

14/11/2019

What is participation ?

- - Thinking and doing: mobilizing knowledge, energy, sentiments, hands, etc.
- - As government, putting social and participatory equality before representative equality.
- - Take care of each other: responsible action, for each other, the neighborhood, the children, the future

In the Netherlands, change takes place and new ways of democracy are flourishing. Nowadays, more and more citizens take actions, initiatives are being born as well as cooperation structures: the “clients” are becoming the producers. This, in opposition of angry citizens who are only asking for help.

As government, how do you deal with these initiatives? How do you give them a legal place? This doesn't happen overnight, it takes more or less 10 years to modify the way local authorities deal with citizens' initiatives. Changing from one process to another makes that the systems are confronted to each other, it struggles but what matters the most is that the transition process was initiated. There's an initial frame, the objective is to play within this frame but also with its limits and flexibility. E.g. shared spaces where no rules are applied but every user behaves, nothing goes wrong.

The future of the government is that they will no longer have a clear central role, they will be **additions** in the network.

It's no longer about bottom-up or top-down, but from all sides as long as you find your place, as long as you get a community implicated. It's no longer “we more, they less” but “together more”! It all happens between the lines!

Changing the participation process and protocols does not work, it is about organizing a process aimed at a collaborative result:

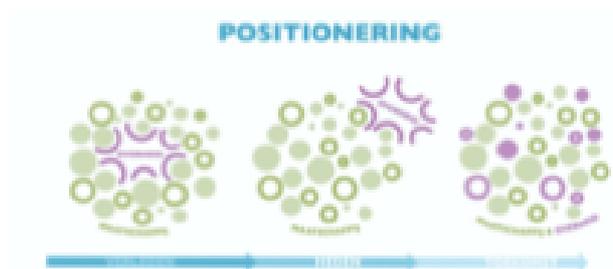
1. 1) More informal, more direct, more loose, mixed together
2. 2) Multiple in forms, network, side by side
3. 3) Energy as a commitment (talent, relationships, opportunities, fun) instead of problematization
4. 4) Whole, as life occurs
5. 5) Together, institutions and organizations are inviting, working and serving residents

Example: Patrick & Leen live in a neighborhood with lots of problems. They started to make their own facade gardens and, rapidly, were asked to do it for others. And later on they created the facade garden academy, the facade garden festival... One day, they saw an empty garage and thought of converting it into a playground. The municipality agreed, as long as they didn't have to pay for it. Lots of volunteers came to help and a group decided to start knitting the longest scarf (of 3km in order to correspond to the perimeter of the neighborhood). Finally, 180 people started to knit and the gigantic scarf was used for several occasions such as welcoming refugees, parading on a football event and

even dress up the statues of their main public place. Since then, the neighborhood is seen as a welcoming quarter where it's fun to live.

It is not about the solution but about the contribution made to social problems. They started from the community out (with a fun approach) and it induced the 'snowball effect'. Such initiatives don't always come along, thus as a community worker it is important to "extend your antennas" and try to connect all initiatives, even the smallest ones. According to Joop Hofmann, community building should be not starting by the problem but with the answer, it's about being supply-oriented rather than demand-oriented.

First contact then content



In closing, the following example was given which is not related to the subject of the masterclass but shows that it's important that public officials understand that they have to find their own space of "freedom" in the working environment imposed on them, i.e. to know to what extent they can introduce a certain flexibility with regards to the rule.

" At the cash register at the store, you end up with a bag of unweighted oranges. You can't walk backwards because the shop will close and the line behind you is long. Arrived at the cash register, the cashier proposes you to pay 2 € for oranges and everyone's happy (you have your oranges at a decent price, the cashier did not make the line wait too long and the store has its income).

If the cashier had to ask for authorization, she would have never obtained it. However, she acted as she should, and her superior would have liked her to do so even though he couldn't officially approve it."

