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**The impact of citizen participation on public policies
Evidence from two local mini-publics in the Netherlands**

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Introduction

Over recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the use of deliberative forums or 'mini-publics', such as citizens' forums or -juries, consensus conferences, planning cells and deliberative polling. However, as yet we know very little about the impact of citizen participation on public policies. Empirical evidence is scarce, and as far as there is evidence, the impact appears to be low (Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Michels 2011). Since the deliberative forum is often one actor among many, the relation with policy making is often hard to define and remains indefinite.

This paper wants to contribute to this debate and provide more insight into the impact on policies by studying two local mini-publics in the Netherlands, the G1000s in Amersfoort and Uden. They are both known as G1000s, following and inspired by the G1000 in Belgium that was organized among others by the Flemish author David van Reybrouck. For the Netherlands, mini-publics are quite a new phenomenon. This has encouraged researchers from three universities in cooperation with the Home Office to monitor the development and effects of this form of citizen participation. This research will be executed during 2015.

The central question that guides this paper is: what is the impact of these local deliberative mini-publics on public policies? To answer this question, we first consider the role of the local council and the local government prior to the start of the G1000. This question relates to the embeddedness of the deliberative mini-publics, the extent to which the mini-publics are tied to and embedded in the decision-making system. That is, have they been initiated by local governments and/or have local politicians explicitly supported them? The two mini-publics in this study differ in the extent to which they are embedded, and we expect that the more embedded the mini-public is, the more likely it is that their outcomes will be implemented in public policies.

We then present our findings about the impact of the mini-publics on policies. This is an ongoing project and the implementation of some policies may take a long time. Moreover, in the Uden case the G1000 took place only some seven months ago. Therefore, we cannot draw final conclusions, but what we do is to analyze step by step what has been done with the input from participants and how politicians and local governments have responded to this input. Interviews, newsletters and other documents form the basis for a detailed analysis over time. Finally, we draw some preliminary conclusions about the relationship between the impact on policies and the extent of

embeddedness of the mini-publics. We will start, however, with our theoretical argument about embeddedness and impact.

Mini-publics: embeddedness and impact

There are considerable differences in the design of various mini-publics (Hendriks and Michels 2012). A first example is a citizens' jury which consists of 12 to 16 jurors. They are brought together and may question experts in a quasi-courtroom setting (Lenaghan 1999; OECD 2001). Their task is to offer recommendations for public decision-making after deliberation. A second example concerns a specific form of a citizens' jury or forum, the planning cell. A planning cell is a non-partisan, ad hoc, randomly selected, single issue, short-term microparliament in which people from different backgrounds work together for a limited time to look for solutions and recommendations (Dienel & Renn 1995; Garbe 1986). The difference with the category above is that a planning cell involves more participants, usually consists of various sub-cells, and typically focuses on planning issues.

In a deliberative polling (Fishkin, <http://cdd.stanford.edu>; Fishkin & Laslett 2002), which is a third example of a mini-public, a random, representative sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather at a particular place for a weekend in order to discuss the issues. The participants engage in a dialogue with competing experts and political leaders based on questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. After the deliberations, the sample is again asked the original questions. According to the founding father of this method, James Fishkin, the resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach, if people had the opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues. (Fishkin, <http://cdd.stanford.edu>).

However different the designs of different mini-publics may be, they also have certain characteristics in common. Probably the most distinct characteristic of all mini-publics is that they are constituted by (near-) randomly selected citizens (Smith 2009). Random selection aims to involve a diverse body of citizens with a diversity of perspectives. Secondly, deliberation is characteristic to all mini-publics (Michels 2012). A deliberative process involves discussion and the exchange of arguments in small and diverse groups of citizens. A deliberative process assumes free public reasoning, equality, inclusion of different interests, and mutual respect. In the ideal deliberative process, individuals not only justify their opinions but also show themselves willing to change their preferences.

Characteristic to mini-publics, finally, is that the impact on public policies is often hard to define. Since the deliberative forum is often one actor among many, the relation with policy making remains indefinite. As far as we can draw conclusions about the impact on policy, the impact appears to be low. In a meta-study of 120 cases, including 20 referendums, 37 participatory policy making cases, 22 deliberative surveys, and 41 deliberative forums, Michels concluded that the impact of deliberative surveys and forums on policy is low compared to referendums and participatory policy making (Michels, 2011). Where a clear impact was seen, cases concerned concrete issues relating to infrastructure of city development. Cases showing no policy impact were deliberative forums on more abstract issues such as genetic testing, ethical issues, and environmental issues. This is also confirmed by Robert Goodin and John Dryzek who state that cases of mini-publics that are formally empowered as part of a decision-making process are rare (Goodin and Dryzek 2006: 7).

Another useful distinction is that between 'invited spaces', which are initiated by local government, and 'popular spaces' which are initiated by citizens (Cornwall 2004: 1-2). Both of these spaces come with different expectations about the role of participants, and they are also likely to lead to different types of outcomes: in the invited spaces, the proposals or decisions tend to be closer to the existing local policy agenda than in popular spaces. Then again, the distinction between 'invited' and 'popular' tends to be less strict in practice, and spaces may evolve in a different direction over time. Other studies also suggest that the impact on policy-making varies and depends on the design of the mini-public. For example, consensus conferences in Denmark and local and regional planning cells in Germany appear to have some influence on policy (Smith 2009: 92-93). However, the empirical evidence is scarce and, as said before, it is often hard to establish the impact because other actors, such as experts or interest groups, may have recommended similar policies.

But, in order for deliberative forums to be legitimate, there has to be some link with formal decision-making. Otherwise, as Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015: 10) rightly argue, they are merely a democratic experiment without practical use. The implication of this is that the recommendations of the forum need to find their way to decision-making in one way or another. Following Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015: 10-11), we can distinguish two aspects of impact on policy-making: political uptake and accountability. Political uptake means that the recommendations of the mini-public have to be effectively implemented or at least set the political agenda. Accountability refers to

regular feedback by government agents to the participants; they should report on decisions and progress made to participants and the general public.

Hence, we conclude there to be an impact of the recommendations of the mini-public on policy-making if:

- The recommendations taken by the mini-public are implemented, or
- the recommendations set the political agenda, and
- the participants or the general public are informed about what has been or will be done with the recommendations.

Following Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015: 11-13) again, we expect a high impact on policy-making when the deliberative mini-public is tied to and embedded in the formal decision-making system. The argument runs as follows. When the mini-public is initiated or explicitly supported by politicians, it is more likely that the forum is taken seriously. Hence, the recommendations of the forum are more likely to be heard, accepted and followed by the established institutions. This idea is also reflected in a study by Denters and Klok (2013) on how local councilors relate to citizen initiatives. The authors conclude that councilors who are already used to forms of direct democracy, like an elected mayor or local referenda, are more open to citizen participation.

This leads to the following hypothesis:

When the mini-public is initiated or explicitly supported by the local council or government, the recommendations are more likely to have an impact on policy-making.

Evidence that supports this expectation comes from the Canadian British Columbia Citizens' Assembly. The Canadian Citizens' Assembly was strongly tied to the formal decision-making process. It was formed by the provincial government at the Prime Minister's request to come forward with recommendations on electoral reform. The recommendations then formed the basis for a provincial referendum that the government had promised to hold. Hence, the decisions of the Citizens' Assembly had an impact on decision making, because they were clearly tied to a public ratification process (Smith 2009: 88-92).

But it is hard to find other examples that support the relationship between embeddedness and policy impact. First, there are only few examples of mini-publics that are clearly embedded in the formal decision-making system. Most are national forums that advise on the constitution or the electoral system, such as the Citizens' Assembly on

Electoral Reform in Ontario (Canada), the citizens' forum on electoral reform in the Netherlands, the Constitutional Assembly in Iceland, and the Convention on the Constitution in Ireland. And, second, even when the forum is clearly embedded, the recommendations are not always accepted. For example, the Dutch *Burgerforum Kiesstelsel* (citizens' forum on electoral reform) was asked in 2006 by the Minister for administrative and political reform to advise the government on electoral reform. The forum was thus clearly embedded (Van der Kolk 2008). However, the newly formed Balkenende government (2007-2010) did not adopt the recommendations of the *Burgerforum*, meaning the forum had no impact.

This seems to point to another relevant factor in addition to the initial embeddedness of the mini-public, which relates to developments within the political arena. A change of government, changes of preferences within political parties or the council, disagreement between political parties or uncertainty within the council or government about the political uptake of recommendations may all be factors that can influence the willingness of the established institutions to implement the recommendations. We will explore this aspect further in our analysis.

Context and method

The first G1000 citizens' summit was held in Belgium in 2011, organized by a group of citizens. One of the organizers was the Belgian author David van Reybrouck (Van Reybrouck 2013). The G1000 was an answer to the political instability that Belgium witnessed at that time. The aim of the summit was to empower citizens and to reach an agreement where politicians had failed to do so (G1000, 2012). The participants were randomly selected in order to have a representative group of people. About 600 people took part in the deliberations during one day in the capital of Belgium, Brussels. The G1000 was an outside challenger of Belgian politics; it was neither embedded in nor supported by the official institutions. The summit received a lot of media-attention, but after the G1000 had taken place, there was no political follow-up. A new government was formed that had no interest at all in the proposals of the G1000 (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2014; interview Stef Steyaert)¹.

The Belgian experience with a citizens' summit of a large number of people has inspired many groups of citizens, politicians and public officials in the Netherlands to organize a similar type of event. As in many other Western countries, the declining levels of

¹ Interview March 5, 2015. Stef Steyaert was one of the organizers of the G1000 in Belgium.

satisfaction with the institutions and processes of representative democracy have contributed to discussions about ways to improve citizen involvement or even citizen self-governance. From the 1980s onwards, ideas have been put forward for more direct citizen involvement, including the direct election of the mayor, however, these suggestions have never managed to receive the required political support. Likewise, there have been several attempts to introduce a national binding referendum. Again, all attempts to do so have failed to generate the necessary political support (Michels 2009), although parliament has agreed to introduce the option of a consultative referendum.

The institutions of representative democracy were never really challenged. Since the 1990s the Netherlands has developed a broad experience with processes of co-production or collaborative governance in which government(s), citizens and (quasi)non-governmental organizations attempt to join forces in policy-making (Hendriks and Michels 2011). Given the lack of progress at the national level, attention has gradually shifted to the local level: the nearly 400 municipalities. Particularly at this level, citizens and stakeholders participate in projects that, to name some examples, aim at improving the livability and safety in a neighborhood, the redevelopment of a particular area, or the founding of a local cooperation for renewable energy. Since the 2010s, a wide variety of citizen participation initiatives have developed, including bottom-up forms that are initiated by citizens and citizens' organizations. The G1000 is just one example of these.

Amersfoort is a city that is located in the centre of the Netherlands and has about 150.000 inhabitants. Next to the city of Amersfoort, there is a village (Hoogland) which is part of the municipality. Over the last twenty to thirty years, the population size has increased considerably, as a result of the expansion of the city with a number of suburban areas. The municipal council, that was elected on March 19, 2014, consists of ten different political parties, on a total of 39 seats. D66, a social liberal party, has the largest share (9 seats) and the College of Mayor and Aldermen includes D66, VVD (conservative liberals), PvdA (social democrats) and CU (Christian).

The G1000 in Amersfoort was the first G1000 to be organized in the Netherlands. It was held on March 22, 2014, a few days after the municipal elections. 530 people took part, among them 354 lay citizens. Characteristic to the design of the G1000 in Amersfoort was:

- A random selection of participants through an a-select draw among all inhabitants.

- Dialogue and an open agenda to create opportunities to deliberate about topics that matter for the participants.
- The presence of the 'whole system', including politicians and civil servants, at the tables during the day.

The central questions that were discussed during the day were: what do you think is important for Amersfoort in the next four years?, what should be done?, and how are you going to contribute? The aim was to come up with a top 10 of topics for the city of Amersfoort. It was also emphasized that this list of topics was first and foremost an agenda for citizens to take up as their responsibility, and less an agenda for the city council or government.

Uden was the second city to organize a so-called 'G1000', although at about the same time there were citizens' summits in other cities as well, such as in Maastricht (about health care provisions) and in Arnhem (about the future of the city) that were not called G1000s, but had similar characteristics. The municipality of Uden, which is an amalgamation between Uden and a number of surrounding villages (Volkel and Odiliapeel), has about 41.000 inhabitants and is located in the south of the Netherlands. The 27-seat municipal council consists of 7 political parties. Although the SP (socialists) became the largest party (7 seats) in the elections of March 19, 2014, it has remained an opposition party. The College of Mayor and Aldermen is formed by VVD-Leefbaar Uden (a combination of conservative liberals and a local party), Jong Uden (local party), Gewoon Uden (local party), D66 (social liberals) and PvdA (social democrats).

The G1000 of Uden was held on 4 October, 2014. The design of Uden's G1000 is similar to that of Amersfoort in many respects, but there are also some differences:

- An open invitation to all inhabitants above 16 years old to participate.
- Brainstorming and deliberation about the selection of ideas.

About 250 lay citizens took part. Furthermore, 20 council members participated. The central question of the G1000 in Uden was: which ideas do you want to be achieved for the future of Uden? By the end of the day, ten initiatives had been selected. Citizens could sign up for one or more initiatives to contribute to a further development of the initiative.

Amersfoort and Uden were the first cities in the Netherlands to organize a G1000. From the perspective of analyzing the relationship between embeddedness and impact on policy, it is relevant that both mini-publics differ to the extent to which the mini-publics were tied to and embedded in the decision-making system. In Uden, the idea for a citizens' summit originated in a group of council members (one council member in

particular) and the council secretary of the municipal council, which was only later supplemented with citizens who brought in their specific expertise for the organization. In contrast, the idea for a G1000 in Amersfoort came from a group of citizens. Later on, the G1000 received financial support from the municipality, but much more than in Uden, the G1000 in Amersfoort remained a citizens' initiative, and the organization also stressed its independence.

In order to analyze step by step what has been done with the input from participants and how politicians and local governments have responded to this input, we made use of different sources. First, we conducted 19 interviews with council members, aldermen, mayors and civil servants and three interviews with the organizers of the G1000s in Amersfoort and Uden. In addition to this, we analyzed newsletters, news on the websites of the G1000, relevant newspaper articles, and documents published by the organization of the G1000.

We distinguish three periods:

1. The period prior to the start of the G1000,
2. The period immediately following the G1000,
3. The period from one month after the G1000 until now (end of May 2015).

For the first period, we particularly focused on the role of the local council, the individual council members, and the local government prior to the start of the G1000. For the second and third period, the emphasis was on the impact of the recommendations of the G1000. More in particular, we looked at how and to what extent the recommendations of the mini-public were implemented or defined the political agenda. In addition, we considered how and to what extent the participants or the general public were informed about what has been or will be done with the recommendations.

Findings

Amersfoort

1) How it started

Amersfoort already knew a tradition of citizen initiatives before the G1000. The council period 2010-2014 was characterized by a lot of political instability, with a number of policy issues causing political and societal unrest, and various changes in the composition of the local coalition government. As a result, both politicians and civil servants had become rather inward looking and many citizens experienced that local authorities were very much at a distance. In order to reconnect with the local

administration, a group of citizens initiated *Het Nieuwe Samenwerken* (HNS, The New Cooperating) at the end of 2011. Their diagnosis read as follows²:

- a closer cooperation between citizens and council members is needed, since it is difficult to get access to the council;
- the council seems to take a rather passive role, instead of actively participating in a dialogue with citizens;
- policy making is mainly unidirectional and not too transparent;
- the outcome of interactive policy making or other forms of citizen consultation are often not taken seriously;
- citizens lose interest and do not participate anymore.

A conference with citizens, local organizations, civil servants and politicians was organized in the autumn of 2012, which was followed by the setup of three working groups to build upon the agenda of this conference. In April 2014, *Het Nieuwe Samenwerken* (HNS) held a final meeting to present the results from the working groups and to introduce the newly elected members of the local council to the variety of citizen initiatives in Amersfoort. This was also the moment at which they decided to go into “hibernation” as they called it, feeling their job had been done and was to be taken over by others.

We could say that HNS more or less paved the way for the G1000, although in terms of personnel there does not seem to be any overlap between the organization behind the G1000 and HNS. The start of the G1000 initiative can be traced back to October 2013. At that time, the principal pacemaker of the G1000 met with a senior civil servant of the city of Amersfoort. Both had been inspired by the work of David van Reybrouck and they discussed the possibilities to hold a G1000 in Amersfoort. This enthusiasm spread through the city hall, and soon the mayor and the council secretary were also convinced that Amersfoort should have a G1000. They offered a financial guarantee, which meant that date and location could be arranged. Moreover, for the random selection of citizens the Municipal Personal Records Database could be used and the invitation letter for the G1000, sent to thousands of inhabitants, was signed by the mayor.

In December 2013, the G1000 Foundation was established, with three board members, none of whom was a politician or civil servant. It was decided that the G1000 would be held on 22 March 2014, only three days after the elections. Our interviewees offer different explanations for this choice of date. Some argue it was specifically chosen to influence the agenda of the council and in particular the political parties that were

² www.hetnieuwesamenwerken.net

negotiating the coalition agreement. Others argue that it was mere coincidence: the building where the G1000 would take place happened to be available that day. Some council members complain that organizing a G1000 this soon after the elections was a bad choice: they were very tired after weeks of campaigning and canvassing. One of them even considered it an insult, as if the result of the G1000 were a better representation of citizen opinion than the electoral outcome. Despite these objections, about ten council members were present at the G1000.

It may seem like a detail, but the way in which the date was chosen, is only one example of the fact that during the first months the G1000 was set up with very little involvement of politicians. Some of the organizers clearly believed it had to be a bottom-up citizen initiative, as an alternative to electoral, representative democracy. Yet, as the movement grew, local politicians got more involved, in particular through meetings that were organized by a former alderman who very much supported the G1000 philosophy. As a result, most politicians we interviewed had heard about the G1000 by the end of 2013 or early 2014. However, the role of these politicians was limited to giving advice and being informed, the actual organization was done by the G1000 Foundation and a variety of volunteers. In terms of embeddedness, we can argue that although there were some important connections with the city hall (civil service, mayor), Amersfoort's G1000 was not very much tied to the politico-institutional structures and decision making.

2) Right after the G1000

In the final part of the G1000, ten proposals were selected by the participating citizens through a voting round. Together, these proposals would form the 'Agenda for Amersfoort'. What kind of proposals were included in this Agenda? One of them concerned organizing a G1000 at the neighbourhood level, which was indeed put into practice some months later in the Kruiskamp neighbourhood. Four of the proposals had something to do with the environment, green areas or sustainability, while another four focused on civil society: knowing what is going on in your neighbourhood, making new connections, doing things together, looking after each other. Finally, one proposal concerned local safety, although it was also mainly focused on knowing your neighbours and correcting each other. For some of these proposals, there hardly seemed to be a role of local government and the local council, whilst others would require some policy changes, meaning commitment from political parties.

The ten proposals were handed over to the mayor, to which the G1000 chairman added that he hoped this Agenda would be picked up by the local council. However, just before this closing ceremony, all G1000 participants, including politicians and civil servants, had

been invited to “adopt” one of the proposals and to form a working group that would further develop the idea and put it into practice. This may also explain why the mayor was rather reluctant to simply hand over the Agenda to the local council, but instead emphasised that it was up to the city to get into action.

Most politicians we interviewed participated in the G1000 themselves. They are enthusiastic not only about the concept of a G1000, but also about the way it actually worked out during the day. They found the participating citizens willing to share their ideas and engage with others, in a positive and constructive way. Some politicians also argue that there was more room to look beyond a narrow self-interest, in contrast to what they often experience in formal settings like a public hearing or when citizens have their say at the start of a council meeting. Even the council members that were sceptical in advance, changed their mind as a result of participating and observing the enthusiasm and energy of the G1000.

However, it also has to be noted that the follow up is rather limited. The idea of establishing working groups composed of citizens, civil servants and politicians looked good on paper, but hardly materialized. Some themes were merged in one group, other groups only met a couple of times, but gradually faded. Two exceptions should be mentioned though: the G1000 that was organized in one of the neighbourhoods (as mentioned earlier on), and a group that developed a monthly award for fellow citizens who do something special for their neighbourhood. Part of this already became visible at a conference in September 2014, where the number of active citizens had decreased substantially as compared to the G1000 in March. Several politicians were present, but most of them with the goal to be informed about the progress of the initiatives, since only two or three of them had joined a working group. In January 2015, the team that coordinated all of the working groups, in order to keep together the ten proposals of the Agenda for Amersfoort, decided to break up.

As could be seen from the brief description of the proposals that made it to the top-10, it was unclear whether local government should play a role, and if so, what kind of role this should be. All politicians we interviewed confirmed that they did not find the proposals very new or innovative (admittedly, they did not expect this to be case), and several of them were rather close to existing local policies. Some of the working groups would indeed find that what they had come up with as a new or different solution, already existed. In addition, some of the proposals did not require intervention from local government, but should be taken up by citizens themselves. Finally, although the Agenda for Amersfoort was presented to the mayor – who is the chairman of the local

council – it was never discussed in the local council. The politicians that did not partake in the G1000 only indirectly heard about the outcomes. None of the council members we interviewed therefore considered it a request or petition to the council. As a consequence, they also did not feel the need to account for the progress on these ten topics to the G1000 or to the Amersfoort population at large.

3) A year later

A year after the G1000 had taken place in Amersfoort, we must conclude that the topics of the Agenda for Amersfoort have never been put on the council agenda, nor on the agenda of the College. Some topics were already covered in local policy, others did not require involvement of government. Also, the idea put forward by the G1000 organizers to organize a G1000 like meeting with citizens, local entrepreneurs and councillors about cutbacks and the core tasks of the municipality, did not succeed. According to some of our respondents, this was mainly due to the time pressure. The city wanted to be relieved from the financial oversight of the provincial authorities as soon as possible, which meant that reforms and cutbacks had to be decided upon quickly. This would not fit with the time schedule envisaged in a G1000. Others however pointed at the responsibility of the council to make tough decisions, and thought the council would be better equipped to weigh the consequences of various measures and to keep the general interest in mind.

In other words, the political uptake is limited. Mainly the 'spirit of G1000', i.e. thinking of this type of citizen involvement in several policy areas, survived. In that sense, many local councillors, particularly those who participated in the G1000 themselves, are enthusiastic about the possibilities of this type of citizen involvement. They can imagine a number of local topics that could be discussed in a setting similar to the G1000. They also believe that in a couple of years, another G1000 could be held, to renew the Agenda for Amersfoort. Other politicians are more sceptical, mainly because they have more faith in the role of political parties and the existing institutions of representative democracy. Some politicians also point at the risk that the G1000 becomes 'the only thing in town', whereas Amersfoort has a rich tradition of all kinds of citizen initiatives.

In terms of accountability and feedback, we can see that only a few working groups are still active, and there is hardly any involvement of politicians and civil servants. Although some councillors have visited follow up meetings and there were some possibilities for the G1000 organization to present progress during council meetings or informal sessions, the overall pattern is a lack of communication between G1000 and council. Now that the coordination team has been dissolved as well, the connection between the

ten topics on the Agenda for Amersfoort seems to be lacking. This state of affairs can be traced back to the ambiguous message at the end of the G1000 meeting, in which the 'ownership' of the Agenda remained unclear.

Uden

1) How it started

In the spring of 2011, an initiative was taken by the Uden administration to involve a large number of citizens and civil society organisations in formulating a vision for the future of the municipality (with a view on 2020). This interactive, bottom up process was called *Udenaar de Toekomst (The Future of the Uden citizen)* and it resulted in a report which presented a variety of ideas on the future of Uden. These were summarized in four keywords: green, healthy, hospitable and sociable, and did not contain specific policy proposals.

Although one of the aldermen was responsible for this process, he was not directly involved in organizing the meetings nor in drafting the text. The council secretary of the local council was in charge. Moreover, the resulting document was not to be seen as local government policy, but as a statement from the local community. The report was merely presented to the local council and the College of Mayor and Aldermen, but it was made clear that it should remain a responsibility for citizens and organizations to act upon the ideas formulated in this document. Indeed, working groups were formed to deal with specific themes, several of which are still active today.

Very soon after the municipal elections of 2014, the council secretary took the initiative to hold a conference, in which the role of the council was the central topic. Like in Amersfoort, the local council was seen as inward looking, focusing primarily on the city hall agenda and involving citizens only to a limited extent. The conference was meant to provide a fresh start, with the new composition of the council. At the time of the conference, negotiations for the new College were still pending. All of the participants could contribute to the discussion from the perspective of a local councillor, including those who would become Aldermen a couple of weeks later. During this conference, one of the important issues on the table was how to make a better connection between citizens and council members. Even if *Udenaar de toekomst* had been quite successful, creating quite some enthusiasm among council members, it was felt that this process needed to be reinvigorated.

On the first day of the conference, a large number of people who were active in the working groups and other stakeholders from civil society discussed with council members

about their ideas for the community of Uden and priorities for the coming four years. It was no coincidence that the conference was chaired by one of the principal organizers of the G1000 in Amersfoort: the council secretary was responsible for this invitation. As the conference progressed, many council members became enthusiastic about the idea of organizing a G1000 in Uden as well. It has to be said that one of the local political parties objected to this idea – and this party has remained sceptical or outright negative ever since. One of the other parties also showed some hesitation, but was willing to give the G1000 a chance.

Similar to the process of *Udenaar de toekomst (Udt)*, the preparation for the Uden G1000, which would take place on October 4, was to be taken up mainly by citizens, i.e. politicians should not be too much involved. However, in contrast with Amersfoort, some local politicians were quite active in organizing the G1000, and so was the council secretary. We see various people who are involved in both initiatives, resulting in a symbiosis between Udt and G1000. In the background, the mayor also supported the idea, and he was also instrumental in providing some financial support. Two council members we interviewed were critical about the budget that was allocated to the G1000, because it would be at the expense of other citizen initiatives. Moreover, they criticized the way in which decisions regarding this budget were made, since this partly took place during the holiday break, and it was unclear who was responsible. Still, a majority of councillors think that it was appropriate to also contribute financially to a G1000. The involvement of both the civil service, the mayor and council members point at more embeddedness of the Uden G1000 than was the case in Amersfoort.

Contrary to Amersfoort, the Municipal Personal Records Database could not be used for a random selection of participants. Instead, an open invitation was sent to all inhabitants of the Uden municipality, signed by the mayor. The G1000 was held on 4 October 2014. It turned out that this was also the day of the Feast of the Sacrifice in the Islamic faith, which had been overlooked by the G1000 organization, and which may explain the near absence of ethnic minorities.

Within the organizing team of G1000, there was some debate whether or not politicians should be invited. On the one hand, it was argued that this should be a citizen initiative in which politicians had no role to play. On the other hand, and this represented the majority opinion, it was argued that politicians should at least hear what citizens had to say and to know about the outcomes – some of which could also require action from local government. A vast majority of the council members participated in the G1000, with the exception of the political party that objected to the G1000. All politicians we

interviewed indicate that they took a modest role at the tables. Since they were aware of the debate about their presence, the councillors had also discussed their role amongst each other in advance. All council members stress that they participated as inhabitants of Uden rather than as representatives of particular political interests or ideologies, although they were not sure whether all of their colleagues had behaved in the same way.

2) Right after the G1000

Just like in Amersfoort, at the end of the afternoon, there was a voting round to select the ten 'best' proposals out of a total of 327. There were fewer rounds of deliberation before the voting took place than in Amersfoort. As mentioned earlier on, the format by which the deliberation took place, differed as well. According to some of our interviewees, this may have led to hasty choices and a bit of pressure on the participants. On the other hand, they doubt whether more time would have led to substantially different outcomes and the booklet that was made to report on the outcomes of the G1000, contains all of the proposals.

As compared to the more abstract wording of some of the proposals in the 'Agenda for Amersfoort' most of the proposals in the Uden top-10 are quite concrete. They concern topics like more safety for cyclists and pedestrians, accessibility of the town centre for visually disabled people, and the preservation of the public library. More than half of the proposals also appeal to the local government, e.g. guaranteeing a basic level of care for each citizen and involving citizens in various stages of policy making. Other proposals concern activities citizens can organize together, to share knowledge, to counteract loneliness and to match supply and demand of small services.

In other words, both in terms of how the proposals are formulated, and in terms of ownership, these proposals are closer to the politico-administrative sphere. Given the embeddedness of the G1000 Uden, making it look more like an 'invited space', this is not surprising. Some interviewees have the impression that this is how the G1000 was framed at the start of the day: politicians cannot afford to ignore the outcomes of the G1000, they have to do something. All of the interviewees confirm that the proposals were not very new or innovative: these were not topics that had been overlooked over the past years. Actually, some of the proposals were already part of existing local policy, or policy in the making.

Still, the G1000 is considered very valuable as a bottom up process in which citizens were in charge, and they have shown that they are able to formulate realistic and

sensible ideas. Like in Amersfoort, a number of councillors seemed to be afraid in advance that citizens would come up with rather utopian or very expensive ideas, and they admit they were proven wrong. Others were more optimistic from the start, arguing that citizens could provide the kind of practical expertise that councillors and civil servants, who focus on academic and professional knowledge, are often lacking. Almost all of the politicians and civil servants who participated on 4 October, are enthusiastic about the atmosphere, the quality of the discussions and the engagement of citizens. This also holds for the council members that were a bit hesitant during the conference of the council where the idea of organizing G1000 was born.

Despite the implicit appeal to the local government, many interviewees stress that the main purpose was to get citizens involved, just as in Udenaar de Toekomst. Citizens should feel a sense of ownership of the ten proposals. In fact, more than 100 participants indeed enrolled in the working groups, and several of them are active as of today. In the *Kantelhuis* (Flipping House) citizens can meet to discuss new ideas and the progress of the various themes. However, the disconnect between the city hall (College and council) on the one hand, and the variety of active citizens, has remained. Most of our interviewees say they lack insight into what is happening in the working groups and how this is related to the policy agenda of the council. There have been some feedback sessions, but these have mainly left the impression that much of the follow up on the G1000 is 'work in progress'. On the other hand, councillors point at a number of pacemakers within G1000 who are very active and know their way to the local council and they mention the regular newsletter which is quite informative.

Some politicians and civil servants are more in the know, as they participate in the 'Passion group', an amalgam of Udt and G1000 that tries to coordinate the variety of citizen initiatives. Yet, the status of this group, and the way it is connected to politicians, civil servants and citizens outside of this group, is not entirely clear.

3) Half a year later

Half a year later, the jury is still out as concerns the effect of the G100 on local politics, and many interviewees say that it is too early to tell. Two examples of the political uptake, i.e. connections between the G1000 agenda and policy making are often mentioned: cycling and the collection of waste. Regarding the safety and infrastructure for cyclers, the city administration was working on a Traffic and Infrastructure Plan already, in which the ideas about cycling from the G1000 working group could easily be integrated. Another group was thinking about ways to reduce waste and make their

fellow citizens more aware of this issue: attempts are made to link this with the local policy on waste collection. A third example, which hardly needs any involvement from local politicians, is the 'Leercafé' in which citizens share experiences and expertise, or discussions about recent events take place. This café does not have a fixed schedule, but there are quite some activities, often in cooperation with civil society organizations, and closely related to the Kantelhuis.

However, what can be established is that, although politicians and civil servants are involved in some of the working groups (not always clear whether it is Udenaar de toekomst or G1000), the functioning of the local council has not changed very much. The focus is on the city hall, councillors are still struggling with the interaction with citizens. Most of the proposals presented to the council receive widespread support from both coalition and opposition parties. According to councillors and members of the College of Mayor and Aldermen, the question whether or not citizens have been involved or consulted in the preparation of these proposals, is hardly asked. Political parties are not using the G1000 outcome to promote their own political agenda. The College of Mayor and Aldermen operates at a distance, although it embraces the philosophy of G1000.

The examples of infrastructure for cyclers and collection of waste do not represent an explicit choice of the council or the College to follow the recommendations of the G1000. Although council members were involved in organizing the G1000, in the end, they did not want the proposals of the G1000 to be seen as a 'wish list' for the local council. Similar to their fellow councillors in Amersfoort, they do not feel the need to give account for what they have done with the top 10 resulting from the G1000. This also raises the question whether the G1000 Uden was intended to influence policy agenda in the first place. There is no shared view on this among our interviewees, partly stemming from the mixed message regarding the nature of the G1000 during the day and in the aftermath as well.

Conclusion

We analyzed the impact of the recommendations of two mini-publics in the Netherlands, the G1000s in Amersfoort and Uden. They differ from each other to the extent that they are tied to and embedded in the decision-making system. We expected to find a greater impact of the proposals and recommendations on policy-making when the mini-public is embedded, that is initiated or explicitly supported by the local council or government. However, this hypothesis is not supported by our findings. Irrespective of whether the

initiative is taken or supported by the official decision-making institutions, the impact on policy is low.

In Amersfoort, embeddedness of the G1000 was low; it was not very much tied to the politico-institutional structures and decision making. It started as a bottom-up citizen initiative, as an alternative to electoral, representative democracy. Even if politicians got more involved during the process, their role was limited to giving advice and getting informed. In Uden, some local politicians and the council secretary were quite active in organizing the G1000. The involvement of both the civil service, the mayor and council members point at more embeddedness of the Uden G1000 than was the case in Amersfoort.

Our findings show that in both cities, the follow up was rather limited. In Amersfoort, the recommendations summarized in the Agenda for Amersfoort, were never discussed in the local council or by the College of Mayor and Aldermen. The politicians that did not participate in the G1000 only indirectly heard about the outcomes. As a result of this, council members never considered the recommendations a request or petition to the council. Furthermore, although some council members have visited follow up meetings, there was no clear procedure for either reporting from G1000 thematic groups to municipal council or visits from council members to G1000 update meetings to check progress of various themes. In Uden, the proposals were more concrete and closer to the existing local policy agenda. Interviewees also had the impression that this is how the G1000 was framed at the start of the day: politicians cannot afford to ignore the outcome of the G1000. Nevertheless, the impact on policies has remained limited. Moreover, the functioning of the local council has not changed very much and the College of Mayor and Aldermen operates at a distance, although they embrace the philosophy of G1000. Despite the feedback sessions, the coordination taking place in the Passion group and the regular newsletter, several politicians feel that they could be better informed about the progress of the G1000 thematic groups, which could require a more structured feedback to the municipal council.

Sometimes there appears to be some agreement between the proposals of the G1000s and policies, but that does not mean that there is an impact on policy making. Several proposals were rather close to existing local policies. Some of the working groups in Amersfoort indeed found that what they had come up with as a new or different solution already existed. Also in Uden, some of the proposals were already part of existing local policy or policy in the making. In the latter case, a connection could be made between

the G1000 agenda and the town's policy agenda and certain groups got involved in policy making as a result.

There are two factors that emerge from our analysis which contribute to the limited impact of the G1000 proposals. A first factor refers to the type and quality of the proposals and recommendations. As said before, some proposals show too much overlap with existing policies; they are not new or innovative. Other proposals are too abstract to lead to projects and feasible results. In both instances, the groups that were formed to work on these topics, encountered problems: either they were disappointed because they could not add anything new, or they struggled for a long time to define and narrow down their topic before they could get into action. Also, some of the proposals do not require intervention from local government, but could be taken up by citizens themselves.

A second factor, which is much more fundamental, has to do with the relationship between the institutions of representative democracy and the mini-publics. As our findings show, there is a lot of uncertainty among council members about their role. It is unclear whether local government should play a role, and if so, what kind of role this should be. Council members tell that they lack insight into what is happening in the working groups and how this is related to the policy agenda of the council. Furthermore, even when council members are involved in organizing the G1000, take part, and when most proposals appeal to the local government, as was the case in Uden, many council members stress that the main purpose was to get citizens involved and that politics should stay at a distance; the G1000 is not supposed to be a "wish list" handed over to politicians, but instead an agenda that should mobilise citizens to get into action themselves.

In that respect, various politicians have pointed at the risk of institutionalization of the G1000, which may be detrimental to its innovative and alternative character. Actually, this could turn the G1000 into a 'citizen council', next to or even competing with the municipal council. But if politics stays at a distance and there is no link whatsoever with formal policy-making, mini-publics such as the G1000s may at best lead to scattered small-scale citizens' initiatives, but further remain democratic experiments without much practical use.

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