11 Between vision and consensus

Urban leadership and community involvement in the Dutch cases

Frans Coenen, Bas Denters and Pieter-Jan Klok

Introduction

This chapter draws on research in the policy areas of social inclusion and economic competitiveness in two Dutch cities: Roermond and Enschede. In both of these cities and policy areas we examine one type of Dutch political leader: municipal aldermen.[1] The Dutch system of local government is uniform and all municipalities essentially have the same decision-making structure. The legal regime for municipalities does not vary, but there are nevertheless considerable *de facto* differences in local politics, citizen involvement and local decision-making across the country. Our prime focus in this chapter is the role of municipal aldermen as political leaders, their leadership types, leadership styles, actual behaviour and role in shaping the complementarity between urban leadership and community involvement.

The findings are based on a study of policy initiatives that took place prior to 2002, when there was a formal monistic system in the Netherlands. Up until 2002, local decision-making formally rested with the municipal council. In practice however, the centre of power resided with members of the executive board. This board consists of the Mayor, appointed by central government, and aldermen, elected to the executive board by councillors who could also dismiss them. In this monistic system aldermen remained members of the council and the parliamentary party after they had been elected. The executive board had a general responsibility for the preparation and implementation of municipal council decisions and the (co-)execution of national policies, and was accountable to the council for their use of these powers. The executive board formally made decisions on the basis of collective responsibility.

On the basis of the formal monistic system we would expect a 'collective form' of leadership with limited room for individual initiative. The chapter discusses how much the leadership type and actual leadership behaviour were influenced by formal and informal institutional structures of local municipal decision-making, local political culture, and expectations towards leaders' behaviour in these cities. We also discuss how these

factors shape the complementarity between urban leadership and community involvement.

The position of aldermen in the Netherlands

Dutch municipalities have a general power of competence ('open realm' or 'home rule'). They are free to define tasks and to create competences, as long as these do not conflict with national or provincial statutes. As mentioned above, all Dutch municipalities have identical decision-making procedures. In formal terms the directly elected municipal council is at the head of municipal government. There are, however, two additional offices in municipal government that have independent powers. There is the Mayor (who is appointed by central government on the basis of a shortlist drawn up by a committee from the council) and the executive board (the Mayor and aldermen elected on to the executive board by councillors). The Mayor has several statutory powers (granted by national law) in the fields of public order and public safety. The executive board, in addition to its general responsibility for the preparation and implementation of municipal council decisions, has specific powers in executing many national policies in co-governance arrangements.

Up until 2002 in formal terms, local decision-making rested with the municipal council. In practice however the centre of power resided with the members of the executive board which proceeded formally on the basis of collegial responsibility. Nevertheless, the actual power structure was quite departmentalised. All the board members had specific portfolios, and the responsible board member and his staff primarily determined the policies in each of these portfolios. This departmentalisation was particularly pronounced in large urban municipalities. In the medium-sized and large municipalities, the substantive policy responsibilities of the Mayor, beyond his or her statutory prerogatives, tended to be at most relatively modest. In small municipalities (approximately 20,000 inhabitants or less) the Mayor was more important, because here he or she was typically the only full-time local politician (Denters *et al.* 2000). In larger municipalities aldermen were full-time.

There were important differences in the way councils made up the executive board. In many municipalities the council (informally) employed the rule of proportionality in allocating seats on the executive board – all major parties in the council were represented. In other municipalities, mostly on the basis of programmatic and ideological considerations, one or more major parties were deliberately excluded from the executive coalition. In almost all cases, coalitions between two or more parties were needed.

Up until 2002 aldermen remained members of the council and the party after they had been elected. The aldermen's membership of the parliamentary party was of crucial importance. Normally, because of their

political weight, their informational advantage and the professional support of their staff, relations between the aldermen and the party supporting the executive coalition were tilted heavily in favour of the former. In many cases the executive board secured the support of the coalition parties in private party meetings, before the official public discussion in the council committees and the plenary meeting of the council. The decisions of these party meetings tended to have an important effect on the subsequent decision-making process, because the legitimacy of party discipline is widely accepted among Dutch councillors (Denters and De Jong 1992: 88; Denters 1993: 86).

In the coalition agreement of the second 'purple' cabinet (at the national level) it was agreed that the formal monistic system be abandoned in favour of more dualistic relations between the council and the board. A State Commission was formed to advise on the new dualistic system (Staatscommissie Dualisme en lokale democratie 2000). Its recommendations included the following:

- Concentration of all administrative powers in the executive board.
- Increasing the council's powers of executive control.
- Separating membership of the municipal council and the executive board.
- Reserving the chairmanship of council committees to council members.
- Increasing local control over the appointment of mayors, either through direct election by the citizens, through indirect election by the municipal council, or via a binding recommendation by the municipal council.

Most of the proposals by the Commission were accepted and incorporated into the municipal law in time for the 2002 municipal elections. The reforms are a major change in the local government system since the municipal council has become more independent from the executive committee (Denters and Klok 2003).

The influence of council members tends to be exerted in advisory council committees. Large urban municipalities especially tend to have an elaborate committee system. Many municipal committee systems reflect the distribution of portfolios in the executive board (and the sectoral differentiation of the local civil service). This strengthens departmentalisation of the municipal decision-making process even further. Since 2002 committees have been headed by one of the council members.

Political leadership and community involvement in the cities

Roermond

Many respondents made remarks about typical political culture in Roermond. Historically, Roermond was under the influence of many (foreign) powers. It is a bishop city where the Church was the dominant force for a century. For two centuries the Roman-Catholic party dominated local politics with a near absolute majority in the local council. There was a paternalistic culture where the elite decided what was good for citizens. In line with this elite culture the citizens were relatively faithful to the Church and local authority. The panel survey shows a moderate level of trust between actors.

For the case period after the election in 1998 a so-called mirror board of aldermen and the Mayor was established, to reflect all political parties in the local council.[2] In these elections the parties VVD (Conservative Liberals) and Groen Links (Green Left) performed above the national average – remarkable considering that these are the right and left wings of the political spectrum in the Netherlands. The political leader, the alderman responsible for the policy field 'work and income', represented Groen Links. The second most important alderman for the economic competitiveness case, the alderman for 'economics and city development' affairs, represented the VVD. Although they were on opposite sides of the political spectrum they cooperated constructively and successfully.

In Roermond, the social inclusion case is the development and implementation of the project known as Delta Plan Work (DWR) to combat unemployment. The DWR was a policy initiative to work on the relatively high number of long-term unemployed in Roermond, linked with the regeneration of deprived areas where most of this group lived. The main focus therefore was the reintegration of the long-term unemployed. The project coordinated the procedures of all resource-controlling actors that had organisational goals concerning unemployed people or job vacancies, and organised some activities such as individual learning and on-the-job experience. It took in activities in the field of unemployment benefits, labour handicap benefits, social benefits, employment finding and job recruitment. The initiative was developed within the context of the project known as Confidence pact Limburg, a result of the European pact Santer[3] that called for a bottom-up approach to develop national, regional and local proposals to solve problems of employment and labour markets.

In this social inclusion case, the alderman responsible for the portfolio 'work and income' took on the key political leadership role. In terms of style, this alderman may be characterised as a consensual facilitating visionary political leader. In the policy development and policy decision-making phase the political leader was a visionary who succeeded in

forging a broad coalition of organisations in the field of employment. His leadership was based on persuasion and a strong personal network with many actors in this policy field. He was able to bring together within the executive board a potent and effective coalition, including the official responsible for economic affairs from the opposition political party.

In the policy implementation phase it was much more difficult for the political leader to coordinate implementation effectively. The resource-controlling actors participated in the DWR on the basis of voluntary contributions. This contribution was often ill-defined and the actors were relatively independent. Partners had to be persuaded to contribute. Furthermore, these partners consisted of corporate actors with limited control over their members. During implementation the alderman was still able to bring different sides together, for instance, by personally intervening in small conflicts between the DWR project organisation and the municipal staff. In the survey, the leadership style of the alderman scored especially high on personal vision, representing the entire city and in attempting to create accountability, transparency, and input and output legitimacy.

The initiative of the municipality of Roermond to strengthen the regional economic structure is the economic competitiveness case. This case is linked closely with the social inclusion case through the DWR. The general objective of the DWR was a total and coherent approach with all involved parties to the problems concerning the supply and demand of labour. During its formulation economic strengthening became part of the DWR itself. The economic competitiveness focused on the development of a programme to strengthen the economic structure at the regional level in order to create business for (sustainable) employment. One of the key regional development actions was the extension of regional development. Measures to stimulate economic development concerned the creation and revitalisation of business areas in the region and the acquisition of new business and service industries.

Political leadership in the economic competitiveness case consisted of the alderman for 'Economics and city development' and the alderman for 'Work and income'. The latter played a more visible outside role, while the former stayed more in the background. The political leadership style in the economic strengthening case may be described as a combination of consensus-facilitating and visionary political leadership in all policy phases. In the search for new investors and the planning of business areas outside the municipal border, decision-making was restricted by the demands of powerful actors. Major local investors had a strong influence on the policies, even bargaining for changes in infrastructure and shop-opening hours.

In other aspects of the regional economic strengthening process political leadership may be called visionary. In several cases there were disputes between the municipality and smaller local businesses about new

settlements seen as threatening existing small businesses. Visionary leadership was needed to bring the sides together, and for capacity generation. The political leadership of Roermond generated a new form of regional cooperation between the regional municipalities, bridging existing differences and smoothing over past disputes. The municipality of Roermond acted as an intermediary between government and business to coordinate economic activities. This removed bureaucratic obstacles for potential investors and contributed to a climate conducive to investment. Political leadership succeeded in facilitating the cooperation both of surrounding municipalities and potential investors. The outcome was successful in terms of visible new investment and jobs created, and initiatives for new business areas.

Community involvement in the regional development company was restricted to business actors. Through the DWR structure, actors such as labour unions were able to discuss regional economic development goals and activities. In the RED, in a procedural sense, no activities of individual citizens were needed. There were no institutional arrangements open for civil society to discuss regional economic strengthening. Instead policy-making was placed partly outside the municipal organisation in a regional development company with shareholders who were municipalities in the region. The involvement of individual local businesses can be awkward. Their interests are sometimes contrary to new business settlements. Here political leadership was necessary to satisfy both interests at the same time from a long-term perspective. Within the municipality, local political leadership made the rather tenuous links between RED and the municipality acceptable.

Enschede

The case studies for Enschede are both part of the programme for rebuilding Roombeek, the area that was destroyed by a fireworks explosion in 2000. They have a common first phase, where a general first-stage plan for the area was developed in close consultation with citizens, business and other participants throughout the year 2001. The general plan resulted in many specific projects where a detailed design of the proposals was undertaken.

The *collective type* of political leadership typical of Dutch cities, with an executive board and aldermen with specific portfolios, was in place in Enschede. In the case of Roombeek it was felt that the substantial and procedural policy challenges were so great that it was necessary to attribute all tasks related to the rebuilding of the area to a special 'project alderman'. His competences cut across the regular division of labour between aldermen. This innovation was made possible by a formal decision of the executive board. The concentration of project responsibilities for the alderman gives him a strong, powerful position in relation to his colleagues and the public officials working in the special project agency.

The political leader responsible for the rebuilding of Roombeek came into office in April 2001 after his predecessor resigned in the aftermath of the investigation into the responsibility of the municipality for the fireworks explosion. Since the new 'project alderman' was in charge during the process where the plan for rebuilding Roombeek was well developed, we concentrate on his performance.

The leadership style of the alderman may be characterised as a combination of *visionary* and *consensus facilitator*. On the one hand he has a strong commitment and involvement in the process, both in relation to participants and public officials. He clearly took important decisions on his own account when needed (for instance, in cases where conflict was likely or the start of a conflict was already visible), but always did so after consulting all relevant participants and taking into account all interests. On the other hand he is very much set on organising the policy and participation process in such a way that interested parties are able to reach consensus on their own. This not only implies clear procedural rules that enable a smooth and balanced process, but also enough space in terms of policy content (scope rules; see Denters and Klok 2004) for participants to be able to work out an acceptable compromise.

The leadership style of the responsible alderman was measured using the standardised questionnaire, and scored especially high on variables of consensus, consultation, networking and representing the entire city, and also more than average on personal vision. In addition, scores on his attempts to create input, transparency and output legitimacy were very high.

The economic competitive case is a project to develop a plan for a business area in the northern part of Roombeek (Roombekerveld). The size of the area is about 3 hectares. The business area is to be surrounded by a strip of houses in order to make it look less 'industrial'. Roombekerveld is located just outside the disaster area, but was added to the rebuilding project because there were already plans for its redevelopment prior to the explosion. A private company is developing the project. Customers may choose from a variety of houses designed by different architects and have several options for business units.

The first stage of the process of rebuilding Roombeek provides some good examples of a complementarity of urban leadership and community involvement. The process was carefully designed by the political leaders to provide citizens, businesses and other organisations with the opportunity to participate to a large extent and with considerable influence. Participants clearly took these opportunities and were very active in the process. Both public officials and leaders took the task of listening to community involvement and heeding the results very seriously. This resulted in high legitimacy and high goal achievement in terms of the procedural and short-term institutional goals. Expectations of substantial goal achievements in all three dimensions of sustainability were high (see Chapter 3,

this volume). The role of leadership was also important in preventing a possible destructive conflict between the city developer and a number of participants, by redesigning the participation arena.

The combination of community involvement and leadership style exercised seems to be very much in accordance with the political culture in the city (high expectations on consensus and collaboration both for political leaders and other participants). All actors have shown behaviour in accordance with these expectations.

With respect to the conclusion that the considerable challenges in the project have been met successfully, we have to bear in mind that the process took shape in a context with a number of extremely favourable conditions. The extraordinary situation of the fireworks explosion caused a general attitude to bring community involvement to a level unprecedented in the city and resulted in a very high degree of local autonomy and flexibility (to a large extent due also to a very generous budget provided by central government).

The social inclusion case ('Voorzieningencluster') is a project to develop a plan for a combination of buildings to host a number of facilities for two primary schools, a day care centre for young children, a youth centre, a sports hall, a general service centre and a number of social citizen clubs (partly for ethnic minorities) that originated in the Roombeek area. In addition, there are a number of apartment buildings included in the plan. The combination of these facilities is intended to bring about a lively centre where people from Roombeek will meet throughout the day, bringing back a social structure in the neighbourhood where old and new inhabitants from all nationalities will live together.

The *leadership style* of the responsible alderman has been described above and was essentially the same for the 'Voorzieningencluster'. Apart from designing the institutional arrangements for the process, his leadership was however less visible in this case, as the process ran quite smoothly. In line with a consensual leadership style, there is no need for interventions of leaders in such situations. This also implies that the visionary aspects of his style were less necessary. Only on a topic concerning the role of a third school in the process was he active in consultations with the school board and the alderman responsible for education.

Community involvement in this case was very extensive for future users, but absent for other citizens. Future users were involved from the beginning of the process, when the terms of reference for the building where formulated. In terms of actual attendance at the meetings the representatives of professional organisations were mostly present, but there were fewer representatives of social citizens' clubs. This reflects the importance they attach to the building design process and its complexity. For most of the social groups the buildings had to provide sufficient space and perhaps a number of special features to be able to perform their part-time

activities (mostly in the evenings). For a school, a child care centre or other professional organisation, the demands for the rooms are far more complex and are crucial to the entire process of their activities.

In the preliminary stage – selection of the architect – all professional organisations were present and two social clubs were involved in the process. In the final selection meeting representatives of two professional organisations were missing. At this meeting the supervisor was also represented (by one of his staff members).

The three comprehensive sessions with all future users were well attended by children, employees and members of all organisations. In the second stage, representative arenas showed the same pattern of attendance as the first stage: high attendance of professional organisations, somewhat lower for social clubs.

The basic pattern of interaction was constructive and moderately consensual for all arenas. Participants indicated that most actors were moderately geared towards consensus in their actual behaviour. The picture of a moderately consensual pattern of interaction is also reflected in the extent to which the participants were satisfied with the way participants were taking each other's interests into account. Participants indicated in interviews that despite the difference between the participating groups (for instance, different religious backgrounds), collaboration in the process resulted in increased mutual understanding.

Conclusions

On the basis of the formal monistic local government system in the Netherlands we would expect to find a 'collective form' of political leadership with limited room for individual initiative. In practice the aldermen have personal portfolios, which make them primarily responsible for certain tasks and policies, notwithstanding the fact that eventually all decisions have to be taken by the collective board of the Mayor and aldermen. The findings of the cases show that political leadership even goes above this departmentalisation.

In all, the discussed initiative tasks cut across these regular divisions of labour between aldermen. Political leaders are granted new institutionalised powers or create power through personal competences. It demonstrates that formal competences and national laws are important for setting the rules, but local leaders (and councils) are equally important.

Institutional structure of local decision-making, political culture and leadership

Concerning the *type of leadership* we see that in both cities the basic Dutch structure of the 'collective form' of leadership is moulded into one in which a single leader has more opportunities and scope for action than

might be expected. In Roermond the leader created a somewhat stronger position through using his informal network contacts and by creating alliances with resource-owning actors outside the municipality. In Enschede the leader had a formal position as 'project alderman', giving him more room for initiative in relation to his colleagues, public officials and the community. These conditions seem to be conducive to a leadership style that combines a relatively high level of personal vision (enabled by the 'special position' of the leader) with a high level of consensus facilitation. Essential to this style is the combination of the ability to listen to others and to bring them together, along with the ability to convince other actors of the leader's personal vision when necessary.

Also in the Roermond case new institutional structures were created and placed outside the municipal organisation. New organisational structures for the DWR and the regional development company for regional economic strengthening gave the political leader more room for initiative, cross-cutting existing departmental borders.

The combinations of leadership type and style described above fitted well with the political culture in both cities. Expectations in both cities on leaders, citizens and business were basically the same and were geared towards active participation and consensus building. In practice actors in both cities lived up to these expectations to a large extent. The atmosphere in most cases was consensual and cooperative.

Complementarity of urban leadership and community involvement

Consensus is largely a prerequisite for bringing the resources of different actors together that are needed to implement policy actions successfully. This is the essence of the concept of 'power to': the collective provision and use of resources that enable actors to achieve their goals. In the Roermond cases it is very clear that the resources of different participants were needed for their common task. In Enschede the financial resources were to a large extent provided by the national budget. Here it was the legitimacy of the process that made participation of the citizens a necessary condition for success.

Comparing the Enschede cases we see the most clear example of a complementarity of urban leadership and community involvement in the first stage of the policy process: the development of the general plan for rebuilding Roombeek. In this stage community involvement was extensive and quite successful in attracting participants from all relevant groups. This was enabled by a carefully designed institutional framework and was supported by acts of leadership when they were called for. Both in terms of legitimacy and sustainability the process scored highly. In the implementation stages the cases show a remarkable variation in community involvement. In the social inclusion case the participation is still very high for future users, but, due to pressure of limited space and budgets some of

the actors were excluded from the process. However, in terms of output legitimation the process still scores relatively highly and sustainability is expected to be moderately high. In the economic competitiveness case community involvement was almost absent, which resulted in open conflict with some of the excluded participants and a low level of input legitimacy. Leadership could ameliorate this problem, but not solve it altogether. However, also in this case the goal achievement is expected to be high and sustainability moderately high.

Community participation in Roermond is largely limited to resource-controlling organisations, often regionally organised, and representing their Roermond members or clients. Although the political leader introduced new citizens' participation forms, these were rare and symbolic attempts. In the social inclusion case in the policy development phase the affected persons – the unemployed – were not really involved, although the labour union was more or less seen as their representative. Only at the end did citizens play a limited role in public hearings. In the economic competitiveness case only resource-controlling actors and other government organisations played a role, except for some legal participation procedures in the location of business areas and business permits.

In the implementation phases there was limited community involvement. In the social inclusion case a separate project organisation was placed outside the municipal organisation and in the economic competitiveness case the regional economic development company REO played a crucial role.

Nevertheless, in both cases the participants expected a high level of goal achievement.

Although there was weak citizen participation, strong leadership was necessary to bundle the interests of all resource-controlling collective and corporate actors and use new institutions to allow them to voluntarily collaborate and contribute. Leadership made use of institutional and funding windows of opportunity to maximise the impact of local initiatives.

Favourable and unfavourable conditions

A very favourable condition for the complementarity of urban leadership and community involvement in the Enschede initiatives was that the fireworks explosion prompted a unique opportunity, entailing a broad commitment to community involvement and a high degree of local autonomy.

By contrast, in the Roermond case national funding and rules bound the initiatives, especially in the social inclusion case. The Ministry did not want to directly co-finance the DWR or allow it to work with unconventional methods and rules. Leadership made use of institutional (Santer pact) and funding (subsidies) windows of opportunity to maximise the impact of local initiatives. According to several respondents the output could have been better if the municipality were more autonomous. A further unfavourable condition in the Roermond case was a general lack

of cooperation with the surrounding municipalities who did not show much interest in the 'big city' problems of the regional centre Roermond, but did profit from the regional economic spin-off.

A favourable condition in the Roermond case was that the initiatives were developed in a period of economic growth, which certainly helped with the cooperation of some actors, particularly in business. The initiative was also implemented at a time when there were already many reforms taking place related to employment benefits.

Notes

1 Like the Dutch word 'wethouder', 'alderman' refers to both male and female politicians.
2 The board of Mayor and alderman may either be formed on the basis of a political programme that is supported by a majority of political parties in the council or as a mirror of all parties in the council.
3 In 1996, at the European Council in Florence, President Jacques Santer launched the idea of a 'confidence pact' to combat the problem of unemployment in Europe, and territorial employment pacts were born. These projects aim to concentrate and intensify efforts to combat unemployment in specific geographical areas via a global and integrated approach. The objective is to mobilise all actors concerned by employment around a joint project that will permit better coordination of job-creating actions in a specific territory.

References

Denters, S.A.H. (1993) 'Raadsleden en partijendemocratie', in S.A.H. Denters and H. van der Kolk (eds) *Leden van de raad…: hoe zien raadsleden uit zeven grote gemeenten het raadslidmaatschap?*, Delft: Eburon.

Denters, S.A.H. and Jong, H.M. (1992) *Tussen burger en bestuur: een empirisch onderzoek naar de positie van het raadslid in de Overijsselse gemeenten*, Enschede: CBO Universiteit Twente.

Denters, S.A.H. and Klok, P.-J. (2004) 'A new role for municipal councils in Dutch local democracy?', in N. Kersting and A. Vetter (eds) *Reforming Local Government in Europe, Closing the Gap between Democracy and Efficiency*, Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Denters, B., van der Kolk, H., Birkenhäger, E., de Jong, H., Loots, M. and Noppe, R. (2000) 'Aan het hoofd der gemeente staat…: een onderzoek naar de werking van het formele gemeentelijke bestuursmodel ten behoeve van de Staatscommissie Dualisme en lokale democratie', in Staatscommissie Dualisme en lokale democratie (ed.) *Dualisme en lokale democratie: rapport van de Staatscommissie Dualisme en lokale democratie (onderzoeksbijlage)*, Alphen aan den Rijn: Samsom.

Klok P.-J. and Denters, B. (2005) 'Urban Leadership and Community Involvement: An Institutional Analysis', in M. Haus, H. Heinelt and M. Stewart (eds) *Urban Governance and Democracy: Leadership and Community Involvement*, London: Routledge.

Staatscommissie Dualisme en lokale democratie (ed.) (2000) *Dualisme en lokale democratie: rapport van de Staatscommissie Dualisme en lokale democratie (onderzoeksbijlage)*, Alphen aan den Rijn: Samsom.