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### Local democratic management in Eindhoven

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## **Local Democratic management in Eindhoven, The Netherlands**

Topic: Local Government Management and Local Governance

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### **Abstract**

This paper will present results from a study in the city of Eindhoven. The main question is: what is the state of participatory democracy in Eindhoven and how is it managed? The paper focuses on the state of participatory democracy in this city. The analysis will not only be based on a broad quantitative survey, but also presents a qualitative analyses of 38 participatory projects in this city in 2006. The paper will reflect on academic debates with regard to participatory democracy and debates with regard to democratic management on the local level.

## **1. What is the problem with democracy?**

*'If democracy were a building, the "under construction" sign would never be removed.'*

(Saward, 2003:I)

Democracy is one of the oldest and most comprehensively discussed political concepts. Politicians, citizens and political scientists all have their own perceptions and opinions on what democracy is or should be. It is a contested concept, because it is used and experienced differently in various contexts (Held, 2002:XI, Hendriks, 2006:29). In daily practise they all, at least in modern societies, play their own role in democracy and experience it individually. Although fundamental and philosophical questions regarding democracy are relevant and important, this paper will strongly focus on the empirical part of democracy. Hence, this paper will only reflect on the academic debate with regard to participatory democracy and democratic management on the local level. For public administration as a field as well as a discipline it is highly relevant to 'measure' how a local democracy functions and how it is experienced. I will concentrate on the city of Eindhoven in The Netherlands, where we did extensive research on participatory policymaking (De Graaf & Bodd, 2007).

In this paper I address the following question: what is the state of participatory democracy in Eindhoven and how is it managed?

The analysis will be based on a broad quantitative survey and will also presents a qualitative analyses of 38 participatory projects in this city in 2006.

This paper has the following structure. Section two and three will reflect on the academic debates with regard to participatory democracy and democratic management on the local level. After a description of the city of Eindhoven in section four, I will describe the research design. Section five presents the results about the participatory democracy and how Eindhoven is managing its democracy. The concluding section will present an answer to the central question and will round off with a discussion.

## **2. Participatory democracy**

Political scientists highly discussed the concept of participatory democracy in the 1960s and 1970s (Macpherson, 1977, Milbrath, 1966, Pateman, 1970). It is a relatively modern notion of democracy, but it is based on classic democratic principles (Held, 2002: 263-273). Currently, participatory democracy is still under discussion (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.

Although national referendums are often labelled as the most common form of participatory democracy, it more 'often refers to enhanced forms of participation in local communities, the workplace, and within political parties and pressure groups' (Saward, 2003:149). 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.

### **Participation as paradox in democracy?**

In general, the principles of liberal representative democracy are often the basis to structure modern societies. 'Representative democracy is a modern and contemporary conception which (...) highlights decision-making by the elected representatives of the people' (Saward, 2003:150). Although political participation is an important key feature 'through the vote, extensive participation in local government, public debate and jury service' it also creates problems (Held, 2002:116). Participatory democracy is often seen as only a supplement to representative democracy (Klijn and Koppenjan, 1998).

Politicians who are representatives do not always accept the output of participatory processes. But at the opposite, participatory processes are often far from representative (Berveling, 1998). In this respect The Dutch Council for Public Administration (ROB, 2004) warns for the danger of the participation paradox, which means that 'many are participating very little, but only a few are participating very much'. Berveling (1998) concludes that 'especially a specific group of highly educated, skilled citizens are

participating'. Elements of representative and participatory democracy are competing and can have opposite effects. Participatory democracy as a supplement to representative democracy creates the danger of selectivity. This must be seen as a warning for those who are involved and the process managers.

### **Participatory democracy and participatory policymaking in The Netherlands**

In The Netherlands, the rise of participatory democracy is linked with a decrease of legitimacy due to declining national and local turnouts, but also the decrease of political party membership. There is a broad sense that representative democracy is lacking and an increasing cry for democratic innovation (Saward, 2000). This development is not unique for The Netherlands (Franzke et al., 2007, Edelenbos and Klijn, 2006). The call for more participative democracy also influenced the policy process. The use of participative democracy evolved in so-called participatory policymaking. The central idea of participatory policymaking is, that involving and committing stakeholders and (groups of) citizens in an early phase of the policy process, rather than consulting them just before the implementation phase, creates a broader support for that policy and should make policy more effective, legitimate and could build more trust (De Graaf, 2007). Internationally, similar perspectives occur. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001:11) argues that 'engaging citizens in policymaking is a sound investment and a core element of good governance. It allows governments to tap wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions, and improves the quality of the decisions reached. Equally important, it contributes to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity.' There

are many motivations for local government to use participatory policymaking (Edelenbos, 2000):

- it increases the democratic legitimacy;
- it narrows the 'gap' between citizen and government;
- it enlarges the problem solving ability;
- it speeds up the policy process;
- it increases the support for the policy;
- it improves the quality of the policy.

In theory, each motive contributes to more participatory democracy and better policy.

### **3. What is democratic management?**

The basis for democratic management is largely based on the competence of the process manager to create and maintain support. This is the capacity to get policies and decisions democratically managed. It is closely related to the search for legitimacy. Schmitter (2001) defined legitimacy 'as a shared expectation among actors in an arrangement of asymmetric power, such that the actions of those who rule are accepted voluntarily by those who are ruled because the latter are convinced that the actions of the former conform to pre/established norms. Put simply, legitimacy converts power into authority and, thereby, establishes simultaneously an obligation to obey and a right to rule.'

Legitimacy consists of an organisational part which is highly related to effectiveness and efficiency as the three core governmental purposes. Legitimacy,

effectiveness and efficiency are highly related with one another. In this manner democratic management relates to managerial and organisational debates about the support and acceptance of governmental outcome. It is the way how a governmental organisation uses democracy in daily practise and how it performs. This requires suitable leadership and an appropriate amount of openness for debate and access for new stakeholders.

On the other hand it consists of an intrinsic part, which is based on democratic values and principles. This part stresses the importance of democracy in decision-making and policymaking which requires a political vision for instance on policymaking.

Although democratic management has clear relations with concepts such as legitimacy, it is a concept that is rarely debated academically, yet. Democratic management requires a (governmental) organisation to be aware of its democratic maintenance in daily practise. Thus, it directly affects the civil servants work. This paper wants to apply democratic management to empirical research.

#### **4. Doing research in Eindhoven**

The city of Eindhoven has 209.699 residents (in 2007) and is located in the south of The Netherlands. It is the fifth largest city of this country. It is also known as 'the Brainport', because of the prestigious Technical University, the attendance of Royal Philips Electronics, and the several partnerships with regional cities and companies.<sup>1</sup> The city and



its surroundings promote itself as the most innovative region of The Netherlands and was the 'Design Capital' in 2006.

Eindhoven has a City Council with 45 members. Councilors are elected once every four years. Day-to-day management is by the Board of the Mayor and Aldermen. The mayor is appointed for a term of six years by the crown. (S)He is chairman of both the City Council and the Board. Aldermen are appointed by the members of the City Council for a term of four years (website Eindhoven city, 2008).

Since the start of Eindhoven's current City Council in 2006, citizens participation has a high priority. There is even one Alderman who has it as explicit political task. Similar to other Dutch cities, Eindhoven has a tradition with participatory policymaking processes which is characterized by a geographical focus on the district level. One of the seven departments within the local government is specialised in so called 'integral policy approach' for these districts.

Eindhoven local government aims to enhance citizens participation through participatory policymaking and asked us, as researchers, to investigate the experiences of the participants in such projects. These 38 projects had a broad variety of topics:

- Projects on community development (more social orientation);
- Projects on district renewal, renovations of city parks and squares, (more fysical);
- Some projects on the development of recreation accomodation, sport and cultural events;
- Projects about safety and social security;

- Projects with a special focus on target groups such as the activation and health care of the elderly or the youth.

There were projects with only a few participants, for instance 3 organisations and citizens, but there were also several projects in which 16 different organisations were involved.

This research is relevant for the debate because it gives insight in perspectives of wide variety of participants and analyses democracy in daily live and the way participatory processes are managed. For future comparative research it is necessary that most similar or most different cases are analysed as well.

### **Research design**

The research aims to list participants' experiences of all 38 participatory projects in 2006 in Eindhoven.<sup>ii</sup> The participants were divided into four categories: individual citizens, company owners, professionals of social organisations, civil servants. The research has been organised in an quantitative and qualitative part. The quantitative research consists of an internet survey among 286 respondents, which were participants of participatory projects in 2006 in Eindhoven. The net response was 49 percent (N=133) which is fairly high for this kind of survey.<sup>iii</sup> The questionnaire had 36 questions, mostly with Likert scale answers, and consisted of a general part and question which were specific for a category (citizen, employee of social organisation, company, civil servant).<sup>iv</sup> Each category got the same questions, but were asked from their perspective towards the participatory project and their opinion about the roles and performances of other participants. This created the possibility to analyse a general perspective and a specific

participant´ perspective. There was also a set of questions about the projectmanagement of the participatory projects.

A qualitative part was added to go in depth for a small selection of participatory projects. We did 8 in-depth interviews among the four categories and investigated the ´stories behind the quantitative data´. We also analysed relevant documents (from Eindhoven government, but also from social organisations and citizens organisations) and analysed literature for the research topic and the research design.

The combination of the quantitative and qualitative design gained a broad and rich picture of participants´ experiences in participatory projects in Eindhoven.

## **5. Managing Democracy in Eindhoven**

### **5.1 Quantitative results and analysis**

This section presents the quantitative data and will analyse it. There are 7 main results:

1. Participants are highly educated men, with an average age of 52.
2. Participants are positive about the participative projects
3. The average report mark for Eindhoven´s role in participatory projects is a 6.5
4. Civil servants take the most important decisions
5. According to all respondents, citizens play an important role
6. It is not clear what Eindhoven local government will do with the input of participative projects

7. A ladder of participation: citizens are consulted, while social organisations and companies are co-producers

These results will be discussed below.

*Result 1: Participants are highly educated men with an average age of 52.*

72 percent of the participants is male, 28 percent is female. The average age is 52 years, the youngest participant was 22, the oldest 85. Almost 70 percent of the participants was highly educated. Participants in the analysed participatory projects are not very representative for the city's population.

*Result 2: Participants are positive about the participative projects*

Respondents (76 percent) have the feeling to be taken seriously by Eindhoven local government. 54 percent of the respondents is satisfied with the results of the project (see figure 1), but there is a considerable difference between the satisfaction of citizens and civil servants.

*Figure 1: Satisfaction about the results of the participative projects according to different categories of respondents*

	Citizens	Civil servants	Social organisations	Companies	Average
Satisfaction about the results of the project	44% is satisfied	69% is satisfied	59% is satisfied	64% is satisfied	54% is satisfied

52 percent of the respondents say that the results are in accordance with their expectations. 55 percent of the respondents say that they surely will participate again when there is a next time.

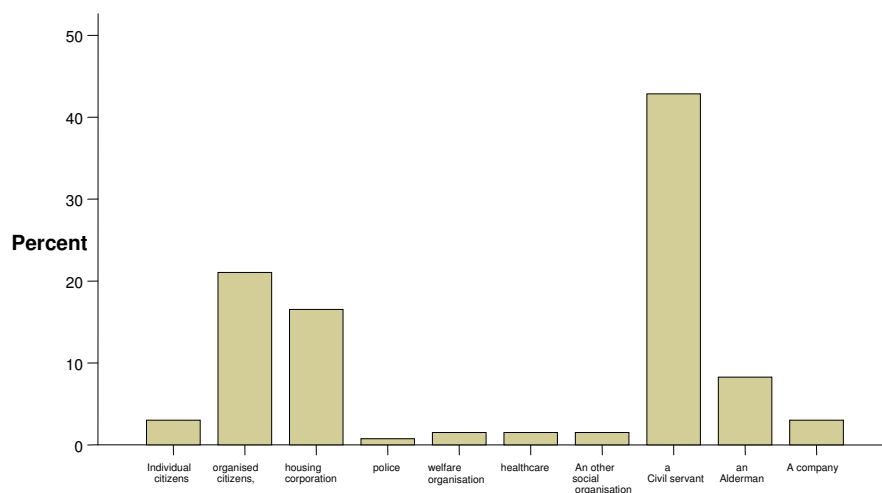
*Result 3: The average report mark (scale 1 to 10) for Eindhoven's role in participatory projects is a 6.5*

This is an average. Civil servants value Eindhoven's role higher than the average (7.0), while citizens and companies value it lower (both a 6.3). Social organisations value it with a 6.6.

*Result 4: Who decide? According to the respondents, civil servants take the most important decisions.*

Figure 2 shows that 'a civil servant' and sometimes 'organised citizens' are taking the most important decisions. An additional result is that 84,8 percent of the projectleaders works for Eindhoven local government. Civil servants play a dominant role in these projects.

*Figure 2: According to you, in general, who took the most important decisions with regard to substantial aspects of the interactive project?*



*Result 5: According to all respondents, Citizens play an important role in participatory democracy in Eindhoven.*

Generally, among respondents citizens have an positive image. Figure 3 shows how different categories of participants judge the (specific) role citizens play in participatory projects. Especially question A and F show a wide variety in the results.

*Figure 3: Participants response to posed questions about citizens (percentages)*

<b>Posed Question</b>	<b>Citizens</b>	<b>Civil servants</b>	<b>Social Organisations</b>	<b>Companies</b>	<b>Total score (weighted)</b>
A. Citizens are creating speed in the process	Agree: 39,5 Neutral: 32,4 Disagree: 26,7	Agree: 51,0 Neutral: 23,3 Disagree: 6,7	Agree: 32,0 Neutral: 28,0 Disagree: 40,0	Agree: 27,3 Neutral: 18,2 Disagree: 54,6	Disagree: 36,5 Neutral: 28,5 Agree: 34,3
B. Citizens deliver essential information	Agree: 91,6	Agree: 63,3	Agree: 80,0	Agree: 54,6	Agree: 86,2
C. Citizens only play a symbolic role	Disagree: 81,7	Disagree: 83,3	Disagree: 80,0	Disagree: 72,7	Disagee 81,0
D. Citizens participate for their self-interest	Agree: 52,1	Agree: 70,0	Agree: 52,0	Agree: 81,9	Agree: 58,4
E. Citizens don't have the required skills	Disagree: 74,7	Disagree: 66,7	Disagree: 68,0	Disagree: 36,4	Disagree: 68,6
F. Citizens are often initiators / leaders	Agree: 5,6 Neutral: 32,4 Disagree: 60,5	Agree: 10,0 Neutral: 6,7 Disagree: 66,7	Agree: 28,0 Neutral: 44,0 Disagree: 28,0	Agree: 45,5 Neutral: 27,3 Disagree: 27,3	Agree: 45,2 Neutral 35,0 Disagree: 19,0

*Result 6: It is not clear for participants what Eindhoven local government do with the input from participants.*

Only 48 percent of the respondents know what Eindhoven local government will do with the output of the project. This percentages includes the civil servants. Alderman and city councillors are only minimally involved (they don't show up often). 59 percent of the respondents show that there was no councillor or alderman involved in the project. They

appear to be not (very) visible. However, whenever there was an alderman or councillor involved 70 percent (N=56) valued this positively for the results of the project.

*Result 7: A ladder of participation: citizens are consulted, while social organisations and companies are co-producers*

The amount of influence of professional stakeholders is higher than the influence of (individual) citizens. In general, citizens were asked or consulted about their opinion, while social organisations and companies were (equal) 'partners' in the project, they were co-producers. There is even a moderately strong correlation between 'the participants influence on the result' and 'participants satisfaction about the results' (Pearson's  $r = 0,43$ ).<sup>v</sup>

### **Analysis**

These quantitative data show that several things are positively evaluated by the respondents. However, it also show a dominant 'civil servant logic' and the way participatory projects are managed in Eindhoven. Such logic has been criticized, especially by citizens. It also confirm that only a selective population is participating in these kind of projects (highly educated, older men). Referring to Sawards' definition of participatory democracy the studied participatory projects indeed enables extensive participation in decision-making. However, it concerns only a selective amount of members of the whole group. This confirms Berveling's argument that participatory processes are often far from representative (Berveling, 1998). It also show that representatives at the city council are minimally involved. This means that the democratic

management in Eindhoven has not reached its optimum yet. It can probably be more successful when making more explicit that the major focus of these sorts of projects is not on representation but on participation.

## **5.2 Qualitative results and analysis**

From the qualitative data we found three results (results 8 - 10).

*Results 8: Interviewees are determined when they say that there is a lack of personnel continuity within the local government organisation*

There are many personnel changes within Eindhoven local government, but also within social organisations such as welfare and housing organisations. Generally, personnel works for only 1.5 to 2 years on a position, before they change. One interviewee said: 'projects memory disappears. Nobody knows what was agreed three years ago. Citizens are getting more and more despaired about it.' It is also striking that professionals admit that a good handing over is the exception to the rules. These matters have a negative influence on the (continuity of the) participatory projects.

*Result 9: Eindhoven local government is often typified as unreliable*

In the interviews, the local government was often called unreliable, not in the sense of cheating or lying, but in the sense of 'you can't rely on them'. This is not an individual feature, but more a feature of the participatory process management. Often, there is a sudden radio silence for half a year. Interviewees gave many examples, but also analysed the causes: compartmentalization and competition between different departments,



personal relations, being swayed by the political issues of the day, (non)intervening alderman. Eindhoven government, but especially the projectmanagers are accused of not having the courage to take a decision.

*Result 10: There is a lack of vision on participatory policymaking*

Participatory policymaking is becoming a matter of course in the policy process. For Eindhoven, it is more normal to involve stakeholders to jointly discuss and create policy. Although a clear political vision on participatory policymaking is lacking, it is used on an ad hoc basis.

**Analysis**

In Eindhoven, participatory democracy is used in a mere instrumental and organisational way. It seems as if the discussion about the relation between representative and participatory democracy has not been started yet. Eindhoven local government has an internal orientation when they operate in (mutual) relationships, for instance the lack of responsiveness. This may be typical for (large) institutions, but it is something on which this city should elaborate. There is cry among the interviewees for more empathy. This is required to make participatory democracy process better and successfully managed.

## 6 Participatory democracy: whose problem is it anyway?

This paper discussed and analysed the following question: what is the state of participatory democracy in Eindhoven and how is it managed? Participatory policymaking does contribute to Eindhoven's democratic quality. Based on the survey more than 50 percent of the participants is quiet positive and satisfied about the way this city (e.g. the projectmanagers) deals with participatory democracy projects. However, there are still problems to be solved and participants are critical as well. Improvement is required through perhaps democratic innovations (Saward, 2000), organisational and culture change within the local government and within social organisations.

There are still some questions which are highly relevant for Eindhoven, but also for other local governments:

- Is selectivity and a lack of representation a problem for the democratic management of participatory projects in cities? Or, should we see participatory projects as addition to the representative democracy?
- It is important for citizens to understand the different models of democracy - here participative and representative democracy – why does (only?) scholars discuss about this?
- More normative: (how) should a democracy being (democratically) managed?

I want to round off with a hopeful quote from (Saward, 2003: 143) '*The job of building democracy is never done*'.

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## Internet

[www.Eindhoven.nl](http://www.Eindhoven.nl)

[www.Philips.com](http://www.Philips.com)

[www.Brainport.nl](http://www.Brainport.nl)

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<sup>i</sup> www.Philips.com shows more information about this multinational. Philips is specialised in the production of lighting, consumers lifestyle and healthcare products. It has 133,000 employees in 60 countries and has an annual sale of 27 billion Euros. For information on Brainport, see: [www.Brainport.nl](http://www.Brainport.nl).

<sup>ii</sup> The research period was from February 2007 until October 2007.

<sup>iii</sup> We had 286 e-mail addresses that we collected ourselves and were gathered at Eindhoven local government at social organisations and via our own network in Eindhoven. From 15 respondents we have received a mail delivery failure, so in total 271 respondents have been approached. 173 of these respondents opened the internet survey which means a response of 63,1 percent. However, only 133 persons fully filled it in. This means  $133/271 = 49\%$  response. The N consisted of 70 citizens, 29 civil servants, 26 social organisations and 9 companies.

<sup>iv</sup> The questionnaire was in Dutch, and is available.

<sup>v</sup> The Pearson's r correlation was measured at a significant level of 99.0%.