civil and institutional	**Social** which also leads to personal and civil	**None**	**Institutional**
Empowerment as goal, mean, side effect	Empowerment is an explicit **goal** and a **mean** for participation	Empowerment is a **mean**	Empowerment is a **side effect** of citizen participation	Empowerment is a potential **side effect** for participation.

5. Conclusion

Our central question was: w*hat is the relationship between empowerment and citizen participation in Dutch local democracies?* Based on the empirical exploration we must conclude that empowerment has been overshadowed by citizen participation in Dutch local democracies. Local governments don't often see empowerment as an explicit goal, but as a mean and even more as a side effect of citizen participation. Local governments are unaware of the broader meaning and value of empowerment.

The Kan Wel! study shows the potential of an explicit approach to empowerment by local government. An extra and enduring effort is required from local government when using such an explicit approach. It also shows that a strong focus on empowerment can have positive effects on citizen participation. Less strong, but a similar pattern can be seen in the research on neighbourhood websites. It shows that empowerment has the potential to become a stimulator for citizens participation. However, when we look at the other two studies in which empowerment is analysed in the political sphere, empowerment is tacit and implicit and citizen participation is the dominant practice. However citizen participation practice show a limited understanding or even an underestimation of the concept and potential of empowerment. A practice that sees citizen participation as the foremost goal is probably blind for the potential that empowerment citizen participation can give. This is also the case for the different qualities the relationship between empowerment and citizen participation can have.

As with the different spheres in which empowerment can take place, there seems to be a specific focus also on which role empowerment plays in citizen participation. The different spheres of empowerment occur in the Dutch local democracies we studied.

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