

Policy Brief 4

Resilient communities: the role of local government



Mike Duijn, Jurian Edelenbos, Daniela Ochoa Peralta, Jan Franssen
Vital Cities & Citizens: Erasmus University Rotterdam May 2020

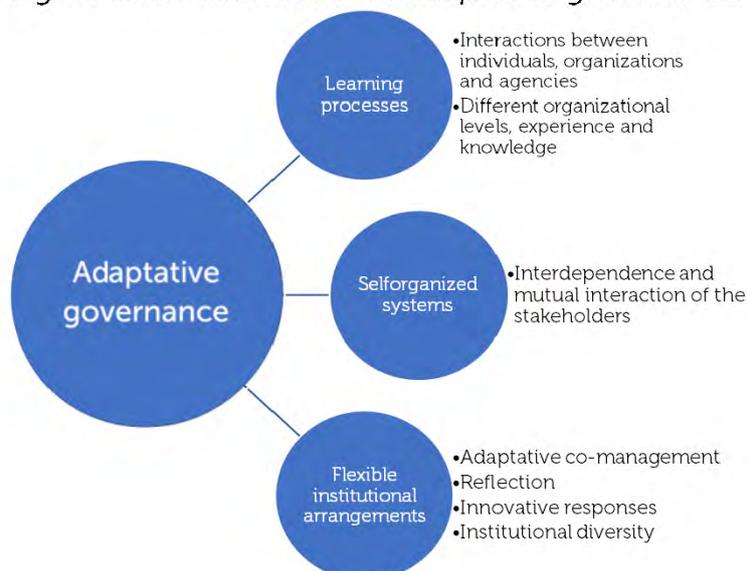
Covid-19 demands a paradigm shift in the way Rotterdam is managed. Infrastructure-led development is not enough, as it (1) can not deal with social problems such as loneliness; (2) does not allow for enough flexibility to deal with uncertainty; and (3) does not unleash innovation and creativity. Rotterdam city council realises the need for a paradigm shift. This policy paper outlines an adaptive, bottom-up and resilient alternative. Besides stating what can be done, it also states what should not be done.

Adaptive governance

Previous crises show that dealing with Covid-19 requires a paradigm shift of local governments to deal with uncertainty (Folke, 2006; Huitema et al, 2009; Rijke et al, 2012). Adaptive governance enables local governments to deal with uncertainty (Adger et al, 2009). This entails the involvement of multiple actors in decision-making processes as well as embracing self-organization of communities and entrepreneurs, thus enabling continuous learning and flexibility (Lebel et al, 2006).

Adaptive governance is polycentric, which entails that initiatives are not centrally controlled (Huitema et al., 2009). To the contrary: institutional diversity and redundancy (overlap) make the system less vulnerable: if one unit fails, others may take over their functions (e.g., Granovetter 1981). Diverse actors and approaches enable experimentation with different approaches, thus increasing the exchange of knowledge, innovation and mutual learning (Ostrom, 2005). It also entails working at different levels (individual, street, neighbourhood, city...) depending on the scope of a problem and initiative.

Figure 1. Characteristics of adaptive governance



Source: Brunner et al., 2005; Adger et al., 2009; Folke, 2006.

Community-Based Initiatives (CBIs)

In CBIs local actors respond and act largely themselves (Van Meerkerk, et al, 2013). They can be very effective in dealing with uncertainty and wicked social issues because local communities have unique local knowledge and experience in dealing with their own challenges (Edelenbos et al, 2017). CBIs can deal with many social challenges, ranging from loneliness to poor access to food (Bailey, 2012; Healey, 2015). They create additional value to the services and products of local governments and markets (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016; Duijn & Van Popering-Verkerk, 2018).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many CBIs emerge, but it is a challenge for these CBIs to succeed and sustain. It demands:

- Strong bonding ties among members of the core group
- Transformational (motivational and intellectually stimulating) leadership
- Organizational capacity
- Recognition within the community (ulug and horlings, 2018; igalla et al., 2019).

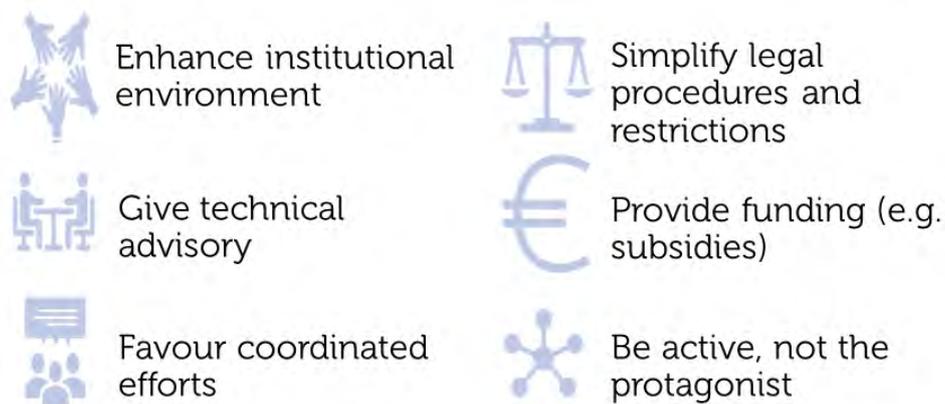
Roles of local governments

Local governments can have different reasons to support CBIs, such as budget cutbacks, co-creation and citizen engagement (e.g. Torfing et al., 2016), CBIs can be of strategic interest, for instance, to maintain a certain level of service delivery during a crisis. The government can support CBI's in many ways (Duijn et al., 2019):

- *Recognize and legitimize* as an additional executive power in the city; a force that 'gets things done', by, with and/or for the residents and entrepreneurs. Supporting attitudes by tolerating and encouraging citizen initiatives are helpful (e.g. Aladuwaka and Momsen, 2010; Hill et al., 2007; Johnson and Young, 1997; Ostrom, 2005).
- *Appreciate* the specific nature of CBIs and their capacities to perform (Igalla, et al., 2019).
- *Designate services and support functions* for CBIs to get started or gain assets (Bailey, 2012). This includes start-up funds, business networking and marketing, technical training and knowledge transfer (Korosec and Berman, 2006; Healey, 2015; Edelenbos et al, 2018).
- Help in acquiring *resources*, such as funding, knowledge, networks, land or space (e.g. Fonchingong, 2005).
- *One-stop-shop*: local government should internally coordinate and align working processes, political legitimization and resources (finance, organizational capacity, information, etc.). Local government professionals must be able and legitimized to perform an internal advocacy-function for the initiative.
- *Network*: Inform, coordinate and align with other community-based, professional and/or government initiatives. Local government professionals must perform a brokering-function for the initiative and stimulate complementarity and 'adding up' with other proactive urban actors.

- *Reliable*: The system must be stable enough for proactive citizens to rely on when applying for support, legitimization, or at least not be hindered by bureaucratic and/or political considerations.

Figure 2. Government actions to support CBIs (inspirations)



Source: Fonchingong, 2005; Korosec and Berman, 2006; Llano-Arias, 2015

What should a local government NOT do

Supporting CBIs, even if well-intended, can easily harm local initiative and lead to participation fatigue. A local government should refrain from the following:

- *Steering authority*: Local governments are not well-equipped to act as one of the steering authorities of urban polycentric governance. This especially holds for dealing with initiatives of (non-professional) urban, self-organizing entities, such as collectives of proactive citizens (Voorberg et al., 2015).
- *Overactive*: Negative effects arise if governments become overactive, demanding “their own programs or services rather than working collaboratively with cooperatives” (Gonzales, 2010).
- *Take over*: preventing the tendency to ‘take over the initiative and mould it in bureaucratic rationales’ (Brandsen, 2016).
- *Red tape*: support of the local government in the form of funding can negatively influence outcomes, if it misaligns the timing of outputs, adds red tape and leads to local competition and participation fatigue (Creamer, 2015).
- *Political interference*: This way of conduct by local governments should not be a question of political preferences that change every four years when a new administration takes office.

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