

# From citizen participation to government participation: An exploration of the roles of local governments in community initiatives for climate change adaptation in the Netherlands

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## Abstract

Citizens' initiatives for climate action are actively encouraged by governments to enhance the resilience of communities to climate change. This increased responsabilisation of citizens has implications for the roles of governments. The degree of government involvement does not necessarily decline, but government roles may need to shift: from a regulating and steering government towards a more collaborative and responsive government that enables and facilitates community initiatives that are self-governed by citizens. However, we lack a conceptual understanding of such new government roles, as well as empirical insights into how local governments participate in citizens' initiatives and how they take up such new roles. In this paper, a "ladder of government participation" is introduced, which is used to explore the roles of local governments in citizens' initiatives for climate change adaptation in the Netherlands. The results show that local governments are slowly but gradually shifting towards more networking, stimulating, and facilitating roles. Key concerns of local practitioners are (a) a lack of flexibility and support of their own municipal organisation to facilitate citizens' initiatives, (b) uncertainty about the continuity of citizens' initiatives over time, and (c) a potential increase of inequity among citizen groups resulting from facilitating citizens' initiatives. An important finding is that the roles of local governments tend to be flexible, in that they can move from one role to the other over time for one and the same citizens' initiative depending on its stage of development, as well as take up several roles simultaneously for different citizens' initiatives.

## KEYWORDS

climate change adaptation, community initiatives, local government, roles, typology

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The rise of New Public Governance in many Western countries has inspired new types of governance practices such as collaborative innovation networks and citizen coproduction, to deal with budgetary constraints and wicked societal challenges (Bekkers et al., 2014; Bovaird & Löffler, 2013; Eriksson, 2012; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018). Citizens are viewed as empowered actors with resources with which they can contribute to the resilience of their communities, as has, for instance, been propagated by the “Big Society” agenda in the United Kingdom (Bekkers et al., 2014; Linders, 2012) and the “Participation Society” agenda in the Netherlands (Troonrede, 2013). This agenda supposes that the initiative and creativity of citizens are both desirable and much needed in addition to governmental action. Citizens are encouraged to get involved in all kinds of community initiatives such as, for instance, in community care, green space maintenance, and renewable energy collectives (Hajer, 2011; Tonkens, 2014).

Citizen coproduction presumes a shift of responsibilities for public goods and services away from or in addition to governments and businesses, towards citizens. This increased “responsibilisation” of citizens—transferring the burden of risk and responsibility to citizens—(Klein, Juhola, & Landauer, 2017; O’Hare, White, & Connelly, 2015; Roth & Prior, 2014; Wamsler, 2016) has implications for the roles of governments. These government roles do not necessarily diminish or become obsolete, but they shift from a regulating and steering towards a more collaborative, responsive government (Aylett, 2013; Bekkers et al., 2014; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Gilbert, 2005) that enables and facilitates community initiatives in which nonstate actors play prominent roles.

Climate change adaptation, from here on referred to as adaptation, is an emerging public policy field in which citizens are encouraged by local governments to take up responsibilities (Mees, Driessen, & Runhaar, 2012; Tompkins & Eakin, 2012). Citizen responsibilisation can reduce important barriers to the implementation of adaptation action, such as limited resources and capacities, fragmentation and institutional uncertainty, institutional crowdedness, and institutional voids (Adger et al., 2009; Termeer, Dewulf, & Breeman, 2013; Wamsler & Brink, 2014). Citizens can contribute by taking adaptation measures in and around the house (Mees et al., 2012; Tompkins & Eakin, 2012). Nevertheless, empirical manifestations of this shift of responsibilities to citizens and other nonstate actors are still limited in adaptation (e.g., Klein et al., 2017; Klein et al., 2018; Mees, 2017; Mees et al., 2016). Consequently, conceptual understandings of what “facilitating” and “enabling” roles for governments might entail in the adaptation domain are in an embryonic stage. At the same time, empirical understandings of whether and to what extent government is moving towards such roles are lacking (Bekkers et al., 2014; Hegger, Mees, Driessen, & Runhaar, 2017). This hampers a thorough understanding of the challenges governments can face and how they can overcome these challenges, which in the worst case might lead to governments frustrating initiatives rather than facilitating them (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2014; Wamsler, 2016).

This paper aims to contribute to addressing this knowledge gap by exploring what it entails to be a facilitating government that supports citizens’ initiatives for climate change adaptation and how these new governmental roles are fulfilled in practice. The following research question guides this research: *How, and to what extent, do the roles and practices of local governments change when citizens initiate adaptation action?* The exploration of government roles is conducted for adaptation in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is selected for several reasons. First, in this country, citizen coproduction is actively encouraged in many fields of public policy, including climate change. Second, adaptation has recently surged on the political agenda: A new Dutch National Adaptation Strategy was launched in 2016 and an Adaptation Implementation Agenda in 2018. Dialogues with societal stakeholders, including citizen (organisation)s, are a key feature of the Dutch adaptation strategy and agenda. Third, a recent study by Hegger et al. (2017) has explored the roles of Dutch citizens in adaptation. Hegger et al. (2017) concluded that governments have an important facilitating role in promoting adaptation activities by residents and their communities. However, although they acknowledge that insights on corresponding roles of governmental actors are lacking, they do not offer further guidance on what such a facilitating role should entail. By focusing on the roles of local governments, this study provides an interesting complementary perspective to the growing body of literature on the governance of adaptation. We focus on adaptation at the local level, because it enables us to study the interactions and relationships between citizens and their local governments. Furthermore, although adaptation is evidently a multilevel governance issue (e.g., Urwin & Jordan, 2015), it is often argued that the local level is very important for adaptation (Grasso, 2010) because climate impacts are often localised, and because this is the level where concrete adaptation measures are implemented (Grasso, 2010; Nalau, Preston, & Maloney, 2015; Reckien et al., 2018).

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. First, we propose a framework for exploring local government roles and practices. Then, we briefly describe the method of data collection used for the study, that is, participant observation research of a Dutch platform of local policy practitioners working on urban climate change adaptation. We proceed with an elaboration of the roles of government. We end with a discussion on the challenges associated with these new government roles in an era of citizen coproduction and a conclusion.

## 2 | CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

An exploration into the roles of governments in their dealings with citizens’ initiatives is important, not only because conceptual explorations are still scarce (Bekkers et al., 2014) but also because governments can frustrate such initiatives rather than facilitate them (Nederhand et al., 2014; Wamsler, 2016). A few general government typologies exist, such as the typology of Bulkeley and Kern (2006) of government “By authority,” “By provision,” and “By enabling” and the typology of a “Realising,” “Cooperating,” and “Inviting” government

of Van Buuren (2017). These have been used as inspiration for the development of a conceptual framework for this study, in addition to using grey literature from the Dutch Council for Public Administration (DCPA). The DCPA is an independent advisory body of the Dutch government and parliament. It can issue advice when requested on its own initiative on the structure and functioning of the government with the aim to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

In line with the rise of the “Participation Society” agenda in the Netherlands, the DCPA have introduced the term “government participation” (ROB, 2012), as a counterpart to public participation. In this case, the government participates in community initiatives that are predominantly led by citizens and other nonstate actors, who independently develop their own solutions and projects to a policy problem (Edelenbos, Van Buuren, Roth, & Winnubst, 2017). This is fundamentally different from public participation, in which citizens participate in policy making that is initiated and structured by the government (Bekkers et al., 2014). Government participation in community initiatives requires governments to act as facilitator rather than as initiator, supervisor, or regulator (ROB, 2012). The premise of government participation is that governments restrain themselves to enabling or supporting the initiation and continuation of such initiatives with as little interference as possible (ROB, 2012).

To put flesh on the bones of government participation, the DCPA have developed the “ladder of government participation” (translated from Dutch “overheidsparticipatietrap”; ROB, 2012), as an equivalent of Arnstein's (1969) famous ladder of citizen participation. Like with Arnstein's ladder, the ladder of government participation shows different rungs on a ladder that identify increasing levels of participation and corresponding roles of governments in community initiatives. The level of power and authority for governments increases with each rung on the ladder. The idea is that governments descend the ladder as much as possible—or climb the ladder as little as possible—to give space to the blooming of citizens' initiatives (Frantzeskaki, Avelino, & Loorbach, 2013; ROB, 2012). Those five rungs range from (1) letting go, to (2) enabling and facilitating, to (3) stimulating, to (4; network) steering, and finally to (5) regulating.

Using the DCPA ladder of government participation as a basis, we have developed a tentative conceptual framework to explore and compare government roles. The DCPA ladder is, to our knowledge, the first in its kind to provide a typology of government roles in interaction with citizens' initiatives. Furthermore, it has resonated well with and is already used by Dutch policy practitioners to guide their practices ever since its inception in 2012. The ladder of the DCPA has been refined by us, based on the dimensions of (a) who initiates, (b) who coordinates the (decision-making) process, and (c) who decides (e.g., Driessen, Dieperink, van Laerhoven, Runhaar, & Vermeulen, 2012). The ladder of government participation, the corresponding government roles, and practices developed for this study are provided in Table 1. The ladder is an analytical device to distinguish ideal-typical roles, acknowledging that, in practice, overlap in roles may exist and that the boundaries between the different rungs are not that clear-cut in practice. Its heuristic has enabled us to systematically analyse how these roles are practiced across a range of

**TABLE 1** The ladder of government participation and corresponding roles

Rung	Roles for local governments	Who initiates, who coordinates, and who decides	Practices of local government roles
5	Regulating	Government regulates interventions by the community, so initiates, coordinates and decides (hierarchical government)	Policy making, organising traditional public participation such as hearings and citizen juries, checking, enforcing regulations, and sanctioning in case of noncompliance
4	Network steering	Government (co-) initiates and creates a network of public and private stakeholders; it coordinates the decision-making process. Decisions are co-decided in the network	Process coordination, fostering of dialogue and negotiation among stakeholders, mediation of interests, arbitrage of conflicts, trust building, creation of a level playing field through rules of the game
3	Stimulating	Government actively stimulates the initiation and continuation of community initiatives. Initiatives coordinate and decide independently from government	Provision of structural (financial) support during a longer period
2	Facilitating/enabling	Initiatives are self-initiated, and the government has an interest in making them happen. Initiatives coordinate and decide independently from government	Boundary spanning activities that facilitate free flows of ideas, people and resources, while maintaining a boundary between the initiative and its institutional environment; Process facilitation, helping the initiative to find its way in the municipal organisation, providing a (very) limited amount of resources and relevant information, schooling and other forms of capacity development
1	Letting go	Initiatives are self-initiated, self-coordinated and self-governed without the help of government	None, government is not participating in any direct way, but indirectly by becoming ambassadors for such initiatives (“hands-off meta-governance” cf. Sørensen, 2006)

*Note.* Adapted from ROB, 2012; informed by Aylett, 2013; Bekkers et al., 2014; Bulkeley & Kern, 2006; Edelenbos et al., 2017; Edelenbos, van Meerkerk, & Schenk, 2018; Overbeek & Salverda, 2013; ROB, 2012; Sorensen, 2006; Van Buuren, 2017.

community initiatives for adaptation with heavy engagement of citizens in the Netherlands.

### 3 | CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN THE NETHERLANDS AND ITS INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The two most important adaptation issues in the Netherlands are adaptation to fluvial and coastal flooding from rivers and the sea with the common goal of water safety and adaptation to pluvial flooding with the common goal of dry feet (Runhaar, Mees, Wardekker, van der Sluijs, & Driessen, 2012). Other adaptation issues such as coping with extreme heat and drought have received far less attention from the government or society at large. The distinction between fluvial and pluvial flooding is relevant, because Dutch governments have different formal legal responsibilities for adaptation to different climate risks and hence by default citizens can take on different responsibilities. This legal context provides one explanation for differences in governmental roles across these two main adaptation issues, as is explained next.

In the Netherlands, flood safety risks from the rivers and the sea have historically been dealt with through primary flood defences in the form of a large system of dikes, dunes, barriers, and sluices (Gralepois et al., 2016; Kaufmann, 2018). Due to its dominance, adaptation to flood risks from the rivers and sea is highly institutionalized and legally embedded. Responsibilities for such flood risks are traditionally delegated from the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment (now: Infrastructure and Water Management) to the regional water authorities, highly specialised public water management authorities in relative isolation from political whims (Kaufmann, 2018). Here, the government has a traditional “regulating” role, the highest rung on the ladder. This is the classical hierarchical form of steering, which is still quite common for adaptation to fluvial flooding from the rivers and the sea that is highly dominated by a traditional flood prevention and flood defence strategy (Hegger et al., 2016). Here, community initiatives are not wanted or desired by the government, because the Dutch government is formally, and feels morally, responsible for the water safety of its citizens. This rung is therefore left out of the analysis, because there is ample literature on the regulating role of government in classical hierarchical government.

Responsibilities for adaptation to flooding from heavy rainfall lie with the municipalities and their citizens. Municipalities are responsible for the efficient collection and processing of rainwater run-off on public grounds, whereas citizens are responsible for collecting rainwater on their own properties. Flood risks from heavy rainfall have predominantly been tackled by (increasing the capacity of) the sewage system. However, heavy rainfall events are occurring more frequently, and therefore, citizens are increasingly called upon to contribute to mitigating risks from pluvial flooding by their municipalities, by requiring them to store a certain amount of rainwater on their properties (Volkskrant, 2017).

Adaptation initiatives with heavy engagement from the community and its citizens are not yet commonplace in the Netherlands, and hence, there is still a limited number of empirical manifestations. Most initiatives are cases of adaptation to pluvial flooding (common goal of dry feet), as a result of the allocations of formal responsibilities highlighted above. Citizens collect or sequester rainwater on their properties, or they help to mitigate surface water flooding on public grounds. Most initiatives on private property are about replacing hard surfaces with greenery to allow the rainwater to infiltrate in gardens and on roof tops, or about collecting rainwater in barrels. Initiatives on public grounds also often deal with adding green space in neighbourhoods. A popular way of doing so is by turning concrete school squares into blue-green play grounds. Citizens' initiatives in the area of fluvial and coastal flooding are still rather uncommon, in light of the formal responsibilities of the government for water safety. Citizens' initiatives in adaptation to heat are even more rare (Hegger et al., 2017), and the roles of local governments limited (Mees, Driessen, & Runhaar, 2015). Therefore, adaptation to heat and drought is left out of the analysis.

### 4 | METHOD

We conducted participant observation research of a knowledge sharing platform of local policy practitioners involved in climate change adaptation (the Dutch platform of urban climate change adaptation for policy practitioners <http://www.citydealklimaatadaptatie.nl/>). Participant observation is a qualitative research method that originated in cultural anthropology and is nowadays used in many fields of social sciences (Bernard, 2017; Kawulich, 2005). It is about getting close to people and making them comfortable with your presence, so that you can observe them and collect data about them (Bernard, 2017). It enables researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities (Kaluwich, 2005). It enables the researcher to talk to people about sensitive issues (Bernard, 2017) that is helpful when you want to collect data from policy practitioners about their relations and interactions with citizens. In our case, two researchers of the author team were observer participants—as opposed to participating observers (Kawulich, 2005). This means that the two researchers became a member of the knowledge sharing platform, so they became an insider of the group. Becoming a member of the platform was the only way to get access to the group's discussions. Moreover, we believe that this also was the only way to get a full understanding of the perceptions of policy practitioners on their interactions with citizens' initiatives. The challenge of being a participant observer is to not become too absorbed in the group dynamics and discussions, not to affect those discussions, and keep a critical distance to analyse what is happening (Merriam, 1988, in Kawulich, 2005). We have refrained ourselves from active interference as much as possible, for instance, by offering to make detailed minutes of the discussions for the group.



The two researchers became member of the group engaged in the theme of “Community Initiatives” (<http://www.citydeal.klimaatadaptatie.nl/2016/12/07/maatschappelijke-initiatieven/>). This group consisted of approximately 10 policy practitioners, who were representatives of several municipalities of different sizes and geographic locations across the Netherlands, and of several regional water authorities, who joined this theme on a voluntary basis. Each participating practitioner has the task within their organisations to engage with community initiatives, and hence, they have first-hand practical experience in dealing with such initiatives. The theme of “Community Initiatives” ran during a period of 2 years, from January 2016 to March 2018, in which eight network meetings were held. In those meetings, the practitioners shared and exchanged their experience and views on community initiatives and discussed what their role is in facilitating such initiatives. The examples of initiatives used in the results section were initiatives that were mentioned by the members of the platform. Several sessions revolved around a specific issue, agreed upon by the participants, such as raising the awareness and urgency of citizens, the financing of community initiatives, the maintenance and continuation of community initiatives, and the transition of school squares into blue-green squares with large engagement of citizens (currently one of the most popular adaptation measures with and for citizens in the Netherlands). All eight sessions were attended by one or two researchers of the author team during the full duration of the existence of this group. A session lasted between two and three hours. The last session was explicitly dedicated to discussing the different roles of local governments in such initiatives. This session was moderated by the lead author who acted as a neutral facilitator of the discussions. The discussion was guided by the ladder of government participation (Table 1). This extensive period of participant observation enabled the author team to get real examples of and actual views on different government roles from policy experts and practitioners. Detailed minutes were made of each session, and these minutes were coded and used for the analysis of governmental roles and practices.

## 5 | ANALYSING LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROLES IN CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

### 5.1 | Rung 1: Letting go

In the Netherlands, many examples exist of citizens' initiatives in climate change *mitigation*, for instance, renewable energy collectives, without any interference from governmental actors (Boon & Dieperink, 2014). Oftentimes, municipalities are not even aware of those initiatives, because they happen autonomously and they are not systematically monitored. However, to the best of their knowledge, no such initiatives exist for adaptation, according to the members of the platform. Examples that come close concern communities living in un-embanked areas. Although flood risk governance is highly institutionalized in general, un-embanked areas in the Netherlands fall outside of the responsibility of public water authorities. But even here, municipalities tend to feel at least partly responsible. Rotterdam

Heijplaat is a case in point. Here, the municipality has constructed a partial levy, whereas citizens reduce flood risks by adapting their houses to rising waters from the river, for instance, through the elevation of electricity sockets, by locating essential utilities on higher floors, and by watertightening lower levels of the house.

There are many citizens' initiatives that deal with the design, execution, and maintenance of community green space in city neighbourhoods without government interference, but these are initiated for other reasons than for their adaptation benefits. Citizens are not aware of adaptation risks or feel a sense of urgency for taking adaptation action (Mees, Driessen, & Runhaar, 2014), or they expect the government to be responsible (Adger, Quinn, Lorenzoni, Murphy, & Sweeney, 2013; Wamsler, 2016). In the absence of citizens' motivation or agency to adapt to climate change, governments must still participate in citizens' initiatives to a considerable degree, as is discussed in the next paragraphs.

### 5.2 | Rung 2: Facilitating

In the Netherlands, a few recent examples exist of facilitating practices by local governments. Several municipalities have hired and trained “rainwater guardians” (“regenwacht” in Dutch), who advise citizens on how to store rainwater on their properties and how to design a “rainproof” garden. In the city of Amersfoort, the municipality goes door to door with informal talks to encourage citizens to disconnect their downspouts from the sewage system and to give advice on alternative measures. Another example of a facilitating government concerns the case of the “Nelson Mandela” square in the city of Breda. Here, the local government facilitated a community initiative by providing a design agency to the community to help develop a blue-green, climate adaptive square (see <https://urbansynergy.nl/project/nelson-mandelaplein-breda/>). This previously paved square has been transformed into a creative playground, by integrating green spaces with plants/trees and water elements such as fountains and water retention basins into the design of the square. A third example is the “Boomgaard” initiative in the municipality of Dalftsen, in which case citizens store rainwater on their properties (they are disconnected from the sewage system). The municipality provides knowledge about rainwater storage solutions and provides a small budget for the creation of a legal entity for the citizen initiative (e.g., a foundation) or for hiring an expert. There are also examples of cases in which the municipality only provides incidental reimbursement of expenses made by citizens. The municipality of The Hague sometimes hires team coaches, being self-employed professionals, to create and maintain the enthusiasm of volunteers of community initiatives.

Based on our observations, we conclude that this government role is still modest and limited to adaptation to pluvial flooding, by encouraging citizens to store rainwater on their properties. The main practice of this facilitating role concerns a limited support of community initiatives, predominantly in the form of advice, knowledge, and the creation of a platform for like-minded people to find each other and to meet. If money is provided, it is limited and meant to cover

expenses, to hire an expert or to create a legal entity. Facilitation is meant to build the skills and capacities of citizens, so that they can take up responsibilities for the provision of public services.

### 5.3 | Rung 3: Stimulating

There are various programmes of structural subsidies or tax reductions used by Dutch municipalities and local water authorities to stimulate citizens to store rainwater on their properties. As one municipal practitioner motivated, “*One Euro is worth more on private property than on public grounds*” (session on government roles, March 2018), arguing that private investments generate additional societal value such as raising citizens' awareness, educating children, and creating social cohesion. For instance, there is a national programme “Operation Stone Break” (translated from Dutch: Operatie Steenbreek, see <https://www.operatiesteenbreek.nl/>) in which 75 Dutch municipalities participate. This programme stimulates citizens to remove pavements in their gardens by providing plants for free, swapping impermeable tiles for plants (translated from Dutch: “tegel eruit, plant erin”). Several municipalities have a subsidy programme for green roofs. A few municipalities are experimenting with water tax differentiation to encourage citizens to take measures to store rainwater on their properties. Important for this government role is the willingness to experiment with alternative forms of financing instead of the provision of traditional subsidies. The argument is that traditional subsidies cannot be sustained over a longer period and hence the initiatives should not become dependent on them. Some examples that were discussed in the session on financing (April, 2017) are the provision of guarantees, in-kind funding, making temporary space available for urban farming, providing plants, and so forth, vouchers, micro financing, seed money, and tax differentiation.

This role is more common than the facilitating role, based on our observations and as also reconfirmed by the group in the special session on government roles. Also, here, it is mainly apparent in adaptation to pluvial flooding. The common practice is to develop a policy that employs various incentives to entice private action.

### 5.4 | Rung 4: Network steering

In the Netherlands, numerous examples exist of this type of government participation in adaptation. “*Networking means that you are more of a partner*” (practitioner in session on local government roles). For instance, “Amsterdam Rainproof” is a network platform that was founded by the Amsterdam municipality (see <https://www.rainproof.nl/>). It consists of different community initiatives that run projects to adapt public and private space to heavy rainfall, in cooperation with businesses such as garden centers and horticulturists. The main role of the municipality is to have an overview of initiatives, to bring people together to form a community initiative, to bring different initiatives in contact with each other, and to spread information and knowledge. A second example is the municipality of Amersfoort that has created a citizens' science network, together with a community college and a group

of artists. Citizens are monitoring and analysing climate change and its impact in different parts of the city (see <http://www.meetjestad.net/>). Participants receive free training. A third example concerns the creation of a multifunctional dike with a rooftop park in Rotterdam, to protect the surrounding neighbourhood from fluvial flooding (see <http://www.dakparkrotterdam.nl/>). Municipal project leaders have assembled and coordinated a network of stakeholders, including citizens of surrounding neighbourhoods, to design and implement the rooftop park (Mees & Driessen, 2018). A few active citizens were key in co-initiating the project by pressuring the municipality to increase green space. Although citizens could codesign and complement the park, they were not involved in the problem framing and goal setting of the project. The main roles of the consecutive municipal project leaders were to convene the collaborative process, to resolve conflicts, and to build trust among network participants.

Finally, “water” squares, “climate” squares, or “green” school squares have become a popular measure for mitigating heavy rainfall, in addition to other benefits such as creating green space or a healthier environment for kids to play. In several Dutch cities, water squares have been developed or are currently planned or being planned to be developed. Usually, as was witnessed in the case of the Tiel Watersquare, the municipality initiates the project and collaborates with engagement of the community surrounding the square. Typically, a civil servant of the municipality is the project leader, who coordinates the decision-making process and involves all stakeholders. Oftentimes, the role of the local government cannot be classified as network steering in all phases of the development of a water square. For instance, in the Tiel case, there was engagement with the community about the design of the square, but the community expected the local government to build and maintain it. Therefore, parts of the process in Tiel can be classified as public participation organised by a regulating government.

Network steering is still the most common rung on the ladder for dealing with community initiatives in adaptation, as is also expressed by the members in the session on government roles. The network role appears to be growing at the cost of the traditional regulating role. Again, this role is mainly witnessed for pluvial flooding. The Rotterdam Rooftop park case is one of few exceptions of a network role in fluvial flooding. As mentioned in Section 3, fluvial flooding is still heavily dominated by the regulating role of different levels of government.

## 6 | ANALYSING THE DYNAMICS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROLES IN CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

### 6.1 | A slow transition from a regulating towards a facilitating role

The study shows a slow but gradual move of local governments away from the traditional regulating role in adaptation. This regulating role is still the most dominant, certainly for adaptation to fluvial flooding, because it concerns public water safety. The level of urgency is a key explanatory factor: The higher the urgency, the higher local

governments climb on the ladder. As one practitioner expressed: “If you really need citizens, because otherwise you will get issues in your city, citizens actions must be less voluntary and so we need to have a more active role” (session on local governments, March 2018). Such view is held by all participants of this session. The level of urgency determines the institutional context, thereby steering governmental roles for adaptation to pluvial and fluvial flooding. Several examples as discussed in the previous sections show that local governments are indeed descending the ladder but mainly for adaptation to pluvial flooding. And even here, network steering as is for instance witnessed in the surge of initiatives on the development of green and blue squares—one rung down from regulating—is the most common government role.

Yet local governments are increasingly experimenting with taking up roles lower down the ladder (see Table 2). They are exhibiting a stimulating role in their rapidly growing practices that entice citizens to add greenery on their private properties, such as the nationwide run “Operation Stone Break” and the numerous subsidy programmes for green roofs. They are showing, albeit to a lesser extent, a facilitating role in their practices to provide initiatives with essential expertise, such as the example of the training of professionals to act as “Rainwater guardians,” as is witnessed in an increasing number of municipalities. A recurring finding in the discussions of the meetings was that they (aim to) vary with different roles for different citizens’ initiatives, arguing that some initiatives need more active stimulation or steering than others. The roles of local governments also tend to move up and

down the ladder along with the citizens’ initiative, so their role for one and the same initiative is not fixed in time. Local practitioners mention that, oftentimes, they initiate a project and start with a network steering role. Then they try to let go once the initiative is up and running. As and when an initiative struggles with continuation—for instance, when certain active residents quit a certain green maintenance initiative because they are moving out of the neighbourhood—they will try to reinvigorate it by taking up a stimulating or networking role. As one practitioner said, “As local government we should fine tune our role with the pace and energy of the involved citizens” (session on local government roles, March 2018).

When asked about the utility of the ladder, practitioners indicated that they found it useful for reflecting on their roles and for discussing and comparing them amongst each other (session on local government roles, March 2018). Some practitioners expressed that they miss an additional rung on the ladder, ie, a “cooperating” role. This role entails that initiatives are self-initiated and self-coordinated, and the government is one of the many partners in an alliance or public-private partnership of such initiative. In their view, this cooperating role could represent an additional rung on the ladder, sitting in between the stimulating and network steering role. In our view, such coordinating role is a specification of the network steering role and does not a priori justify an additional rung without further research. However, it does signify the challenge to classify roles into distinct rungs as the boundaries between the rungs are more blurred in everyday practice.

**TABLE 2** Overview of the roles of local governments in adaptation initiatives in the Netherlands

Rung	Roles for local governments	Examples of adaptation initiatives of citizens	Common practices of local government roles
4	Network steering	“Amsterdam Rainproof”	Bring citizens together, connect initiatives with local businesses, bring different initiatives in contact with each other, spread information, programme coordination
		“Meet je Stad” (Measure your city-initiative in Amersfoort)	Bring citizens together, train citizens to monitor and analyse data, programme coordination
		“Dakpark Rotterdam” (rooftop park in Rotterdam)	Bring stakeholders incl. citizens together, programme coordination, resolve conflicts, build trust
		Various initiatives to develop blue and/or green squares	Bring stakeholders incl. citizens together, coordination in the development stage of the project
3	Stimulating	“Operation Stone Break” (national programme)	Provision of free plants and free removal of tiles and pavements
		Subsidy programmes for green roofs	Provision of a fee per square metre for the installation of the roof, and/or offering free advice
		Alternative funding	Experimentation with water tax differentiation, in-kind funding (plants, equipment), microfinancing, making temporary space available for urban farming
2	Facilitating/enabling	“Regenwachten” (rainwater guardians in various cities)	Training of self-employed professionals to advise citizens on how to store rainwater on their properties
		House visits Amersfoort	Going door to door to advise citizens
		“Nelson Mandela square”	Hiring an agency to help citizens with the design of the square
		“Boomgaard Dalfsen” (Orchard initiative in Dalfsen)	Hiring of an expert to advise citizens, provision of a small subsidy to create a legal entity
1	Letting go	Nonexistent in adaptation	No role for the local government

## 6.2 | Practitioners' concerns in moving down the ladder

Practitioners also expressed concerns when descending towards the lower rungs of the ladder. First, there are several concerns with respect to the internal organisation. Practitioners who are cooperating with citizens' initiatives are often frustrated by the lack of their own organisation's flexibility and willingness to bend the rules when needed to facilitate the initiative. Related to this, they express the concern that there is a need for one clear point of contact for citizens within the municipal organisation to avoid citizens being sent back and forth, thereby killing the energy in the initiative. Furthermore, they have trouble selling citizens' initiatives within their organisations and to their politicians, because of the relatively limited contribution of citizens' initiatives in addressing the adaptation problem, as perceived by some civil servants and local governors. The practitioners in the City Deal network try to counteract this, by stressing other important benefits of citizens' initiatives, such as the awareness raising for climate adaptation and the building of social cohesion among citizens. Nevertheless, the perceived lack of effectiveness of citizens' initiatives could become a catch-22 situation. This is because recent research by Edelenbos et al. (2017) indicates that the level of enthusiasm of the local government for citizens' initiatives influences the impact of such initiatives: A limited passion of local officials limits the success of such initiatives. Edelenbos et al. (2017) also show that another reason for a limited buy-in of certain staff of the municipal organisation is that, in some cases, they feel threatened by them (Edelenbos et al., 2017). Although such feelings were never expressed among the participants of the City Deal network, they did indicate that they are occasionally confronted with colleagues in their organisation who hold such sentiments.

A second concern regards the continuation of initiatives, especially those that fulfil a maintenance role of public green space or school play grounds. How to maintain them in the long run? What happens when the government lets go? This has induced a few municipalities to have a back-up budget available in case an initiative dies, but this is quite exceptional. A final but important concern regards equity issues. What about certain neighbourhoods in which such initiatives are not present? Citizens that start those initiatives are often passionate and skilled networkers, who can easily make contacts and arrange (financial) support. This may result in a biased support of local governments towards better-off citizens, thereby further raising inequities among different citizen groups and neighbourhoods.

## 7 | DISCUSSION

The study has shown that currently, in the Netherlands, the *network steering* role is the most dominant local government role in citizens' initiatives for adaptation to pluvial flooding. Practices of this network steering role as described in Section 5.4 resemble the practices of the "facilitative leader" role of individual persons in the literature on collaborative innovation (e.g., Ansell & Gash, 2012; Meijer, 2014; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; 2018). Ansell and Gash (2012) differentiate between the

"steward," "mediator," and "catalyst" roles. The steward helps convene collaboration and maintain integrity; the mediator manages conflict and exchange between stakeholders; and the catalyst helps identify and realise value-creating opportunities (Ansell & Gash, 2012). In this study, all such kinds of practices were witnessed in different examples of roles and practices that we have described under the network steering role. The Rotterdam Rooftop Park is a particular case in point, in which all three practices of steward, mediator, and catalyst were present in the project leaders who coordinated the project over time. There are also some similarities between the practices of the network steering role and the role of boundary spanning in the network governance literature (e.g., Van Hulst, de Graaf, & van den Brink, 2012; Williams, 2002). Again, this literature primarily refers to individual, skilled networkers, who can bridge different interests and cross boundaries of organisations. They connect different stakeholders and instigate dialogue to create a shared interest (Williams, 2002), while also connecting the process in the network with the process in their own organisation (Van Hulst et al., 2012). Both types of practices were found to be performed by the project leaders in the Rotterdam Rooftop Park case.

The *facilitation* role resembles that of the professional process facilitator as described in the literature on deliberative governance (Cooper & Smith, 2012; Moore, 2012). Both show facilitative practices but with different objectives in mind. A key difference is that the professional process facilitator is primarily occupied with the facilitation of public participation processes such as citizen panels, citizen juries, planning cells, and mini-publics with the aim to inform public policy, whereas the role of local governments in government participation is to facilitate the process of citizens initiatives themselves, to help them realise their own public goods and services.

The finding that government roles are flexible—they vary among initiatives and within different stages of one and the same initiative—is in line with recent work on governance arrangements for adaptation that has shown that different arrangements for one and the same adaptation issue are stacked upon each other (Mees, 2014). This coexistence of arrangements, with different roles for governments for each arrangement, is also found in other fields of environmental research (Arts, Leroy, & Van Tatenhove, 2006; Driessen et al., 2012; Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Nilsson, Eklund, & Tyskeng, 2009). This flexibility of government roles indicates a need for a "reflexive governance" that creates space for such initiatives (Frantzeskaki et al., 2013, p. 114).

The concern for equity expressed by the local practitioners in this study resonates with similar concerns in the coproduction literature. Research consistently shows that wealthier and more educated citizens are more inclined to coproduction (Jakobsen & Andersen, 2013; Meijer, 2012; Snel, Custers, & Engbersen, 2018; Talsma & Molenbroek, 2012; Verschuere, Brandsen, & Pestoff, 2012). When citizen input forms a large part of the public service delivery, coproduction often reinforces existing inequalities among citizens (Jakobsen & Andersen, 2013). So there is a risk that only specific private interests are served, rather than public value for everyone (Meijer, 2012). Local governments can compensate for this by targeting their efforts towards the facilitation of specific citizens' initiatives in certain neighbourhoods and perhaps climb on the ladder to take up a more steering role in such cases. Hence, in such a



situation, a responsabilisation of citizens does not necessarily imply a deresponsibilisation of governmental actors.

## 8 | CONCLUSIONS

This study has engaged with a prominent knowledge gap by conceptually and empirically unpacking the role of governments in citizens' initiatives. We explored government roles in citizens' initiatives for adaptation to pluvial and fluvial flood risks, addressing the research question of how and to what extent the roles and practices of local governments are changing in concordance with an increased citizen responsabilisation. This exploration was conducted using a "ladder of government participation" as a heuristic device. The results show that local governments are slowly but gradually descending the ladder of government participation, thereby fulfilling more networking, stimulating, and facilitating roles. Nevertheless, they do this predominantly in the case of initiatives that deal with pluvial flood risks. This is not the case for fluvial flood risks with the common goal of water safety. One explanation is that the institutional context requires governments to take up responsibilities for water safety. Another explanation is the shared view of local practitioners that matters of urgency require a bigger role for the government, as was shown in this study. The higher the perceived urgency of a certain climate risk, the higher they will tend to climb on the ladder towards a regulating role. This is still very much the case for fluvial flood risks, and therefore, local governments tend to stay on the highest rungs of the ladder for those types of high risk issues. Key concerns of local policy practitioners that are climbing down the ladder towards a more facilitating role in adaptation to pluvial flooding are (a) the flexibility and the support of their own municipal organisation to facilitate such initiatives, (b) the continuity of citizens' initiatives over time, and (c) the potential increase of inequity between citizen groups and neighbourhoods from facilitating citizens' initiatives, because they tend to be over-represented in better-off neighbourhoods.

The government participation ladder has proven to be useful to symmetrically study the government's roles that correspond with certain citizens' roles, allowing for a more precise analysis of the interactions between governments and citizens. It has proven to be a useful heuristic device with which the roles of government concerning the government participation in citizens' initiatives for adaptation could be explored. The fact that government roles are flexible—see Section 7—shows that the ladder should not be used in a static way. As is the case with any ideal-typical classification, the boundaries between classes are never that straightforward in practice. Our study shows that governments can move from one role to the other over time for one and the same initiative, as well as take up several roles simultaneously for different citizens' initiatives. Each analysis is a snap-shot in time, and therefore, longitudinal studies on government roles are required to analyse whether and to what extent the shift towards the newer types of government roles is proof of a more permanent transition of local governments or not.

Having said this, we realise that our study on government roles in citizens' initiatives and the resulting "ladder of government participation" is only the first modest step towards deepening our knowledge on city-

citizen interactions in the era of the Big Society. We still lack a thorough understanding of the facilitative and enabling roles that local policy practitioners and their organisations could play in such new modes of participation (Aylett, 2013) in various fields of public policy. Our study has focussed on the experience and perceptions of the policy practitioners who directly interact with citizens' initiatives. But what about the views of other political elites? How supportive are governors and councillors of such facilitative roles for local governments in the field of climate change adaptation? And what do the citizens, active in such initiatives, think of the role of the local government? Furthermore, we need more insights on the tensions such new participation modes create between citizen and government responsibilities and how these tensions can be overcome. New modes of participation may also open up avenues for coproduction modes of research in this area.

We encourage other researchers to further develop the ladder. First, researchers could refine the distinctions between the ideal-typical classifications, that is, the rungs on the ladder, with other dimensions (in addition to or partly replacing the dimensions used in this study: who initiates, who coordinates, who decides), and investigate whether a "cooperating" role, as expressed by the practitioners, is sufficiently distinctive to warrant an additional rung on the ladder. Second, conceptually the ladder could be further refined and substantiated by combining insights on the roles of individual leaders and public servants from different strands of governance and planning literature, such as the literature on network governance, on deliberative governance, on collaborative innovation, on reflexive governance, and on collaborative planning. Those strands have not yet been integrated but could provide useful insights in the roles of governments with respect to the facilitation and networking roles. Third, further empirical and more longitudinal research is needed to study the utility of the ladder for other institutional and geographical contexts and for other public policy fields. Such research endeavours may prove to be challenging. Key here is getting access to policy practitioners and other political elites and obtaining oftentimes sensitive information on their roles and interactions with citizens. Participant observation has shown to be a very useful method for acquiring such access and information. However, participant observation may not always be feasible, and therefore, researchers will also have to rely on other qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups.

We encourage reflexive policy practitioners to use the ladder to make informed decisions about how and to what extent they will facilitate citizens' initiatives, taking into consideration the above-mentioned concerns for the continuity and equity of citizens' initiatives. By taking these next steps, the ladder of government participation has the potential to develop into a well-validated conceptual framework that provides policy relevant insights into the roles of governments in their engagement and interaction with citizen-led initiatives for climate change adaptation and beyond.

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