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Everybody should contribute, but not too much: Perceptions of local governments on citizen responsibilisation in climate change adaptation in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Arguments for so-called citizen responsibilisation, the transfer of responsibilities for public services to citizens, are increasingly put forward in several Western-European countries. An important domain in which citizen responsibilisation is advocated is that of urban climate change adaptation. However, in practice, the advocated shift is taking place only to a limited extent. This study aims to help explain this by researching Dutch local governments' perceptions on citizens' capabilities as well as these governments' preferences regarding the tasks they want to delegate to citizens in the different stages of adaptation planning. Findings from three workshops with policy practitioners from local governments show that these practitioners have moderate trust in citizens' capabilities, but a low willingness to transfer responsibilities. Concerns of local governments include how to: (i) ensure an equal division of resources between different citizen groups/neighbourhoods; (ii) address citizens who are pursuing their own benefits more than producing a public adaptation good; (iii) address potential externalities for other citizens; (iv) guarantee a certain quality level for the public space. The study shows that local governments have an implicit awareness of different dimensions of responsibility and the tensions between them, including at least: responsibility as a task, as a legal duty, and as something for which one can be held accountable. We recommend a more explicit discussion of these dimensions in practice and a more systematic treatment of them in conceptual and in empirical studies.

KEYWORDS

citizen responsibilisation, climate change adaptation, local government, responsibilities, the Netherlands

1 | INTRODUCTION

In many Western European countries, national governments are searching for ways to re-allocate responsibilities for public issues from governments to citizens (Edelenbos et al., 2018; Mees et al., 2019). In literature, this phenomenon is referred to as 'citizen responsibilisation', being "…how politicians and governments publicly frame and legitimize a new realm of state intervention dedicated to enticing, persuading and

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nudging citizens to 'take responsibility' in producing public value" (Peeters, 2013, p. 586, in Uittenbroek et al., 2019a). These efforts are sometimes inspired by a political (neo-liberal) ideology or by weak government capacity (budgetary constraints), but also by the more substantive rationale that citizens provide an additional source of creativity and resources to initiate and engage in all kinds of community initiatives (Hajer, 2011; Mees et al., 2019; Tonkens, 2014). In addition, it is argued that citizens often are the ones with a legal mandate to act, for instance when it comes to realising measures on private properties (Hegger et al., 2017).

Climate change adaptation, amongst other public issues such as health care and sustainable energy, is a prominent example of citizen responsibilisation (Hegger et al., 2017; Mees, 2017; Mees et al., 2012; Tompkins & Eakin, 2012; Uittenbroek et al., 2019b). In order to address the expected risks of climate change such as floods, heat waves and droughts, adaptation measures need to be implemented in public and private space. Thus far, mainly local governments have taken the lead in implementing adaptation measures (Mees, 2017). They encounter various barriers, though, such as limited resources and capacities, and institutional crowdedness as well as voids (Adger et al., 2009; Runhaar et al., 2012; Uittenbroek et al., 2014; Wamsler & Brink, 2014). In an effort to reduce those barriers, countries such as the United Kingdom (Big Society) and The Netherlands (Participation society) have presented national agendas propagating such increased responsibilisation of citizens (Klein et al., 2017; Mees et al., 2019; Wamsler, 2016). However, actually delegating tasks, either formally or informally, to residents is taking place only to a limited extent (Klein et al., 2018; Mees et al., 2019), raising questions about the mechanisms, feasibility and desirability of citizen responsibilisation.

An emerging literature on citizen responsibilisation, both within the domain of climate adaptation and beyond, provides insights that may explain the limited empirical evidence of the transfer of responsibilities to citizens (see e.g., Biesbroek et al., 2018; Edelenbos et al., 2018; Klein et al., 2017; Mees et al., 2019; O'Hare et al., 2015; Wamsler, 2016). This literature points at three key insights regarding citizen responsibilisation. First, while 'citizen responsibilisation' in practice is often understood as the *formal or informal shifting of tasks to citizens*, literature points to the fact that 'responsibility' is a *multifaceted concept* (Brink & Wamsler, 2018; Löfmarck et al., 2017; Pellizzoni, 2004). Besides delegation of tasks, the concept also has dimensions of liability and accountability, amongst others, attached to it as well as different underlying considerations for shifting responsibilities, including care and responsiveness. Responsibilisation is believed to require *empowerment*, which, broadly understood, implies that citizens need to be provided with the necessary skills and resources to be able to assume a task (Brink & Wamsler, 2018).

Second, and related to the previous point, citizen responsibilisation takes place in an *existing institutional context* that could enable or constrain it (Biesbroek et al., 2018; Brink & Wamsler, 2018; Edelenbos et al., 2018). A shift in tasks of citizens would require, ceteris paribus, a symmetric shift in tasks of local governments towards a more stimulating and facilitating, as opposed to an initiating and executing, role. Hence, governmental actors have to reconsider their position vis-à-vis citizens (Mees & Driessen, 2019). These governmental actors seem to be reluctant to do so, especially in the adaptation domain and they want to remain in charge of the decisions as to who is allowed to contribute to the adaptation process and when (Brink & Wamsler, 2018; Edelenbos et al., 2018; King & Cruickshank, 2012; Uittenbroek et al., 2019b). In addition, governmental actors anticipate that citizen responsibilisation may lead to important equity issues in that it can exclude disadvantaged groups (Brink & Wamsler, 2018; Mees et al., 2019).

Third, despite these emerging insights, actual systematic *empirical* insights into processes and mechanisms of citizen responsibilisation are still rare (Brink & Wamsler, 2018). There is still a large knowledge gap as regards the precise ways in which different notions of citizen responsibilities are discussed and acted upon in different geographical and institutional contexts; whether, to what extent and how actions of citizens lead to institutional change; what these changes, if any, produce in terms of adaptation goods and benefits, equity and social justice; and what lessons we can derive from this about the desirability of different processes of citizen responsibilisation. Especially local governments' perceptions on the desirability and feasibility of citizen responsibilisation have insufficiently been researched. Neither have these perceptions been specified for different phases of the policy process from planning to delivery of goods and services (Edelenbos et al., 2018). This merits a study of the perceptions of different officials within local governments on citizen responsibilisation, in order to explore the feasibility and desirability of such citizen responsibilisation.

The current paper addresses this knowledge gap. We aim to contribute to explanations for the discrepancy between discourse and practice of citizen responsibilisation, by studying the perceptions of local governments of the *capabilities* of citizens to take on responsibilities for climate change adaptation, and by comparing this with the *willingness* of local governments to attribute a larger responsibility to citizens in the field of climate change adaptation. We do so, by studying municipalities' views on the desirable shift of responsibilities in the context of the Netherlands. For this, we answer two research questions: (1) 'what responsibilities do local governments think citizens *can* take on?' and (2) 'what responsibilities do local governments *want* citizens to take on?' Our assumption is that there might be a discrepancy between the answers to these two questions. Local governments might see the potential of the citizens in terms of knowhow, resources and/or willingness to act. Nevertheless, they seem hesitant to shift responsibilities towards citizens (Uittenbroek et al., 2019b; Wamsler & Brink, 2014). Therefore, we expect that a comparison of the 'can' and the 'want' will provide insights into concerns that might hamper citizen responsibilisation in practice.

To achieve the research goal, the following steps will be taken. Section 2 develops an analytical framework for structuring local governments' perceptions on citizen responsibilisation. Section 3 describes the applied methods. Section 4 provides the findings. Section 5 provides the conclusion and discussion.

2 | ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING PERCEPTIONS OF CITIZEN RESPONSIBILISATION

As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of responsibilities is fuzzy and can be interpreted in many different ways (Brink & Wamsler, 2018; Löfmarck et al., 2017; Pellizzoni, 2004; Snel et al., submitted). It contains both empirical and more normative manifestations (Birnbacher, 1999; Miller, 2007). We argue here that an empirical approach, that is, operationalising responsibility as a task (de facto responsibility), is a useful and necessary starting point to unpack the abstract concept of responsibility. In other words, first we need to understand who does what in everyday practice, before we can engage in discussions about other dimensions of responsibilities. Our assumption is that we can only start filling in what someone sees as his/her moral obligation (moral responsibility); formal duty (legal responsibility); or informal duty (perceived responsibility) if we first understand what he/she actually does in terms of specific tasks.

Furthermore, the operationalisation of responsibility as a *task* has the additional benefit that we can unpack responsibilities for climate change adaptation in a way that is understandable and recognisable for officials of local governments. Therefore, in practical terms this operationalisation enables us to actually assess the perceptions of officials in a structured way. Such a structured assessment is a required step, before we can address the other dimensions of responsibilities, something which we will do in the discussion section of this paper.

To empirically assess local governments' perceptions to citizen responsibilisation in a structured manner, we draw on Mees et al. (2012), who identified 13 tasks for local climate change adaptation and introduced a distinction between relevant policy phases in the adaptation domain, being the Plan, Do, Check, Act circle of Deming. Mees et al. (2012) substituted 'Act' with 'Maintain' to bring the circle more in line with the policy making process. For each phase, Mees et al. (2012) identified examples of possible tasks related to climate adaptation. For example, in the first phase, there are four tasks: agenda setting, knowledge creation, taking initiative and setting goals. Accordingly, for each task, examples for climate adaptation (to flooding) are presented. The framework is the best available overview to date for the purpose of our study. For that reason, we have chosen to adopt it. Table 1 includes the entire framework of Mees et al. (2012). As can be read in the table, tasks related to citizen responsibilisation are diverse and include forms of citizen participation as well as the carrying out of practical tasks, hence, the latter two (participation and practical tasks) are a sub-category of the broader category of 'responsibilisation'. Mees et al.'s (2012) framework served as an analytical tool for the researchers and as a dialogue facilitator during the empirical research. We used the analytical categories contained in the framework as guidance for interpreting the empirical data collected. Furthermore, as part of the data collection, the categories were explicitly discussed with local governments' officials.

3 | METHOD

The Netherlands serves as our case study of citizen responsibilisation in urban climate adaptation planning. In the Netherlands, climate change adaptation is an emerging policy field (Massey & Huitema, 2013) for which national and local governments have produced policy documents, for example, the National Adaptation Strategy 2016 and Adaptation Implementation Agenda 2018. This policy agenda is enmeshed in a broader societal and political trend in Dutch society towards an 'Energetic Society' ('*participatiesamenleving*' in Dutch), in which citizens are expected to take part in public issues and to increasingly bear responsibilities for addressing these issues (Hajer, 2011). In methodological terms, this makes the Netherlands an extreme case (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2007). We assume that any barriers to a shift in responsibilities that we identify in our research will certainly be present in countries with a less outspoken focus on citizen responsibilisation and engagement.

Our findings are based on a combination of a focus group organised by the researchers and a 2-year participation of two co-authors of this paper in the City Deal network. The City Deal network is the Dutch platform of urban climate change adaptation for policy practitioners (http://www.citydealklimaatadaptatie.nl/). As part of this network, several workgroups were established including one on community initiatives in local climate adaptation. Two of this paper's authors participated in the latter workgroup. The mere existence of the city deal network can be explained out of the fact that the Dutch approach to climate adaptation is a combined centralised/decentralised one, which loose steering by the national government on processes to be implemented, which includes the obligation of local and regional authorities to organise risk dialogues on spatial adaptation with involved stakeholders. The national government, however, does not pose substantive requirements to local governments. https://ruimtelijkeadaptatie.nl/. This necessitates local governments to engage in knowledge exchange with a view on capacity development.

As part of this **City Deal network**, several workgroups were established including one on community initiatives for local climate adaptation. The two co-authors participated in this workgroup. All organised meetings (both the focus group and those of the City Deal network) involved practitioners from municipalities and water authorities. At each meeting, 8–10 participants were present. These practitioners were responsible for either community involvement, urban development and/or water management. Some practitioners had hands-on experiences with community initiatives in local climate adaptation (i.e., facilitating or subsidising green initiatives in public space), while other practitioners were still struggling with how to facilitate community initiatives foreseeing concerns inside and outside of their organisation. The researchers collected data by observing and listening to the experiences and views that practitioners shared on community initiatives and on their roles in facilitating such initiatives. Between January 2016 and March 2018, eight sessions on community initiatives were held, each taking 2–3 h. In all sessions, one or two researchers were present. Each meeting was organised by

TABLE 1 Analytical framework, based on Mees et al. (2012)

Policy phase	Tasks	Examples for climate adaptation
Policy-making (PLAN)	Agenda setting	Convincing politicians of the need to do adaptation planning and/or to integrate adaptation into other policy areas
	Knowledge creation	Acquiring information on climate effects, on their impacts on various sectors in society, on the impacts of various adaptation measures and their costs
	Initiation of policy	Bringing together stakeholders to initiate discussions, including those affected by and/or particularly vulnerable to climate impacts
	Target setting	Setting targets for acceptable flood security levels, for water storage capacities, reduction of heat stress, etc.
Policy implementation (DO)	Strategy making	Developing strategies for mitigating flood risk (e.g., dykes, adaptive building, evacuation plans) and the policy instrument mix to stimulate adaptation action
	Information provision and dissemination	Active sharing of relevant information to the public, for instance, about safety levels, evacuation routes, heat refuge centres, etc.
	Financing of measures	Bearing the cost of adaptation measures, compensating the damages inflicted by climate impacts or adaptation measures
	Physical implementation	Implementing adaptation measures, such as building a dyke, digging a canal, installing a green roof, etc.
Policy evaluation (CHECK)	Monitoring of results against targets	Monitoring implementation progress of adaptation measures and their intended impacts through physical inspections, geographic information systems, satellite imagery, etc.
	Enforcement through sanctions/incentives	Establishing fines for not retrofitting one's home for storm water retention, or developing fee reductions for storm water retention, etc.
	Policy adjustment	Making relevant changes to the policy based on the evaluation and/or deciding on the termination of policy
Policy maintenance (MAINT)	Maintenance after instalment	Inspecting dykes and repairing when necessary, regular training of evacuation plans, keeping buildings waterproof, etc.

Note: The tasks that citizens can de-facto fulfil are our conceptualisation of responsibility in the current paper.

another practitioner, who would present a theme or case study to discuss. During these meetings, the researchers posed questions about desirability and feasibility of citizen responsibilisation in local climate adaptation. The analytical framework was here used by the researchers to distil tasks per policy phase from the gathered experiences shared by the practitioners. The researchers have made summaries of the meeting sessions (in Dutch).

In the **focus group**, the analytical framework was *explicitly* used as a dialogue facilitator structuring the discussion in the focus group with policy practitioners. The categories in the table were used to inspire a discussion on local government officials' perceptions on the capabilities of citizens and the desirability of citizen responsibilisation. The participants of the focus group came from other municipalities and water authorties than those participating in the City Deal network, but had similar profiles, that is, responsible for either community involvement, urban development and/or water management. The focus group consisted of three rounds of approximately 45, 45 and 30 minutes respectively. The nine participants discussed topics in two small groups of four and five participants respectively, with one of the authors being the discussion leader and another acting as observer. In the first round, participants were asked to think of responsibilities citizens *can* take on. Each group was to think of responsibilities related to two out of the four planning phases. The intention was to let them think freely and without limits about possible citizens' tasks, assuming that it is in principle possible to delegate a specific task to a citizen and that citizens will be adequately supported in enhancing relevant knowhow, resources and capabilities. In the second round, participants had to think of responsibilities that their governmental organisation *wants* to attribute to citizens, again related to the same two planning phases as in the first round. In the third round, we held a plenary discussion in which participants reflected on the given answers. The focus group was recorded and transcribed.

In total, we based our research on the experiences of 20 Dutch policy practitioners of different municipalities and water authorities. In the findings section, we refer to these 20 practitioners as the participants, because they were participating in the focus groups and/or the City Deal network sessions. Mostly, the participants seem to agree with each other. In case, they were not we will explicitly state so in the findings section. We have to acknowledge the explorative nature of this paper, since this research is based on a small sample.

The sample exists, however, of practitioners that work for municipalities and water authorities that differ in size and geographical location. This makes it reasonable to assume that the findings are representative for the broader challenges Dutch local governments are facing.

4 | FINDINGS

The findings on local government officials' perceptions on citizen responsibilisation are structured per policy phase. For each phase, we discuss what responsibilities local governments think citizens can take on, and what responsibilities local governments want citizens to take on. Interestingly, while defining current and possible responsibilities for citizens, the local policy practitioners also reflected upon their own responsibilities vis-à-vis those of citizens. The practitioners emphasised the formal division of responsibilities in the Netherlands, which currently is organised as follows (see also, Dai et al., 2018). Citizens are responsible for water management on their own property. Municipalities are responsible for adequate rainwater collection and drainage and the development and maintenance of (green) infrastructure in public space. In addition, in case of new developments in public space, municipalities have to organise participation processes to inform citizens about these new developments. Water authorities are responsible for the management of all surface water and water safety (i.e., to circumvent flooding).

The local government officials came up with very concrete examples of potential contributions from citizens. All of these examples relate to adaptation measures for urban flooding. In the Netherlands, climate adaptation policy also includes measures to heat and drought, but (urban) flooding is considered to have the most consequences for the Netherlands (considering 60% of the country lies below sea level).

This section emphasises officials' perceptions of the shift in responsibilities in terms of ‘can’ versus ‘want’, but also mentions the responsibilities the participants see for themselves while interacting with citizens. Table 2 provides a summary of the findings. In this table, we have added a column with ‘can versus want’ to indicate whether or not there is discrepancy.

4.1 | PLAN-tasks

Regarding the first phase of policy making, participants argued that citizens can come up with their own ideas and initiatives, and can share them via social media. For example, the ‘BuitenBeter’ (Improving the Outdoors) mobile application allows citizens to share their ideas for their neighbourhood with local policy practitioners. Citizens can think along about defining the problem and finding solutions, and help in setting goals for projects. In so doing, citizens can also gain a sense of ownership.

Some of the participants have experienced that citizens came up with initiatives, for example for realising more water storage in their neighbourhood, but then just dropped them in the lap of the local policy practitioner and took off, assuming that local policy practitioners would realise these initiatives. The participants point out that this is an unwanted situation: they argue that if citizens come up with an initiative, they also have to take the responsibility to plan and implement it. This implementation should fit the regulations provided by the local government and is facilitated, or not facilitated by the local government. In addition, the participants stress that they do not always have the capacity to facilitate and realise citizen initiatives. Having a clear overview of what initiatives are out there and identifying possible synergies, is a relevant responsibility that local governments can take on.

Most participants say that they want to acknowledge the citizen as an expert of the neighbourhood. Citizens often know where the large puddles are after a large downpour and how long it takes before the rainwater runs off. Knowing this, the participants want citizens to act as an expert more often: citizens' tacit knowledge needs to be brought to the surface in order to make use of it. Interestingly enough, the participants consider the unearthing of tacit knowledge as a responsibility of the local government and not necessarily of the citizens. In the case of setting goals together with citizens, some of the participants see a task for the citizens to set up a foundation, including members and public budget, so that the continuation of the implementation of the goals can be secured. Additionally, the participants indicated that they want citizens to contribute to gaining public support for the initiatives they come up with.

4.2 | CAN versus WANT

In the *plan* phase, the tasks focus on agenda setting, knowledge creation, initiation of policy and target setting. The perceptions of the participants are that the citizen can take various tasks in this plan phase: come up with ideas, share information and knowledge and set goals together with the local government. Clearly, in the plan phase, municipal practitioners understand ‘tasks’ to be ‘forms of participation’ rather than practical tasks. Certainly, with regard to agenda setting and initiation of policy, the participants want citizens to take on responsibilities. There is some discrepancy between the *can* and the *want* as the participants can make the tasks more specific in terms of what governments want citizens to do than in terms of what they think citizens can do. Hence, the participants stress that citizens should act as experts, organise public support, take initiative albeit in the institutional context. This illustrates that the participants see active participation as a task of the citizens while local governments remain primarily responsible for the process and outcome.

4.3 | DO-tasks

Regarding the second phase of policy implementation, participants argue that citizens can provide input on plans during participatory walk-in sessions. Examples mentioned include: policy practitioners pitch plans to those who are interested or invited, kitchen-table talks are held, being

TABLE 2 Findings regarding 'CAN' and 'WANT' per policy phase

Plan tasks	CAN	WANT	CAN versus WANT
Agenda setting	Come up with ideas and initiatives	More often act as expert of their neighbourhood	CAN < WANT small discrepancy: governments want citizens to act more effectively (act as an expert, gain support for their own initiatives) than governments suggested for tasks citizens 'can' fulfil
	Use social media to share information	Organise public support for (their own) initiatives	
Knowledge creation	Share their expert knowledge about their neighbourhood	Share their expertise and (tacit) knowledge	CAN=WANT no discrepancy: Governments think citizens can and should share their expertise and knowledge
Initiation of policy	Think about the policy design and measures	Take initiative and implement it, but within the institutional context	CAN > WANT small discrepancy: Governments want citizens to act within the context that is set by the governmental institutions
Target setting	Set goals together to generate ownership	Set goals together; if possibly set up a foundation in order to secure goals	CAN=WANT No discrepancy. In the want column governments have suggested a way to generate ownership by setting up a foundation
Do tasks	**CAN**	**WANT**	**CAN versus WANT**
Strategy making	Contribute in participatory practices such as walk-in sessions, kitchen-table talks, ateliers/workshops	Actively contribute in participatory processes such as mentioned in the 'can' section	CAN=WANT No discrepancy
Information provision and dissemination	Setting an example for the neighbourhood by taking measures and sharing them with their neighbours	Communicate about water nuisance and share information about measures	CAN > WANT small discrepancy: As a minimum, governments want citizens to communicate with each other, while citizens can set the example and take measures. So not only talk, but also action.
Financing of measures	Finance public measures by paying taxes; taking measures on their own private properties	Financing measures on their own properties	CAN = WANT No discrepancy: Governments want more citizens to take measures on their own property.
Physical implementation	Think of effective technical measures; thinking along about the design and actual implementation	Provide input/feedback on specific elements (e.g., aesthetics/colour) of the design	CAN > WANT Large discrepancy: Governments want to decide on measures and implementation themselves. They want citizens to only say something about the design or appearance of the solution.
Check tasks	**CAN**	**WANT**	**CAN versus WANT**
Monitoring of results against targets	Those who want, can monitor	Monitoring done by government is leading	CAN > WANT small discrepancy: Governments think that they monitor more effectively. Therefore, they do not really see the value of citizens monitoring.
Enforcement through sanctions/incentives	No task	No task	CAN = WANT No discrepancy: Governments do not see a task for citizens here. Governments do it themselves.
Policy adjustment	Provide feedback for adjustments based on practical experiences with the measures	Feedback is wanted, but government interprets and decides on adjustments	CAN > WANT Small discrepancy: Citizens can provide feedback but governments decide how to value and use the feedback.
Maintenance tasks	**CAN**	**WANT**	**CAN versus WANT**
Maintenance after instalment	Adopt public green and take responsibility for the provision of green.	Take responsibilities for green maintenance, but only if continuity and quality can be guaranteed.	CAN < WANT Some discrepancy. Governments agree citizens can take maintain public green, but want citizens to deliver up to government standards regarding continuity and quality. This could result in asking too much of the citizens.

Note: The colours in the right hand column indicate the extent to which there is a discrepancy between the two (green = no discrepancy; orange = some discrepancy; red = large discrepancy). The column also shows the direction of the discrepancy (CAN < WANT; CAN > WANT or CAN = WANT).

one-to-one talks between policy practitioners and citizens in the citizen's own home, or ateliers are held, being workshops in which policy practitioners and citizens talk, draw and/or share ideas. Several of the participants point out that some citizens are already taking up these tasks and stress that they also want them to do this as they consider citizens' input relevant. In addition, citizens can contribute by sharing or disseminating knowledge and experiences regarding effective measures that they used themselves or others in their neighbourhood. Again, the tasks that came to mind of the participants are mainly tasks related to participation rather than to practical implementation.

Concerning responsibilities for financing, citizens can and should pay their taxes so that adaptation measures in public spaces can be financed. This also allows for equal spread of measures throughout the city, which is considered a sign of equity and solidarity. Furthermore, citizens can take measures on their own private properties, such as green roofs, rain barrels and less paved surface. Participants want citizens to take and finance these measures themselves.

In case of physical implementation of adaptation measures in public space, citizens can think of effective measures (e.g., more green stormwater infrastructure such as wadis or a water square for water storage) and think along about the design and implementation. Yet, participants want citizens only to give input to the aesthetic design of the measure, not so much the technical functioning in itself. The participants argue that governments want to deliver public goods of high quality to the citizens. They are afraid that citizens might propose another, lower, level of quality. The participants consider a shift in responsibilities towards citizens regarding physical implementation of adaptation measures in public space neither feasible nor effective.

4.4 | CAN versus WANT

In the do phase, the tasks relate to strategy making, information provision and dissemination, financing, and implementation. In two of these tasks (i.e., strategy making and financing) there is no discrepancy between can and want. For these tasks, the participants have envisioned tasks that they also want citizens to fulfil. In case of information provision and dissemination and implementation, there is discrepancy. The participants perceive that citizens can set examples, but they want them to at least share and communicate about water nuisance issues and measures. Interestingly, the *want* is in this case a more modest task than the *can*. For implementation, there is much discrepancy between can and want as the participants perceive that citizens can probably contribute to the selection and design of measures, and also the implementation. Yet, governments want citizens to only have input on the design. Hence, what governments want citizens to do is much less than what they believe citizens are capable of doing.

4.5 | CHECK-tasks

During the third phase of policy evaluation, citizens can assist in monitoring. For example, in one of the municipalities, citizens monitored the amount of rain that fell in their own gardens during a period of time. The affiliated participant points out that this was on the citizens' own initiative. These citizens are intrinsically motivated to monitor a problem or a consequence for a longer period of time. In this example, the local government was not sure if the gathered data would be of any use to the organisation but they wanted to stimulate rather than demotivate the citizen initiative. On the other hand, there are also participants who question why you would ask citizens to do any monitoring. One participant of the water authority says "just let the government do it." The underlying reasoning is that local governments could monitor more effectively and consistently.

The participants do not see any task for citizens in enforcement through sanctions or incentives. This, the participants consider a responsibility for the government.

In terms of policy adjustments, citizens' task could be that they provide feedback on the experienced or real consequences of taken measures. This could inspire adjustments to the implemented policies. To collect such feedback, the municipal spokesperson for the neighbourhood (gebiedsbeheerder), a position that exists in most Dutch municipalities, would be the appropriate person. This person, after collecting the feedback, could start internal procedures to improve the situation if necessary. In addition, the participants reason that local governments are still in charge of interpreting the input themselves in order to make deliberate alterations to a policy.

4.6 | CAN versus WANT

In the *check* phase, the tasks relate to evaluation and monitoring. The participants cannot really list any responsibilities that citizen can de facto fulfil. Citizens may monitor or can give input, but the participants do not want citizens to carry out tasks related to evaluation and monitoring either. Local governments want to fulfil these tasks themselves. This indicates that there is actually little to no discrepancy between can and want.

4.7 | MAINTAIN-tasks

During the final phase of maintenance, citizens can sporadically carry out maintenance tasks, such as cleaning of small water ways or managing public green. But this is only considered acceptable by the participants if clear arrangements are made with the citizens regarding safety and continuity. Safety is an important issue as problems of, for example, broken or uneven tiles could lead to accidents. Citizens might be responsible for maintaining a public area, but the local government will be held accountable. And although suing local governments for unsafe public spaces is not that common in the Netherlands, local governments want to avoid that from taking place.

On the topic of continuity, one participant argues that if you want citizens to take up responsibility for maintenance tasks, governments want some guarantee that residents continue carrying out these tasks. But this participant also realises that this is hard to ask from citizens.

The participant argues that you want to use the energy of the citizens who want to carry out such tasks. For this, local governments have to make sure that they have a back-up maintenance budget in case citizens decide that they cannot or do not want to continue these tasks. The participant says that for that reason her local government has a small back-up budget available.

4.8 | CAN versus WANT

In the *maintain* phase, there is some discrepancy between can and want in the sense that governments want more than citizens can deliver. The participants see a possible task for citizens in maintaining public greens, but they do not seem to want to shift this responsibility towards citizens as long as no guarantees about continuity or safety are given up to governmental standards. This can result in asking too much of the citizens.

4.9 | Discrepancy between 'CAN' and 'WANT' in policy phases

Our starting assumption was that there is a discrepancy between the perceptions of local governments about which responsibilities citizens can take on and which responsibilities governments want citizens to take on. The colours in Table 2 give a nuanced overview of the extent of this discrepancy per task. For five out of the 12 identified tasks (the green ones), there is no discrepancy between 'can' and 'want': what governments want citizens to do is in line with what they think they can do. For one task, there is a clear discrepancy: policy practitioners think citizens can fulfil a task in physical implementation, but do not seem to want the citizen to take this task. In addition, we also see six tasks for which the discrepancy between 'can' and 'want' is somewhat difficult to ascertain. For these responsibilities it seems that the 'want' answer is a more concrete, demarcated version of the 'can' answer. This is true for agenda setting, initiating policies, policy adjustment and maintenance. There is a clear desire from the part of local governments to remain in charge of the boundary conditions within which citizens have to operate. In addition, the findings illustrate that local governments might find it difficult to think of what responsibilities should be shifted towards citizens other than those that are already institutionalised.

In line with this, our observation is that the policy practitioners see relatively few responsibilities for citizens in the policy process. Only if citizens take an initiative themselves, the policy practitioners see the planning and the implementation as a responsibility for the citizens. Otherwise, citizens are given the responsibility to contribute and provide input (thus: participate) during plan making and implementation, but no responsibility for the actual planning or implementation of public services themselves is assumed. In the phase of policy evaluation, the participants barely see any responsibilities for the citizens. This is interesting as the perceptions of citizens towards an implemented policy, in term of whether they consider it a success or a failure, can be relevant for the improvement of a policy. If the feedback is taken into account, it can also increase public support for a policy. And in case of maintenance, responsibilities should only be shifted if continuity and safety can be guaranteed. In other words, policy practitioners consider limited responsibilities for citizens with exception of the task of participating early on in the policy process.

5 | DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH

5.1 | Discussion

This paper has engaged with the debate on citizen responsibilisation in climate change governance, by providing findings and lessons from the empirical domain of climate adaptation in the Netherlands. The findings provide additional insights related to a key topic in this debate, being the *multifaceted* nature of the concept of citizen responsibilisation (Brink & Wamsler, 2018; Löfmarck et al., 2017; Pellizzoni, 2004). Local governments hold legitimate concerns that pose limitations to citizen responsibilisation. Our interpretation of these concerns is that at a strategic level responsibilities of citizens are now mainly discussed in terms of tasks that they could assume. The notion of 'responsibilities' is, however, broader than 'tasks allocation' only and has several additional dimensions to it (see also, Doorn & Van de Poel, 2012; Pellizzoni, 2004). As we have shown, relevant additional dimensions in the field of urban climate adaptation are, at least: who has which means for assuming a task (capacity, resources); and who is accountable for the delivery of the task? Without always explicitly naming these dimensions, local policy practitioners arguably showed to have a large practical awareness of them, including an awareness of the interrelationships between these dimensions: a change in one has implications for the other two, which might explain the unease and hesitation felt by local policy practitioners. Based on our findings, the question can be posted what these implications are.

As regards the link between task and resources, one could either argue that a shift of tasks should be accompanied with a shift of resources, or that such a shift of resources is not necessary (or only to a limited extent). Arguments for either position can be made, but will, besides being practical, also be normative in nature. A shift of resources could be justified out of a substantive rationality, in those cases in which a shift of tasks to citizens is believed to lead to the more effective and efficient provision of public goods (see also, Tompkins & Eakin, 2012). Understood in a narrow sense, this could imply that citizens can carry out a task better and/or at lower costs than governmental actors. But a consideration could also be that transferring a task to citizens has various societal co-benefits (e.g., increased social cohesion; enhanced livability or enhanced aesthetic quality of the built environment). Those in favour of a shift of resources would likely argue that not providing these resources is illegitimate, since large demands are placed upon citizens' time and other resources, without adequately compensating them for it. Seen in this

light, not compensating for the resources invested by citizens would only be appropriate in cases in which the tasks transferred to citizens are minor and do not overburden them. Our findings suggest that several tasks that, according to national governments, could be transferred to citizens are actually not minor. Hence, a symmetric shift in resources would at least deserve a deliberate discussion.

As regards the link between task and accountability, the question is whether the citizens who assume a certain task should also be held accountable for the quality of the execution of this task. One position is that some discrepancy between the task dimension and the accountability dimension (e.g., a task goes to citizens but municipalities remain accountable) is something that to some extent has to be tolerated. It might be necessary that local governments step out of their comfort zone and become less eager to stay in control. Advocates of this position will probably argue that a change in attitude of local practitioners is the main pathway to increased citizen responsibilisation. A second position is that a discrepancy between the two dimensions of responsibility is something that needs to be reduced. This might imply that accountability for certain hitherto public tasks should go to citizens to a larger extent. The latter element is radical in that it implies that citizens become not only account holders—actors who hold the government to account for the adequate provision of public goods and services—but also account givers—actors who themselves can be held to account (see also: Mees & Driessen, 2019). Needless to say that the latter change requires adjustments of highly institutionalised mechanisms including legal changes.

As regards the link between resources and accountability, the dilemma seems not as big as it is for the previous two links. One could logically argue that in a democratic society, the two belong together. If citizens receive publicly funded resources aimed at the production of public adaptation goods, they are to be held accountable for how the resources are spent. Vice versa, if citizens are held accountable for the production of public goods, they should have the necessary resources to meet their obligations.

This reflection on the findings shows that citizen responsibilisation is not a quick fix. Allocation of more responsibilities to citizens requires local and regional policy practitioners to change as well. The key question is not if such change is required, but how much of what kind of change (e.g., in attitudes, institutions, practices) is needed.

5.2 | Conclusion

The previous sections have delved into the question of why local governments are so hesitant to shift or allocate responsibilities to citizens. Unpacking these responsibilities in terms of specific tasks in specific policy phases has helped to gain a nuanced answer to this question. We have found some similarities, but also some salient discrepancies between local governments' perceptions of the capabilities of citizens to become responsible, and the desirability thereof in different phases of the policy process. Local governments want to involve the citizens, yet they are hesitant to shift responsibilities towards citizens other than those that are already institutionalised. Our findings point at several reasons for this.

First, local governments seem not to want to burden the citizens too much. Local policy practitioners are aware of how time- and resource-consuming some tasks can be and of the fact that citizens are currently not paid for assuming these tasks. This concern is arguably relevant for the physical implementation of measures. This is a time consuming task for which we found the largest discrepancy between what governments think citizens can do and what they want them to do. To a lesser extent, this may also hold for the task of information provision, which was understood by local governments as 'citizens lead by example and actively disseminate information to fellow citizens', and the task of monitoring.

In addition to concerns about the overall burden posed on citizens, local governments argue that not all citizens will have the same amount of resources at their disposal. Local practitioners perceive that some citizens or groups of citizens are able to organise themselves better than others. An increase in citizen responsibilities will most likely also lead to inequality in the attainment of public services (see also, Mees et al., 2019). Local practitioners are aware of this and want to prevent a further increase of inequality. They seem to argue that public services paid out of public money guarantees that there is an equal distribution of public services and resources.

Second, local practitioners worry that citizens are not capable of effectively carrying out the task. Local policy practitioners argue that several minimum requirements need to be met in public space. Our findings suggest that safety, continuity and quality are amongst these requirements. The practitioners show doubt as to whether citizens are capable of meeting the requirements up to the government's standards. This concern of local policy practitioners is arguably relevant in the case of the physical implementation of measures; initiation of policy; monitoring; policy adjustment; and maintenance. Local policy practitioners are aware that citizens need the necessary resources, including possibly additional resources (financial and human capital). All tasks require a certain level of commitment of citizens and some of them, predominantly maintenance, require sustained commitment, also when citizens leave or move. The underlying reasoning is that citizens might be made responsible for public services (the task is delegated to them), yet the local government seems to remain accountable. Local practitioners hence fear that citizens might start with good intentions but further on in the process loose interest resulting in a lack of continuity or quality in the implementation.

Third, local practitioners have hesitations because they fear that citizens focus on their personal situation only and do not see how their actions relate to the bigger picture/common good. It is argued that governments have a more holistic view on the policy process: local governments understand how various local (and other level) policies fit together and affect each other. It is difficult to expect citizens to carry out the task related to a public service and also be aware of all adjacent policies and possible interrelations. For instance, if citizens disconnect their property from the sewage system but make wrong connections, ground water sources can be polluted with waste water, something for which local and regional authorities remain accountable (see also: Wamsler & Brink, 2014). While officials might think that

citizens are not capable of thinking holistically, recent research indicates the opposite (Marschütz et al., 2020).

Fourth, and related to the previous points, an important consideration seems to be that local policy practitioners are not uniform entities but can be internally divided about the issue of citizen responsibilisation. Some employees of a municipality are more resistant to change than others, to the extent that there can be said to be an internal struggle within local governments' organisations as to whether or not they want to shift responsibilities to citizens. While some policy practitioners are stimulating citizens to take on more responsibilities, they notice resistance with their own colleagues who do not want citizens to fulfil more tasks. To further develop citizen responsibilisation, local governments also have to change and make sure the entire organisation is open to such a shift. Yet thus far it seems that only certain policy practitioners and only during some phases in the process are creating space for citizens to contribute and fulfil tasks.

The overall perceptions of the local policy practitioners seems to be that they do not want to burden the citizens too much and mainly leave local government in control when it comes to the planning, implementation, monitoring/evaluation and maintenance of public services. Local governments might agree, on an abstract level, with visions and ambitions related to citizen responsibilisation as formulated in national level policies. In addition, they have shown to be confident about the capabilities of citizens to assume certain tasks. However, local governments do have some legitimate concerns that provide a reality check to visions formulated by national policy makers. They are aware of the practical constraints posed by the existing institutional context and the fundamental questions that come along with citizen responsibilisation. These include: (i) Who is accountable for what? If citizens get additional tasks, but local governments remain accountable from a legal point of view, this leads to tensions; (ii) Who gets what, when and how? If resources for assuming responsibilities are unevenly spread across society, which they are (see also, Mees et al., 2019), citizen responsibilisation might create new distributive effects or exacerbate existing ones.

5.3 | Implications for further research

The notion of responsibilities in the field of urban climate adaptation is multifaceted and includes, amongst other elements, responsibilities as tasks, as legal duty, and as something for which one can be held accountable. There is a need to explicitly unpack the different dimensions of responsibility as well as the tensions between these dimensions. There is scope for unpacking these dimensions at the conceptual level, by combining insights from different bodies of literature, including political philosophy, ethics and environmental governance. In addition, comparative empirical assessments of cases of citizen responsibilisation are needed, in order to illustrate the scope of the different dimensions of responsibility in different contexts and the tensions that arise between them as well as to identify good practices for addressing these tensions. The current paper has shown that the institutional changes and inertia that go along with debates on citizen responsibilisation require an equal place in the analysis. We invite the emerging international community of environmental governance scholars working on the roles of citizens in climate governance to join us in this endeavour.

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