

Perception of participation in the management public space in the Netherlands

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Research question

How do managers of public spaces at the provincial level implement and perceive participation?

1. What is the role of the manager of public space?
2. How (if) is participation implemented by these managers?
3. How do the managers perceive the value of participation?

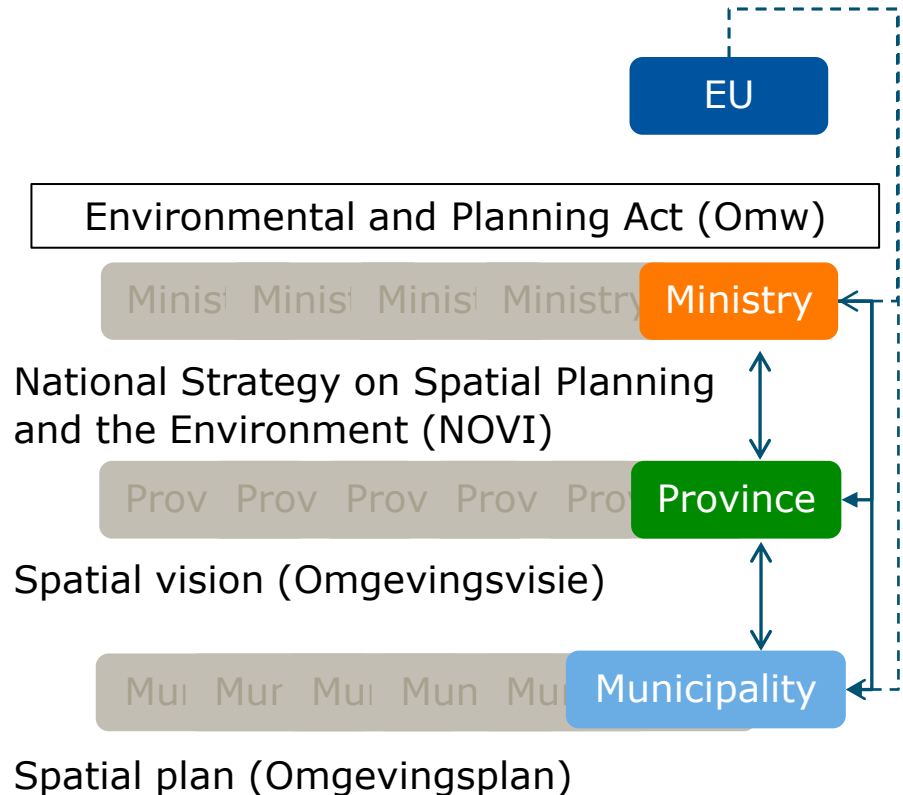
Why?

- Managing public space at provincial levels? How does that work?
- Mandatory participation at all levels (New act from 1 January 2024)
- Strategic managers of public space (vs. tactical or operational)

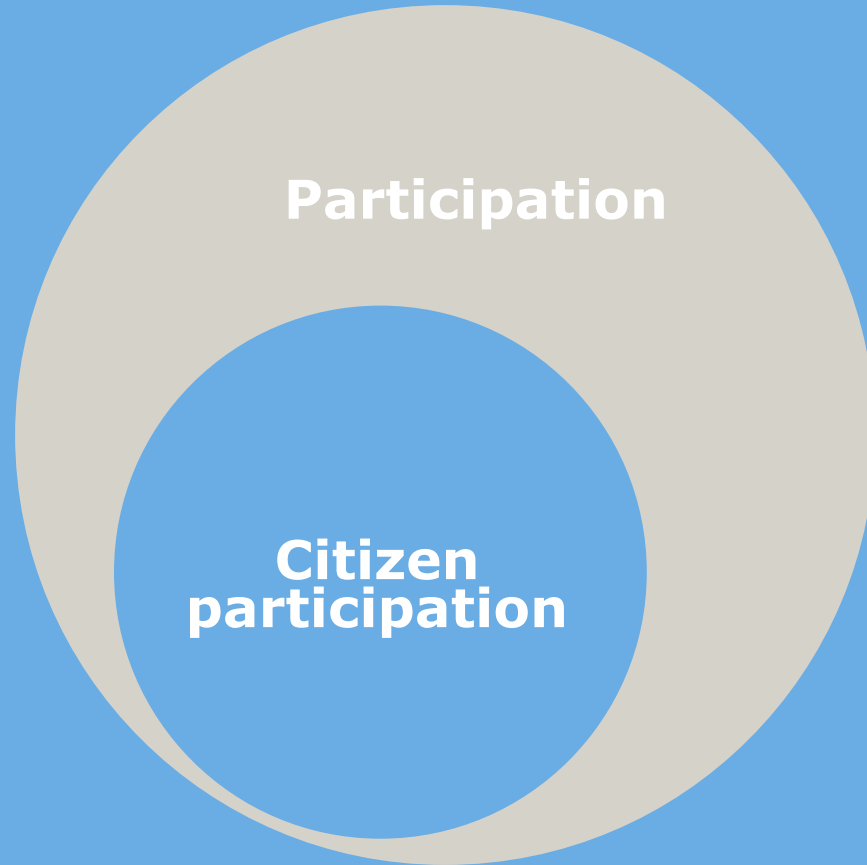


Spatial planning in the Netherlands

- Hierarchical, blueprint?
- Multi-scalar approach
- Multi-level governance



Qualifier



Methods



Pilot interviews with
thought leaders (2x)



(Online) Survey
(n = 25)



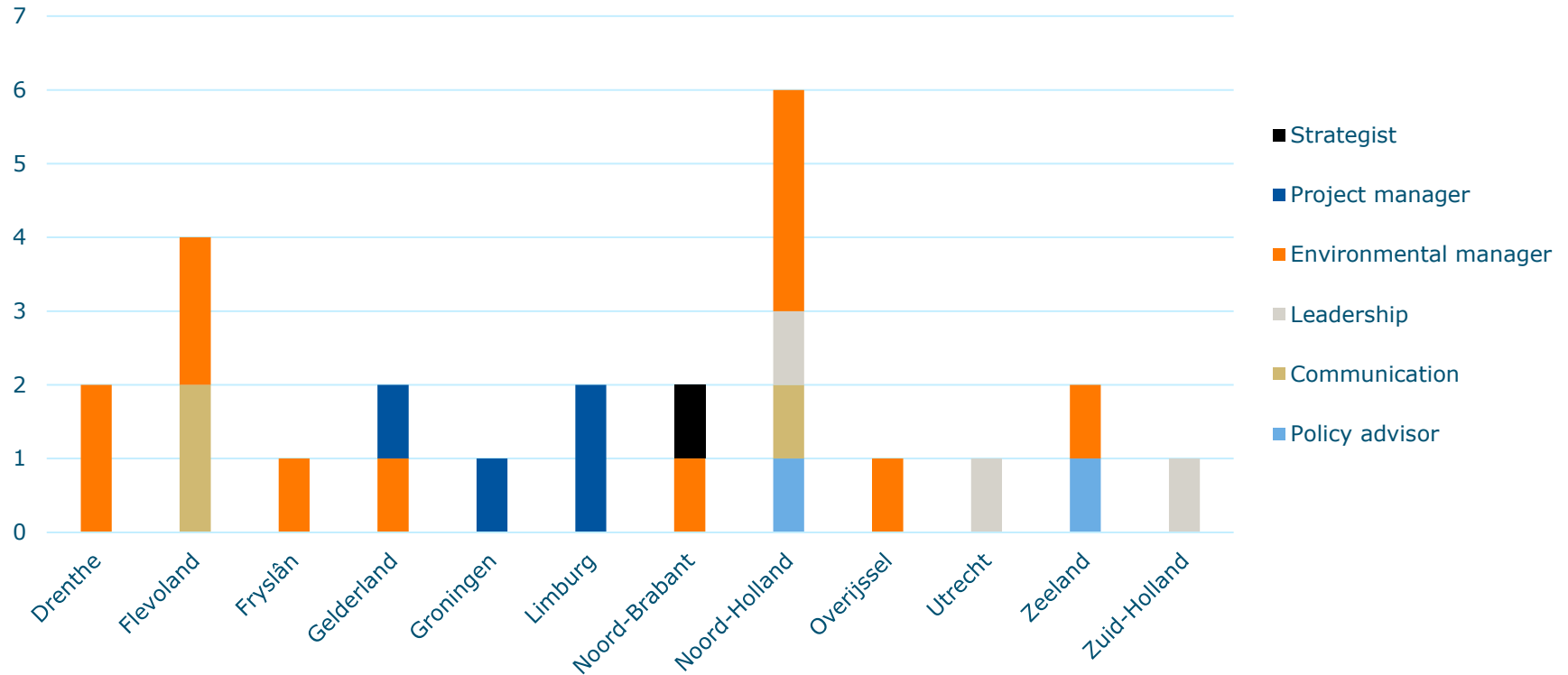
Focus groups (2x)

Findings

Pilot interview

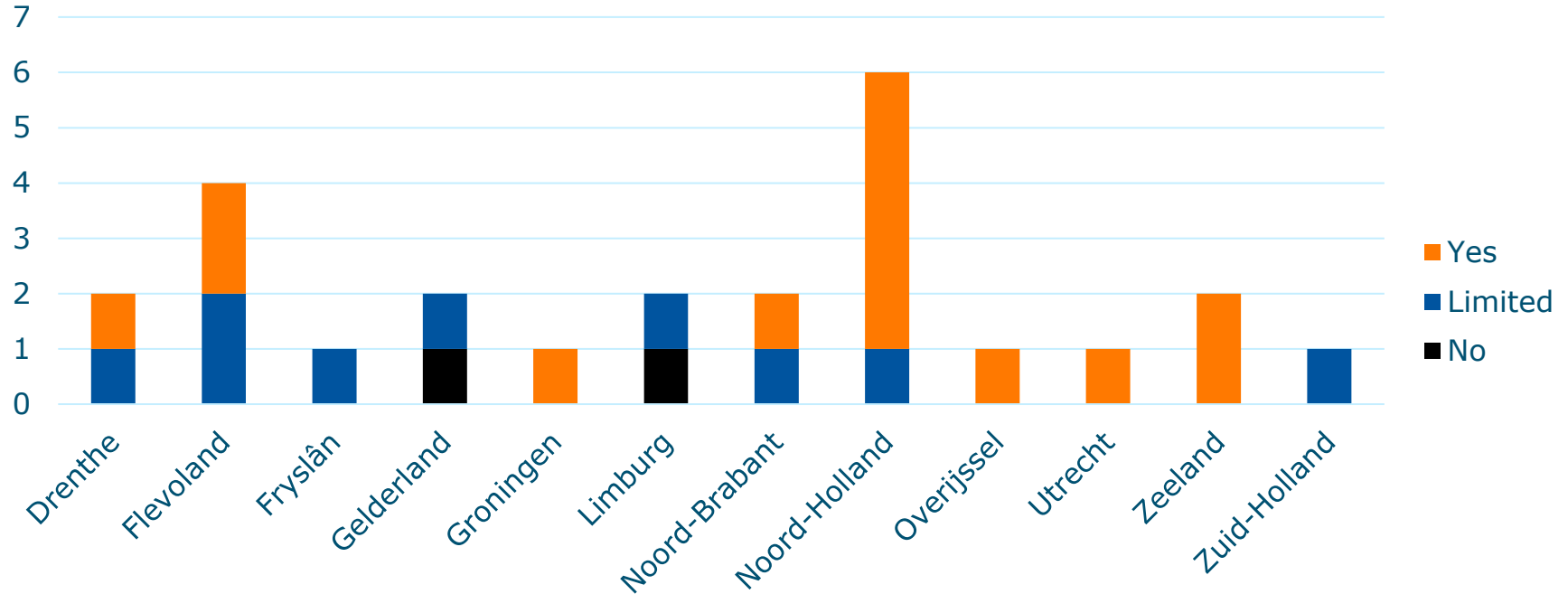
- Participation is seen as important in policy making, but actual implementation is still limited.
- Varied approach (how, when, whom) by managers within both organisations.
- Lack of experience and fear of the unknown within managers are mentioned
- Relinquishing control: Participation is seen as challenging as it departs from the 'traditional' managing public space methods.

Survey



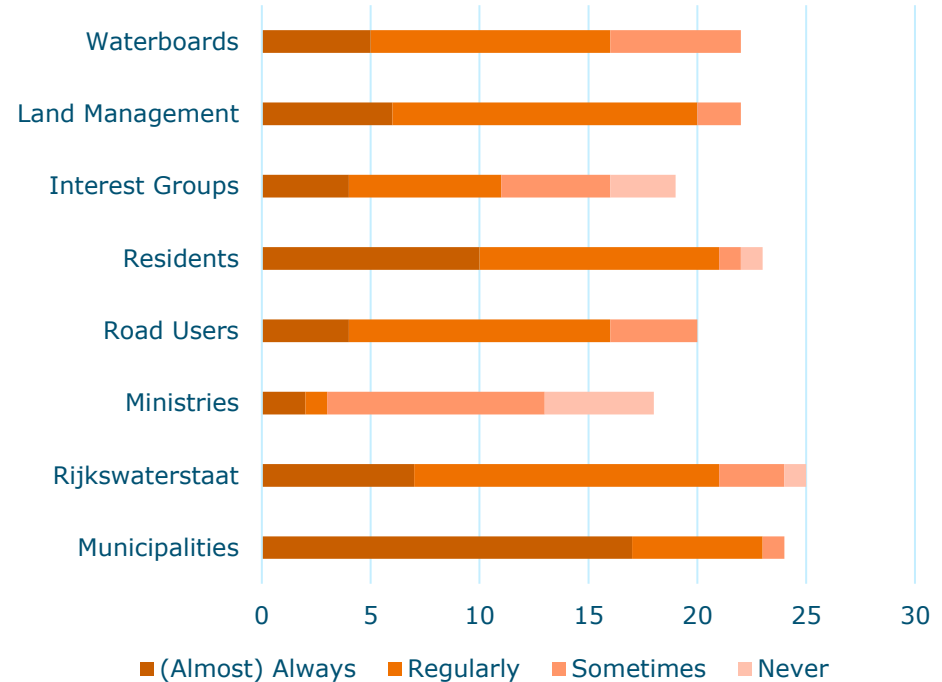
Who/what is a 'Omgevingsmanager'?

Are you aware of the upcoming changes in the spatial planning act?



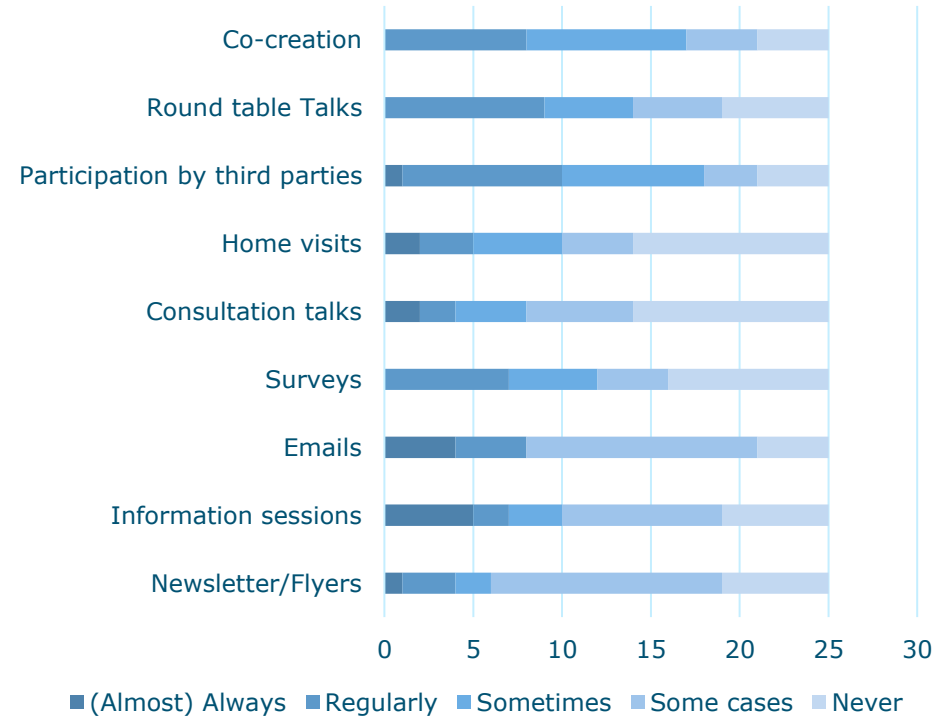
Type of stakeholders

- Municipalities and residents are most frequently involved.
- Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (Rijkswaterstaat), Land management organisations are regularly involved.
- Other ministries are less often involved.



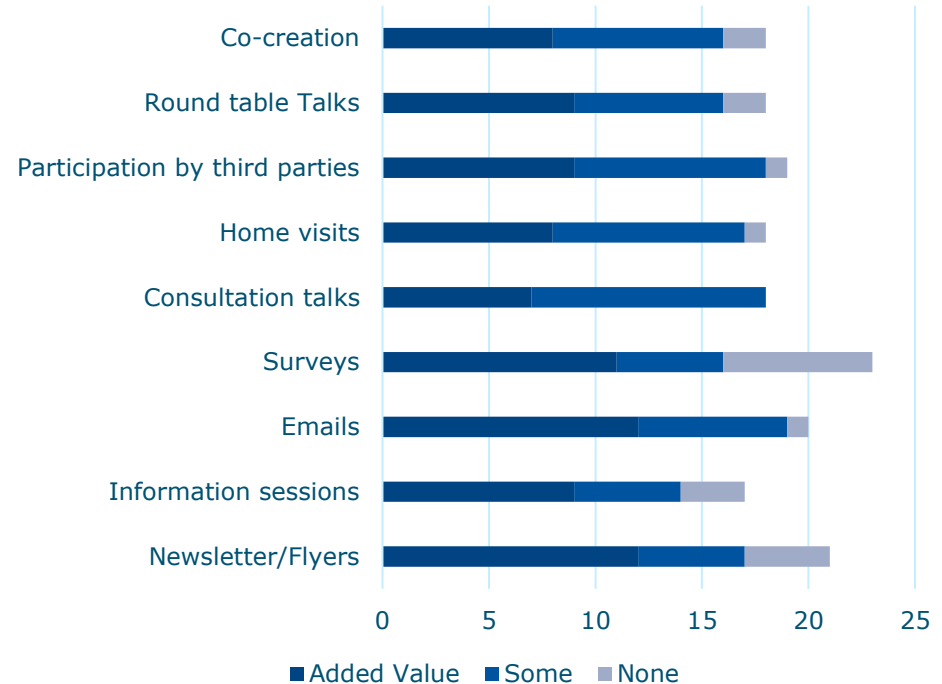
Type of participation

- Respondents graded their province with 6,2/10 for the degree in which participation was implemented.
- Most common types of participation stays in the 'informing' range (Newsletters, emails, surveys etc.)
- Participation via third parties (consultants) is sometimes used.
- Co-creation is the least common type.



Added value?

- Respondents graded the added value of participation with 6,7/10.
- 'Informing' methods were considered of great added value.
- Surprisingly, more 'co-creation' methods of roundtables, co-creation were also highly valued (but not frequently used).



"Participatie kost tijd maar levert wel draagvlak op voor de toekomst"

"Participation takes time but does deliver support for the future"

(Survey respondent #19, translated by authors)

Focus groups

- Role
 - Challenges in aligning with current practice, fear of unexpected outcomes or delays.
- Participation
 - Not just external participation. Internal alignment of vision is also necessary.
- Perception of value
 - Valued for improving decision-making and plan quality but challenging as it leads to delays and mismanaged expectations.
 - Stress need for transparency and a 'two-way process'

Perception of value

- Tensions are experienced. Some view it as a potential delay or hindrance. There is a sense of fear of the unknown and preferring control with traditional processes.
- Shared understanding that participation **could** create understanding and a sense of co-ownership among stakeholders.
- Early stakeholder involvement can add value, but it requires more capacity, time, and resources. Most equate participation with potential delays in project timelines or increased costs.

Take aways

- **What is participation and what can managers do?**

- Everyone seems to be struggling with this new 'mandated' participation, what it means for their roles and how to implement. There seems to be a need for a clear definition, followed by a clear protocol.

- **Sounds good, but hard to do well**

- Although the theoretical value is clear, the actual practice of participation is still bringing out hesitation. Sharing of 'best practices' might be a good way forward.
- The value factor is still not aligned with how managers perceive their role and their mandate in such processes.

Thank you!

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