

Leadership of governments and citizens initiatives, enabling energy transition in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The governance of regions undergoes radical changes brought about by environmental challenges such as climate change and the depletion of fossil energy, as well as the rise of voluntary civic engagement which can play a role in dealing with these issues. On the one hand spatial planning and governance are based on deliberative intentions and interventions of governments to act upon spatial trends and the current environmental challenges. On the other hand we see the emergence of citizen-led community initiatives and civic enterprises, taking over governmental tasks in providing public services in various sectors, such as energy, care, landscape maintenance, and culture. These initiatives carry the risks of introducing (social) innovations that would not be done by firms or the public sector.

The trend of civic engagement can be explained by a renewed interest in community, place and 'local identity', the erosion of the welfare state and the privatization of public services, a re-emergence of the social economy, and tensions between 'bottom-up' initiatives and the changing role of the state. This raises questions who can and should take the lead in the much needed energy transition and spatial transformation in creating sustainable regions. The co-production of governments and initiatives can potentially result in shared leadership in solving the challenges of energy transition.

The objective of this paper is to get more insight in the role of public leadership in facilitating citizens initiatives in sustainable energy production. This has been assessed based on a triple case study, with as main question: How do provincial governments in the Netherlands take the lead in implementing an adaptive governance approach considering citizen-led wind energy development? Public leadership in this context was studied by combining the framework of Meijerink and Stiller (2013) for leadership in climate change adaptation and the framework of Sotarauta (2010) for place leadership. Thus a framework for public leadership in citizen-led development, or Accomodative Leadership, was created. Through researching the Dutch provinces of Gelderland, Flevoland and North-Holland the framework for accommodative leadership was tested and refined. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with representatives of the

provincial government, as well as with representatives of citizens-led initiatives and municipalities to analyse how the provincial roles were perceived. Furthermore a policy analysis has been conducted based on policy documents.

The results show that all provinces adopt a different leadership style: 'facilitative decentralization' in Gelderland, 'deliberative innovation' in Flevoland and 'authoritative reluctance' in North-Holland. The varied provincial roles result in different outcomes. Our conclusion is that there is no roadmap to effective accommodative leadership, supporting bottom-up led development, as it occurs in many forms. However, the created framework can be used by regional governments as an assessment tool and contributes to an increased understanding of the possible roles and actions which can be taken to improve every day policy practices.