GUIDE 2.0: FOR THE PARTICIPATION BYE-LAW

Getting started with participation

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Berenschot & the Association of Dutch Municipalities

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Introduction

Participation has become an integral part of the daily life of Dutch citizens. Public and government participation are becoming increasingly more important in the country. The expectation is that residents will want to participate[1] and many municipal authorities (75% in the 2022 coalition agreements) have stated that they intend to increase participation in 'one way or another'.[2]

At the same time, participation is a difficult subject. The principles and conditions for a good process are numerous and complicated; there is a serious risk of disappointment among residents, and achieving the right balance between participation and representative democracy is a complex task.

The legislative proposal Strengthening Participation at Decentralised Level Act (hereinafter 'the legislative proposal') aims to *"encourage municipal councils and other decentralised representative bodies to create clear frameworks for residents and representatives for participation in a bye-law".*

We briefly explain the legislative proposal below.

Legislative proposal for strengthening participation at decentralised level

The legislative proposal was submitted in September 2022 and aims to make it possible for every municipality to draw up clear frameworks and rules for participation, suited to local circumstances. In order to take that local context into account, the legislative proposal specifies *that* the council will lay down rules ('in a bye-law'), but not *how* those rules should be laid down.

First, the more technical information. According to the public involvement bye-law (which municipalities already have at their disposal; see Article 150 of the Municipalities Act), residents must be involved in policy preparation. If a municipality does not regulate anything else in the public involvement bye-law, the uniform public preparatory procedure (Dutch abbreviation: UOV) in section 3.4 of the General Administrative Law Act applies. This includes the *classic opinion procedure*, which ensures that residents can express their *opinions* on the subject of the procedure in writing or orally.

With the legislative proposal and the intended participation bye-law, the public involvement bye-law will be expanded: **a municipality[3] can regulate participation not just for preparing policy but also for its implementation and evaluation.**

The legislative proposal also stipulates the possibility of the right to challenge. It is again the task of the municipal council to draft rules on this subject. With the right to challenge, residents can ask their municipalities to allow them to take over the execution of a municipal task if they believe they

[1] However, the figures for this are diverse. The necessary support exists for greater control, for contributing to neighbourhood activities and for some participation instruments. Vollaard, H., Jansen, G. et al. (SKON). *Democracy in the municipality: Local Voter Survey 2022.*
[2] Berenschot. (2022). What is the Netherlands thinking and doing? Analysis of the 2022 coalition agreements. Utrecht: Berenschot.
[3] The legislative proposal also applies to provinces and water authorities. For the sake of readability, however, we will limit ourselves to municipalities in this guide.

can perform this task *better and cheaper*. This could include the maintenance of a park or the management of sports fields or other social facilities.

What does this legislative proposal mean for municipalities?

We briefly explain the most important points below:

Clarity: the explanatory notes to the legislative proposal often emphasise that clear and transparent processes must be created in order for participation to be successful. The new participation bye-law should contribute to this, creating clarity for residents and for the municipality itself. Among other things, this clarity can relate to the course of the process, the goals of participation, the degree of influence and how the results of the process are subsequently used.

For reasons of legal certainty, it is very desirable that municipalities provide clarity about the possibilities for participation. At the same time, there must be room to take account of local ambitions and circumstances. After all, they can differ greatly. In principle, municipalities have the freedom to decide how they involve residents in the various policy phases and how their vision of participation is reflected in the participation bye-law. It therefore makes sense for a municipality to first decide how it looks at participation and how participation should be shaped. Having done that, it can then record these ideas in legally-binding documents.

Representative democracy is and remains the guiding principle: with participation, the focus soon turns to the relationship between representative and participatory democracy. The legislative proposal is clear about this. This relationship is discussed in more detail in **Step 1**.

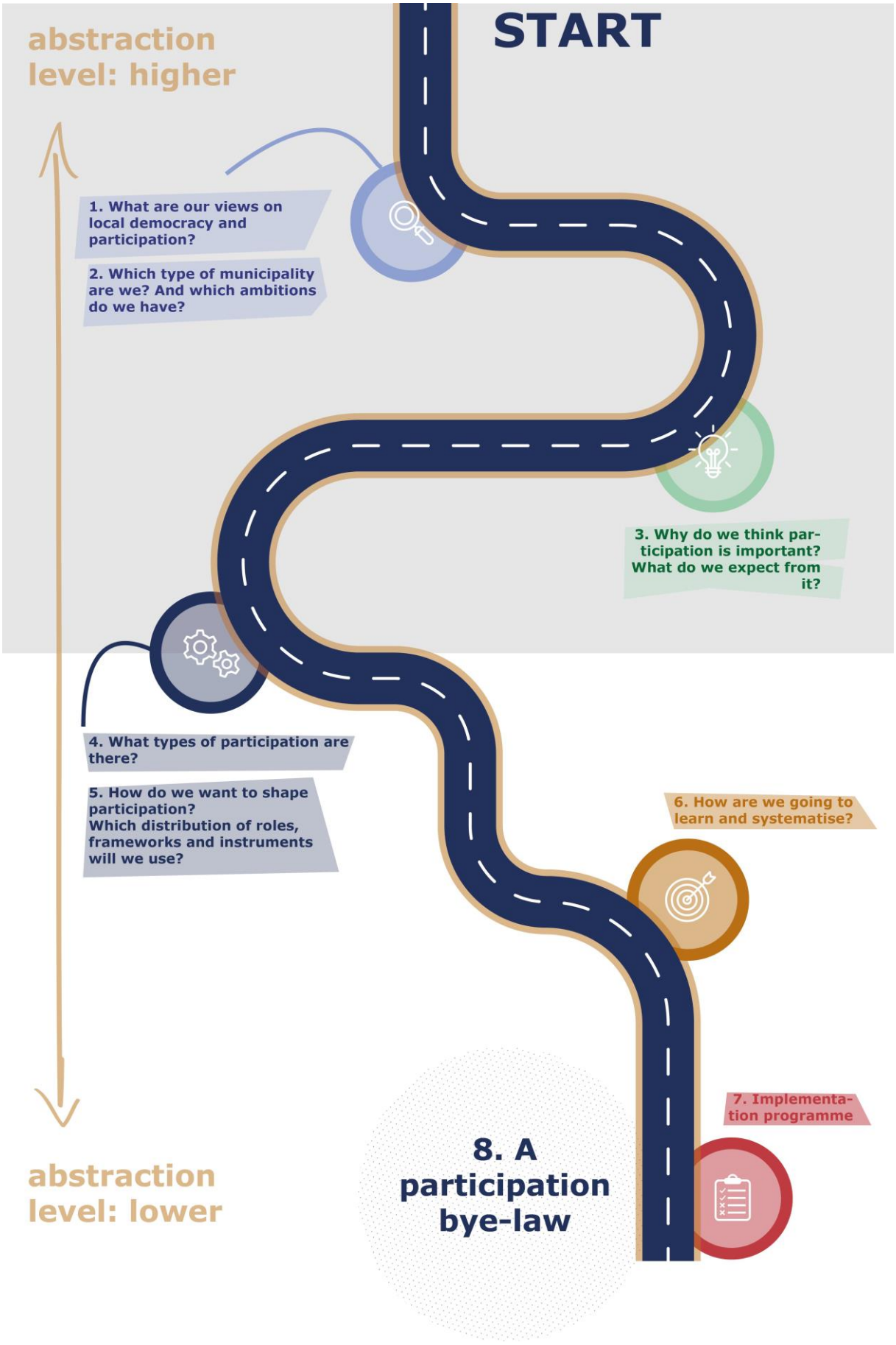
Choices made by the municipal council: the explanatory notes are crystal clear about the fact that the municipal council will have to make choices about participation.[4] Local authorities can choose how they implement the bye-law but the government expects the municipal council to play a defining role. This is shown by the following two examples (and there are many more):

"*Because council members have control over the frameworks, the representative bodies themselves ensure that there is a good connection between representative democracy and participatory democracy.*"[5]

"*The proposed mandatory participation bye-law therefore requires the municipal council to indicate in advance how it will deal with participation in the various phases of the policy process.*"[6]

In the next chapter, we explain how this guide works, what it includes or does not include and how it can best be used. The guide is consistent with the explanatory notes, arguments and definitions that are part of the legislative proposal and the Explanatory Memorandum written for it.[7]

[4] The legislative proposal refers to 'the council' 106 times.
[5] Explanatory Memorandum, *Parliamentary Paper* 2022, 36210, no. 3., p. 6.
[6] Explanatory Memorandum, p. 15.
[7] See the Explanatory Memorandum.


START
abstraction level: higher
1. What are our views on local democracy and participation?
2. Which type of municipality are we? And which ambitions do we have?
3. Why do we think participation is important? What do we expect from it?
4. What types of participation are there?
5. How do we want to shape participation? Which distribution of roles, frameworks and instruments will we use?
6. How are we going to learn and systematise?
7. Implementation programme
8. A participation bye-law
abstraction level: lower

About this guide

A roadmap

This guide is about how municipalities can tackle the subject of participation in a general sense. So it is not about organising participation 'in that one process' but primarily about working towards a general vision, a general policy and a general implementation programme. And ultimately about anchoring all of this in the participation bye-law.

The roadmap is a general, accessible way for a municipality to explore important issues surrounding participation. The roadmap starts by focusing on fundamental questions about participation, democracy and citizenship and leads us step-by-step to important topics such as specific participation frameworks, methods and instruments.

The guide always includes the following for each step:

- A relevant, substantive description of the subject of the step. The necessary theory.
- A selection of ***good practices*** that are relevant for this step.
- A two-part set of tips that help you **get started** with a good conversation about this step. We have tips for explorers 🔭 and for innovators 🚀.
- A number of **sources** as **background** and food for thought. These sources give a more in-depth view of the step or serve as inspiration.

We also discuss frequently-recurring topics related to participation: the right to challenge (sample articles of this have also been included in the sample bye-law), decentralisation, representativeness and the role of the municipal council.

How to use the guide

The guide can be used in a number of different ways. Two examples:

- You can go through the steps one-by-one from start to finish. This structures the discussion on participation from more fundamental to more specific topics. At the same time, all the steps are closely related to each other. Often, a conversation about a specific component (such as the 'How' of participation) will involve reviewing previous steps (for example, to see whether the 'Why' and 'How' actually fit well together).
- You can cherry-pick the steps. You select the steps that are relevant to your municipality rather than going through all the steps from 1 to 8. Here it helps to discuss in any event the step with the related question 'Which type of municipality are we?' This step gives you an insight into which topics are worth addressing in detail.

Once you have completed all the selected steps, there will often be a need to repeat a few steps (quickly) before formulating (or fine-tuning) your vision or policy and finalising the bye-law.

The purpose of this guide is not so much to require you to complete all the steps with a participation bye-law as the ultimate goal and the final step, but rather to help you set up a modular process that suits the context and character of your municipality.

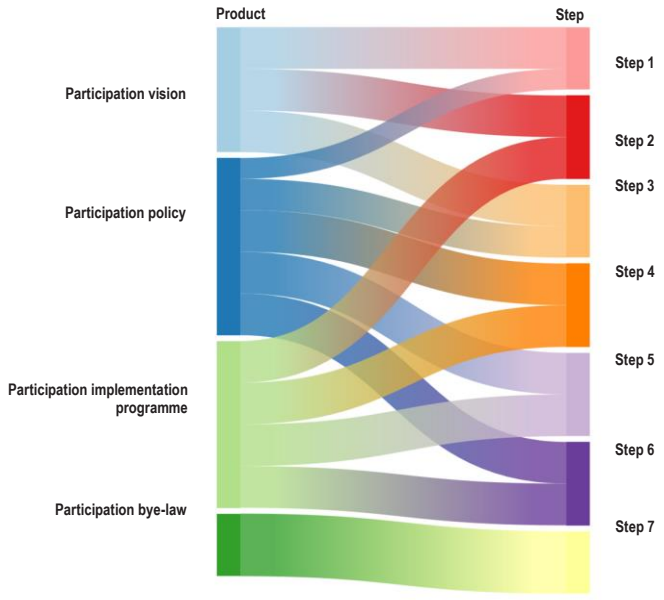
The steps on the roadmap:

1. **Participation and democracy**: The meaning of participation in a representative democracy in relation to the legislative proposal and the bye-law; what are we talking about and who are we doing it for?
2. **Which type of municipality are you** now in a participative sense? And which ambitions does your municipality have?
3. **Why participation?** How does your municipality answer the question 'Why is participation important'? What are the reasons and motives for participating (as a resident) and making participation (as a municipality) possible?
4. **What type of participation** is taking place or should take place in your municipality? The 'What' is about the formats and the framework (for example, a participation ladder) that your municipality uses to implement participation types.
5. **How do you shape participation?** Which roles are assigned and taken? Which frameworks and instruments are used to organise a specific participation project?
6. **Learning and evaluation**: How does your municipality organise learning about participation? By means of personal and organisational development, evaluations or even a learning programme?
7. **Implementation programme**: Are you also drawing up an action or implementation programme?
8. **Bye-law**: Create a local participation bye-law that does justice to the steps that were taken earlier.

Products & Steps

The result of the various steps is consistent with a number of existing municipal documents.

- **A participation vision** often addresses the meaning of participation in representative democracy, the municipality's ambition and a hypothesis about why the municipality considers participation important.
- **The participation policy** usually addresses the types of participation and the ways in which participation is organised.
- **A participation implementation programme** identifies a number of goals, results and/or activities that the municipality will undertake in the coming years.
- **The participation bye-law** anchors the agreement that the municipality makes with itself in the field of participation.



These documents overlap with the steps in this guide (see the figure on the right).

To make the steps more binding, it helps to use this guide and all the topics it deals with to arrive at these products.

Travelling the route together

The big question is of course: Who should be involved in taking these steps? In an ideal situation, every step is designed in a deliberative way: organising a good conversation with multiple actors such as residents, social organisations, local businesses, council members, the mayor and aldermen and civil servants. At the same time, the task of organising seven good conversations is a social challenge in itself. That is why, for each step, we make suggestions for an appropriate way to hold this type of conversation.

Step 1: The basis of what we are talking about

To get started with participation, it is important that everybody speaks the same language. That is why we start at the beginning by laying a good foundation for what we are talking about: participation and representative democracy.

Participation and representative democracy

The discussion about the precise definition of participation can soon get sidetracked. For this guide, we stay close to the definition specified in the legislative proposal and in the Explanatory Memorandum:

> *"Citizen participation is a policy-making method whereby residents – individually or organised, directly or indirectly – are given the opportunity to influence the preparation, implementation or evaluation of policy."*[8]

This definition ties in well with other definitions – for example, as used in a systematic literature study into participation[9] or in the Public Administration sector.[10]

One of the most frequently-asked questions about definitions of participation is whether providing information and communicating are also participation types? Although opinions on this topic differ and communication is very important for participation, the answer in this guide is: no, participation is really about exerting influence. This is different to receiving information.[11]

In the Netherlands, representative democracy is the starting point of democracy.[12] Participatory democracy supplements this. It is therefore necessary for representative and participatory democracy to relate to each other in a positive way.

Among other things, this search for the right relationships focuses on how the municipal council or municipal administration relates to participating residents. On the one hand, the municipal council decides in a more general sense how participation will look like (for example, frameworks, policy or a bye-law!). In this way, the municipal council creates the space within which participation can take place. The legislative proposal leaves municipalities free to decide how they implement this. On the other hand, such a decision about that space affects the influence of the municipal council

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[8] This definition is taken from: ProDemos. (2018). *Monitor Citizen Participation 2018. An inventory of municipal policy and activities in the field of citizen participation*, The Hague.
[9] Visser, V., van Popering-Verkerk, J. & van Buuren, A. (2019). *Well-substantiated designs for participation processes: Knowledge base for participation in the physical living environment.* GovernEUR, Erasmus University Rotterdam.
[10] Michels, A.M.B. (2011). The democratic value of citizen participation: interactive governance and deliberative forums. *Public Administration*, *20*(2), 75-84.
[11] For an in-depth look at this question, see Chapters 2 and 3 of the following study: Blok, S., Luiten, L., de Vries, R. & Lucas, T. (2023). Citizen participation at national level: a legal and empirical exploration.
[12] See the Explanatory Memorandum. *Parliamentary Paper* 2022, 36210, no. 3.

itself. More space or fewer frameworks may also mean less direct influence by the council on what a participatory process looks like and what potentially comes out of it.

The main question is therefore how best to shape the interplay between representative democracy (the elected representatives) and participatory democracy (the involvement of and influence by society).

Some examples of these different interpretations of the interplay:

- municipalities that emphasise citizen participation in policy-making and decision-making processes;
- municipalities that attach great importance to citizen initiatives, where the municipal administration defines frameworks and often plays a supporting role;
- municipalities that experiment with types of more direct influence such as a citizens' budget, a citizens' assembly, or a referendum.

More and more, these examples emphasise the interplay for the ‘benefit’ of participatory democracy. When highlighting participatory democracy, questions often arise about democratic values: how representative are participatory processes actually? Are all the stakeholders at the table and do they have equal influence? Should the council not always have the last word to ensure that democratic values are being safeguarded?

It then seems as if there is a fundamental tension between representative and participatory democracy. At the same time, we see in practice that this tension leads to a joint search for broadly supported decision-making, resulting in a strengthening of the balance. After all, questions can also be asked about how good the representativeness of representative democracy actually is. There is, for example, criticism of the lack of representation from different groups in society.

The first step on this route is therefore to become aware of the relationship between participatory and representative democracy. And then there is the challenge of always shaping this relationship in support of broad-based decision-making.

This step does not necessarily have to lead to choices about how exactly the interplay between representative and participatory democracy should look. But it will in any event lead to a good conversation about the different types of democracy. The shared commitment can be the intention to jointly search for the interplay between representative and participatory democracy and then further shape its development. Ultimately, this interplay must take shape in practice. With this step, you choose to jointly enter into a process that leads to a (fine-tuned) vision and a drafted bye-law. At the same time, you are making a specific contribution to daily participatory practice because you have increased awareness of the interplay in democracy.

GOOD PRACTICE: EFFECTIVE INTERPLAY BETWEEN DEMOCRACY & PARTICIPATION

The municipality of Hof van Twente decided to actively look for ideas about the right balance between representative and participatory democracy. In order to properly take the opinions of residents into account, the municipality decided to ask residents whether they wanted to join in the discussion. This resulted in a group of representatives consisting of residents, the council, the Municipal Executive and the administrative organisation, who jointly discussed the relationship between representative and participatory democracy and their vision of participation.

One conclusion from the meeting is that the Hof van Twente municipal council will (have to) take a more or less decisive position for ultimate decision-making for each situation. Frameworks and the effective management of expectations play a major role here. To a certain extent, the search for the right frameworks and the way residents are involved will be never-ending. In this way, the municipality of Hof van Twente, together with a group of residents, discovered that the search for the right balance between representative and participatory democracy is an important part of the process.

GOOD PRACTICE: CITIZENS IN ACTION

The municipality of Amsterdam is exploring and pioneering themes related to participation and democracy in many different ways. The municipality wants to work to create a (more) democratic city. For example, it has a Democratisation Team that focuses on questions such as 'What is democracy for you?' and themes such as 'inclusive and participatory in the neighbourhoods' and 'providing a service for good ideas and social initiatives'.

As part of this last theme, the municipality's point of departure is that residents of a neighbourhood often know more about what is happening in their surroundings and what is needed. To actively enable citizens to come up with solutions for these issues, the municipality has launched a scheme that awards up to € 100,000 for each social initiative. These amounts may sound large and are obviously not available in every municipality. However, support for social initiatives can also be very impactful on a smaller scale. One example of a more modest initiative that came about in this way in Amsterdam is the creation of a life-size chess set on Van Beuningenplein. Initiator Joost van Hienen and his neighbour noticed in 2019 that social cohesion in the neighbourhood was declining and people were visiting each other less. They also noticed that children were spending less and less time outside and couldn't keep their eyes off their smartphones, so they decided it was time for a change! A chessboard on which residents young and old could play together in the fresh air seemed like a positive step forward. And with great success. The municipality of Amsterdam made a budget available to realise the chessboard.

> ***"There are actually lots of possibilities in Amsterdam. I recommend this to everybody: if you want something to change, make a good plan, write it down and make sure you can pitch it somewhere. There are budgets available for things like this."***
>
> **- Joost van Hienen, initiator chess plaza Amsterdam**

To support these types of initiatives even more and to encourage citizens to come up with ideas, the municipality publishes open data such as evaluation, information about neighbourhood budgets and reports about participation and democratisation.

Background and knowledge sources

Source	Which information does this source contain?
Committee on Future-Oriented Local Government (2016). Towards plural democracy	Information about democracy that is constantly evolving and that requires different perspectives
Sartori, G. (1987). *The theory of democracy revisited* (Vol. 1). Chatham House Pub.	An extensive, theoretical in-depth study of democracy, representative democracy and participation
Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2005). The democratic anchorage of governance networks. In: *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 28(3), 195-218	How participatory processes can be democratically anchored
Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of participation in complex governance. In: *Public Administration Review*, 66, 66-75	How 'democratic' participation is
'Democratic Pocket Book' and 'Council Canvas Democratic Process'	Explanation of democratic values
Van de Pool, E. & Rijnja, G. (2017). *Stop discomfort*, with the Valuation methodology	Support for discussing abrasive subjects and situations

Getting started: explorer

The first step is to stimulate a good conversation about types of democracy. The shared commitment can be the intention to jointly search for the interplay between representative and participatory democracy.

Working method: review a case

One accessible but effective way to be able to evaluate or discuss this interplay is to use cases. These can be fictional examples or examples from practice. It is extra interesting when you collect cases from different domains (if available). The case describes a policy situation in which a particular type of participation has been applied or in which there is or was a desire to apply participation.

- **Step 1:** Divide the participants into groups of two. Each group receives a written case. The case includes a brief description of the issue, the type of issue it involves, the policy domain, the relevant stakeholders, why there is/was a desire to apply participation or why it was decided to do this.
- **Step 2:** First get the pairs to discuss among themselves how participatory and representative democracy relate to each other in the case in question. Ultimately, the intention is for each pair to arrive at a shared, brief reflection on the interplay and the relationship.
- **Step 3:** After an appropriate number of minutes, put two pairs together. Get them to present the case studied and then the final review to each other.
- **Step 4:** Ask the pairs to respond to each other's final review.

Getting started: innovator 🚀

If more general exchanges of ideas have already taken place about the interplay between participation and representative democracy, you can choose to shape this in more detail and make it more specific. Ultimately, the interplay must take shape in practice on the basis of a (more fine-tuned) vision and a drawn-up bye-law.

The working method below, suitable for innovators in the area of Step 1, consciously focuses on conducting a more fundamental conversation. A value-oriented conversation requires a setting in which space and respect come first. The way this conversation is organised therefore partly depends on the particular situation in a municipality. Sometimes it is wise to have such a conversation guided by an independent facilitator (from within or outside your own organisation). The conversation should ultimately lead to a clearer shared view of participation and representative democracy.

Working method: iceberg

With this method, the intention is to map out the visible events and characteristics (the tip of the iceberg). After this, the underlying, more deeply rooted structures and mental models will emerge.

- **Step 1:** The group meets for a short plenary session and works together to formulate a problem or challenge that the municipality is facing and for which participation might provide a solution.
- **Step 2:** Divide the participants into groups of three to five people and instruct them on the working method for this exercise (online on a Miro board, offline on a flipchart/whiteboard). Draw an iceberg on the page.
- **Step 3:** The problem is displayed at the top of the iceberg drawing. The participants discuss all the layers of the iceberg:
  - **Layer 1 (on the surface). Identify incidents and patterns:** What has been going on for some time and how is that expressed?
  - **Layer 2 (under water). Analyse the system structure:** Which types of structures are causing the patterns? (For example, relationships between actors.)
  - **Layer 3 (under water). Develop interventions**: What are the beliefs, values and assumptions that are creating the structures?
- **Step 4:** Get each group to reflect on participatory and representative elements in the entire context and form an opinion about the possible solution.

Step 2: Which type of municipality are you?

The second step is about reflecting on two topics. Firstly, **the ambition** of your municipality. Secondly, **the current state of affairs in your municipality**: how far have you gone in shaping the vision of participation and its implementation?

These two topics show the type of municipality you are in terms of participation. This is done using a finger exercise that we call the 'strategic picture'.

Ambition in the field of participation

Not every municipality is the same and not every municipality wants the same things. The basis for a vision of participation is to determine the municipality's ambition in the field of participation. This determines the content of the conversation and influences the next steps. The ambition cannot be determined using a standard checklist. The ambition is relative: does your municipality have higher or more modest ambitions for itself?

Modest ambitions	← →	High ambitions

The level of the ambitions has a direct effect on what is required to realise those ambitions.

Strategic picture: exploring strengths and weaknesses

To complete the next steps and/or formulate a vision, policy and implementation programme, we recommend that you draw a picture of your own situation. This strategic picture contains important information about the current state of affairs in your municipality.

When drawing the picture, place the following topics on the agenda:

- **Shared values**: To what extent is there a shared image of participation in the municipality?
- **Shared vision**: To what extent is there a detailed vision (more than, for example, the executive programme)?
- **Specific plan**: To what extent is there an implementation programme for participation?
- **In practice**: To what extent is your municipality already involved in participation in practice?
- **Experiential learning**: To what extent does learning take place on the basis of practical experiences?
- **Systematic learning**: To what extent does your municipality shape systematic learning?
- **Anchoring**: To what extent is participation anchored – for example, in guides and budgets?

For each topic, the answer can be affirmative or more negative: the municipality has made progress in this area or there is still work to be done. The municipality has extensive experience with this or indeed still very little.

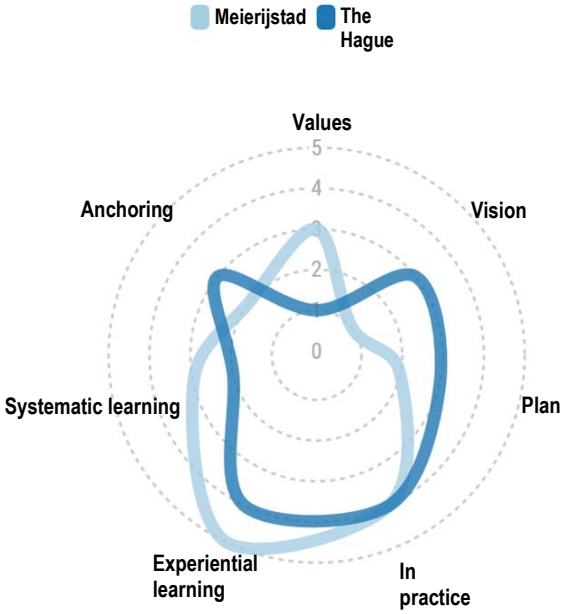
A topic can also be developed into sub-questions. For the 'In practice' point, this might include an elaboration of representation and inclusion in participation processes:

- What do we do to involve as many residents as possible?
- How accessible are our participation processes?
- Do we offer digital and physical accessibility and is our communication understandable?

For each topic, the priorities and points for attention for your municipality become clear during the conversation.

GOOD PRACTICE: THE OPENNESS OF MEIERIJSTAD

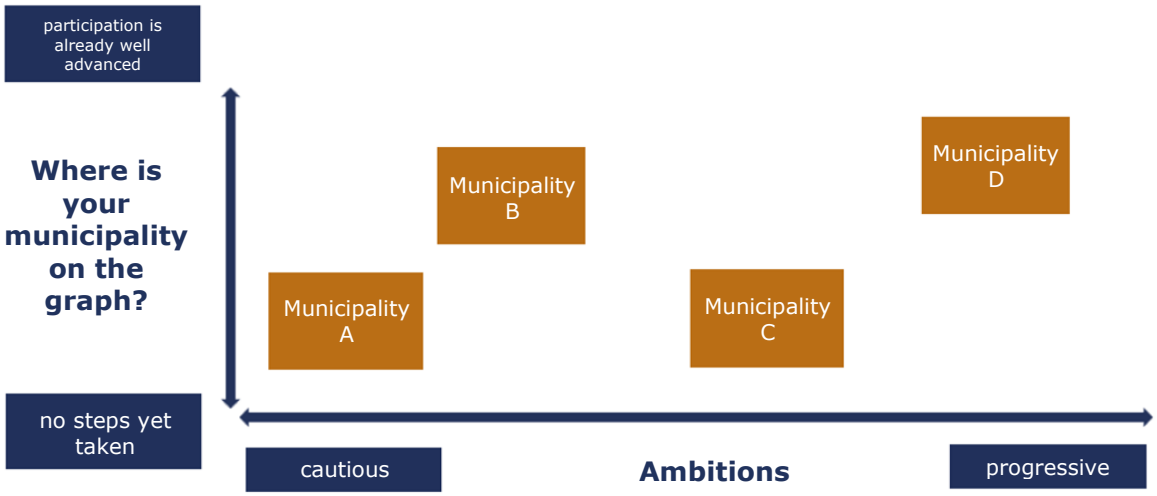
The municipality of Meierijstad has obtained a clear understanding of where it stands in terms of participation: its employees (such as neighbourhood advisers) have extensive experience, they are strongly focused on learning and they particularly want to work bottom-up with participation and learning. Participation and learning should not be fenced in too much by vision, policy and various implementation programmes. At the same time, the municipality is specifically pioneering how it can involve the municipal council (see *Good practices* at **Step 5**) and stimulate initiatives through the (very accessible) New Ideas Fund.



GOOD PRACTICE: SOMETHING TO HOLD ON TO IN THE HAGUE

The municipality of The Hague is involved in participation in a range of areas. For example, there is a Participation Compass to determine the quality of participation and a Participation Step-by-Step Plan that the municipality always follows. The Haags Samenspel team helps with the implementation of all the resources in this municipality and advises on organising participation processes. The Hague therefore has relatively many answers to the above questions but the interpretation of the seven topics varies greatly inside this large organisation.

The elaboration of the ambition and the strategic picture gives a good idea of where your municipality stands and where the strengths and weaknesses are located in terms of shaping the perspective on participation. This image serves as a starting point for your municipality to select and further implement the next steps in this guide.



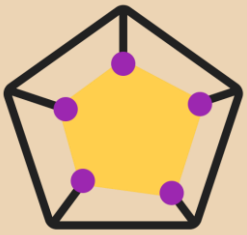
Background and knowledge sources

Source	Which information does this source contain?
QuickScan Local Democracy (QSLD)	The QSLD is a digital instrument for questioning residents, the municipal council, the mayor and aldermen and civil servants. Besides a report, the QSLD also produces an improvement agenda for the municipality
Waarstaatjegemeente.nl	For a broader picture, quantitative data can be looked up at Waarstaatjegemeente.nl. Not all the data is available for every municipality because not all the subjects have been explored in every municipality.

Getting started: explorer 🔭

While making an initial inventory as part of this step, it is particularly important to obtain a **shared picture** of where the municipality stands in terms of shaping a perspective on participation. We recommend that you organise this image in any event in consultation with (part of) the municipal council, mayor and aldermen and (part of) the administrative organisation. No one person has a complete picture of how the municipality is doing in terms of participation. It is therefore important that the persons concerned can complement each other.

Working method: creating the strategic picture



- **Step 1:** Prepare questions in advance that test different facets of the topics (in this chapter). Place those questions together with an empty grid in a format.
- **Step 2:** Divide the participants into groups and distribute the formats.
- **Step 3:** First get the groups to discuss the questions among themselves without immediately drawing the lines on the grid. Take the time to do this – among other things, to create space for new insights from other parts of the organisation. Participants can also think about this in-depth without relying specifically on the last example they have in their minds.
- **Step 4:** After discussing the questions, get the groups to draw the situation on the grid.
- **Step 5:** Then focus on the results in a plenary meeting and discuss any differences. For example, by taking an average of all the scores. If necessary, briefly consider whether improvement is wanted and which initial steps would be required to do this.

Make sure that it does not become a scientific ambition to define what a particular score (a two or a five) exactly means. It is more an exercise to get a feel for the current situation and to discuss differences in interpretation!

Getting started: innovator 🚀

If you want to take a more thorough approach to mapping out the strategic picture of the municipality, it is a good idea to organise a session for everybody concerned in the municipality and among the residents. The insights from this session will help the municipality to more effectively shape its strategic position for participation in practice.

Working method: dreams and disasters

This working method forces you to think further than usual about **ambitions**. By drawing up an (exaggerated) dream scenario and contingency plan, you subconsciously learn more about the assumptions behind the ambitions and the current situation that makes the ambitions more or less possible.

Dream scenario: what does participation in your municipality look like in five years' time in an ideal world?

Contingency plan: what does participation in your municipality look like in five years' time if everything goes wrong?

- **Step 1:** Appoint one moderator with this working method. This can be an internal employee, provided that person encourages the participants to think freely and creatively.
- **Step 2:** Create mixed groups consisting of residents/stakeholders and employees from the administrative organisation.
- **Step 3:** Get the groups to brainstorm two extremes: a dream scenario and a contingency plan. Encourage participants to think out-of-the-box and tell them that nothing is wrong or right:
  - What do those scenarios look like?
  - Which combination of events happened to create this scenario?
- **Step 4:** After the brainstorming session, hold a short plenary round to collect the findings and experiences from the groups. The facilitator should make sure that the common theme of the plenary round is fed back to the administrative organisation after the session.

Optional: practical follow-up

- After the session, some members of the Municipal Executive, the council and the administrative organisation will look back on the main insights they gained with residents, summarised by the facilitator.
- They will then brainstorm about what they can do with the insights in practice.
- After this, they will work out how to implement the insights with a simple storyboard.
- After 15 minutes, the participants will hang up the storyboard and briefly explain it to each other. Make sure they explain their ideas as specifically as possible.

Step 3: Why opt for participation?

What is the answer to the question ‘Why do we think participation is important’? This question sounds a little redundant in this day and age. Everybody has grown to believe that participation is important. Yet it is crucial to consider this question for two reasons:

- Behind the view that participation is important, there is often a world of assumptions that can differ enormously. One person sees participation as a way to increase support and another sees it as a fundamental right. These assumptions both result in the statement 'participation is indispensable', but the reasons why are very different.
- A strong answer to the ‘Why’ question gives meaning to the participation processes. If it is unclear what participation contributes to, why would anybody participate? Linking a participation process to a deeper motive makes it worth doing.

The answer to the 'Why' question is naturally related to the municipality’s ambitions on the one hand and the more precise implementation of participation (policy and instruments) on the other. If the municipality has a high ambition – with the restoration of trust as the main motive – and then organises patronising walk-in evenings, these elements simply don’t match up.

Shared values are important

The answer to the 'Why' question relates to the values in a municipality in relation to participation. When different actors share those values, it creates a good basis from which to proceed further: after all, everybody now wants the same thing. When the values clash, the basis is less solid, but that insight does help with the next steps. If it is known that different actors have a different basic attitude towards participation, this often also explains their different preferences for formats and instruments.

Because public involvement is and remains mandatory, but the legislative proposal will require an expansion from policy preparation to implementation and evaluation (see the introduction to this guide), the 'Why' question often remains unanswered. After all, it is mandatory and must be done anyway. Although it is understandable that, given the urgency, municipalities want to quickly get started with participation, it is important to consider this question very carefully. Municipalities have a wide range of options, which determine the design of the participation process. If you have a clear idea of why you want residents (or other parties) to participate and also how much citizens feel the need to participate, you can organise the process in a targeted manner and work towards a useful result for everybody concerned.

What are the motives for participation?

As already mentioned, every municipality is different. Motives for participation can, may and will therefore differ. During the conversation about the motives, it often also becomes apparent that not everybody considers every motive to be equally important. So which motives are there? In a

literature study into participation, Visser et al (2019, pp. 7-12)[13] make a distinction between two levels:

- **Actors**: participant (why does this participant want to participate?) and municipality (why is there a need for participation?).
- **Types of motives:** democratic motives (contributing to the proper functioning of democracy) and instrumental motives (contributing to better decision-making or policy-making).

This quadrant with motives shows that participation can contribute to more than one motive. However, not all of these motives necessarily need to be the goal of every individual participation process. That would be asking too much of one process. It is more about a municipality's general ambitions for participation and the reasoning why it does or does not engage in specific individual participation processes. The purpose of the quadrant is to indicate the reasons why the municipality is working participatively or wants to improve participation in practice. Finally, of course, there are refinements that can be made or more nuanced motives that can be identified. These might include: 1) a purely intrinsic motivation to participate, 2) the need to be part of a group, 3) the creation of a societal learning process, or 4) the fact that contributing is just a lot of fun![14]

	Democratic	**Instrumental**
Participant	Control Democratic right Active citizenship Co-responsibility	Better decisions Skills Financial advantages
Municipality	Democratic ideal Legitimacy Bridging the political divide	Quality Effectiveness Support base

GOOD PRACTICE: CLEAR MOTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

The municipality of Best has drawn up a Resident Participation Memorandum with explicit motives. *"The reasons for involving partners can therefore be summarised as follows:*

- *to increase mutual trust and understanding*
- *to increase the quality of policy or plans*
- *to increase support for policy or plans*
- *to reduce the gap between residents and government*
- *to increase the involvement and sense of responsibility of residents*
- *because the municipality of Best wants to be a reliable partner for its residents."*

This example shows that the municipality is mainly focusing on its own participation motives. Here, both democratic motives (legitimacy and bridging the political divide) and instrumental motives (increasing the quality of and support for policy) are used.

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[13] Visser, V., van Popering-Verkerk, J. & van Buuren, A. (2019). *Well-substantiated designs for participation processes: Knowledge base for participation in the physical living environment.* GovernEUR, Erasmus University Rotterdam.
[14] Blok S.N., van Buuren, M.W., Fenger, H. J.M. (2023). The public value of citizens' initiatives: Evidence from a Dutch municipality. *The American Review of Public Administration*.; Visser et al. (2019), p. 29.

It helps to distinguish between these (more) democratic and (more) instrumental motives, because it provides a clearer vision when looking back on a participation process, for example. Sometimes residents are dissatisfied with the outcome but satisfied with the control they had in the participation process. The distinction provides greater clarity about what did not go well and helps to show where the real dissatisfaction – if it exists – is to be found.

GOOD PRACTICE: ASK THE RESIDENTS

While drafting the participation policy and the bye-law, the municipality of Oude IJsselstreek first approached local residents. It wanted to ask them why they find participation important, which formats suit them, when it is successful and how they want to be involved; so several birds with one stone.

The research included two steps:

- Qualitative component: out of a group of 400 residents, 19 residents were randomly selected for three different focus groups. The focus groups came up with a range of opinions, assumptions and questions. These were used for a survey.
- Quantitative component with a survey. Approximately 450 residents took part in the survey. This showed, among other things, that quality and policy improvements were the main motive for residents to participate. Not democratic ideals or trust!

In the end, the new participation policy was drawn up on the basis of these two sub-studies.

Background and knowledge sources

Source	Which information does this source contain?
Visser, V., van Popering-Verkerk, J. & van Buuren, A. (2019). *Well-substantiated designs for participation processes: Knowledge base for participation in the physical living environment.* GovernEUR, Erasmus University Rotterdam	The above-mentioned motives plus how the authors arrived at those motives and where those motives come from
Dalfsen, F. van, Wesseling, H. & Blok, S. (2021). *Learning in Participation Land: real-world smart participation lessons.* Utrecht: Berenschot	Attention to the 'Why' of participation from different perspectives: learning and public value
Torre, L. van der, Douglas, S., 't Hart, P. (2019). *Working on public value: Learning from and for municipalities.* Association of Dutch Municipalities	In this VNG publication, a distinction is made between material public value, intangible public value and process values
Groningen Participation Workbook	Concrete description of different values of participation
Publications about the relationship between participation and trust	Research by the province of South Holland with multiple reports and summaries through the link

Getting started: explorer 🔭

To make the why of participation in your municipality more specific, we recommend that you rank motives on the basis of a dialogue. This prioritises the motives but also creates space to choose more than one. It also helps when making choices about formats and tastes (see Step 4).

Working method: Placemat discussion

- **Step 1:** Divide the participants into groups of four and show them a range of motives for participation using a PowerPoint or other prepared format.
- **Step 2:** Give each group a large sheet with a circle in the middle and the assignment: prioritise the motives for participation for our municipality. Divide the space around the circle into quarters so that participants can note down their answers.
- **Step 3:** After an appropriate number of minutes, get the employees to discuss their answers among themselves and reach a consensus (inside the circle). The group's definitive prioritisation is placed in the middle of the assignment.
- **Step 4:** Discuss the results in a plenary session.
- **Step 5 (optional)**: Write down the results in a conceptual vision of the motives for participation for your municipality and organise a dialogue about why this prioritisation has been chosen.

Getting started: innovator 🚀

A good conversation about values is important – and is sometimes also very exciting and fun – but always entails certain risks. For example, it may be too abstract, too vague or too free of interpretation. It may be the case that even though the people concerned use the same words, they interpret them completely differently. Without being aware of it. Or they may emphasis different terms, even though they mean approximately the same thing. There are several ways to deal with these types of risks.

Working method: commission a study

For an in-depth examination of values, you can choose to have a study carried out. External researchers are often better at uncovering 'hidden' values, discovering relationships between certain values and/or prioritising values.

The type of study is up to the researchers, of course. But with a good study design they can provide a clear insight into the different values, motives and assumptions behind participation. For more information, get in touch with a local knowledge institute!

Step 4: Which type of participation?

The 'what' of participation in a general sense is perhaps the strangest step when thinking about participation. In this guide, this step involves examining:

- different participation types: citizen and government participation;
- the degree of influence as displayed in participation ladders and steps, and different characterisations of activities in a participation process, such as coming up with ideas or making decisions together.

However, the 'What' also involves a municipality's basic view of participation: **how does a municipality – on average – want these processes to proceed**? How can these processes be structured?

Citizen and government participation

Where does this dichotomy actually come from? Many governments are involved in administrative innovation. In essence, this is about the question of how they should and can relate to the classic triangle of community, market and government.[15] Due to all kinds of developments around the world, the relationship in the triangle is also changing and that is requiring governments to change too. Participation is, of course, mainly about the relationship between governments and communities (but if a market party starts financing a citizen initiative, the entire triangle is involved again).

We usually refer to the shift in the relationship between government and community in terms of citizen participation (or an initiative from the government) and government participation (or an initiative from the community). This distinction is essentially about which party takes the first step and invites the other party to take part, so it is actually about the distribution of roles.

Governments and participants may have different motives for working together.

- Citizen participation is organised by governments, so it is quickly aligned with the motives of that government. The question for governments is then: how do you make it worthwhile for participants to participate? Which motives among participants do you appeal to?
- On the other hand, a community can choose to organise many things itself. The question for the government is: how do we relate to those initiatives or cooperative ventures? Practical choices include: providing space, making the right to challenge possible, encouraging types of self-management (such as citizen initiatives that manage a plot of land), allowing commons (shared facilities that are created and shared by a neighbourhood) to emerge.

[15] Van der Steen, M., van Twist, M., Chin-A-Fat, N., & Kwakkelstein, T. (2013). *Pop-up public value. Government control in the context of social self-organisation.* The Hague: NSOB.

The influence of citizens in the phases of the policy process

A second distinction relates to the participation processes. In that case, the **participation ladder** soon comes into play. The participation ladder (Arnstein, 1969) is by far the best known and most frequently-used way of thinking and talking about the distribution of influence between governments and residents in participation processes. The distribution of influence plays a major role in individual participation processes: how much influence is needed, how much influence does a municipality share and how much influence do participants want?

In practice, there is often some conflict about this and expectations do not always match. When people speak about the good practice of good expectation management, it is often about managing expectations related to influence. Is it clear that residents are allowed to participate in discussions and advice but not in decision-making? Or: is it clear what has already been established and what is still up for discussion? And was this clearly achieved through consultation or was it imposed?

Another distinction concerns the characterisation of the participation activity. This includes terms such as **doing, knowing, thinking and deciding things together or learning together**.[16] Topics such as the distribution of roles and preconditions also play an important role. What is the role of the mayor and aldermen or the role of the municipal council in 'joint decisions'? What are the preconditions for 'doing it together' when residents – supported by the municipality – take over an implementation task?

During the participation process, the representativeness (involvement) of residents is often a central issue. In many municipalities the question arises: 'How do we also involve residents who do not naturally participate or cannot easily participate?'. This often involves target groups such as young people, people with disabilities, a mix of educational and income levels, etc. More generally, the goal may be to promote participation (see 'Background and knowledge sources' in **Step 3** for more information).

The basic strategy

It is easy to get bogged down in a discussion about concepts. The aim of thinking about citizen versus government participation or participation ladders versus participation quadrants is to create a kind of shared picture. That a few concepts are looked at in *approximately* the same way in a municipality and within a community. Because these concepts can then be worked out using the following categories, for example:

- **Quality criteria**: When did thinking together go well? For example, in terms of representativeness?
- **Preconditions**: Which conditions must be met when deciding things together? For example, in terms of inclusiveness?
- **Distribution of roles**: Which types of roles do we know and to whom do we assign which role when doing things together?
- **Instruments**: Which type of instrument suits this target group when learning things together?

And there are many more categories. Ultimately, considering the 'What' is an unusual step between the more profound 'Why' and the practical 'How'.

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[16] Dalfsen, F. van, Synhaeve, M. & Hoet, E. (2017). *Pioneering in Participation Land*. Berenschot, Utrecht. See also: Visser, V., van Popering-Verkerk, J. & van Buuren, A. (2019). *Well-substantiated designs for participation processes: Knowledge base for participation in the physical living environment.* GovernEUR, Erasmus University Rotterdam.

GOOD PRACTICE: SUBSIDY INITIATIVES & RIGHT TO CHALLENGE

The municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch has a Right to Challenge scheme in which it also clearly maintains a 'Why, What and How' structure.

"The municipality is working on the creation of socially strong districts and neighbourhoods [*motive*]. By working together with residents and creating space for ideas [*format and degree of influence*]. Based on their experience and knowledge of their surroundings, residents often come up with better solutions for the municipality's social and community tasks [*motive*]. By combining this with the experience, knowledge and network of the municipality, we achieve the best results together. With the 'Right to Challenge' subsidy, residents receive financial support for the implementation of their idea [H*ow: an instrument*]."

What makes 's-Hertogenbosch unique is that the municipality has the right to challenge and also grants subsidies for new initiatives: so it is not just about challenging the municipality.

GOOD PRACTICE: FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The municipality of Emmen has formulated a vision and strategy for youth participation. In doing this, it is focusing explicitly on the representativeness issue and is working to develop it. The municipality has already introduced a number of different participation types: a youth council, a youth parliament and a youth annual plan. The municipality also wants to focus on young people using a digital youth platform and social media.

Background and knowledge sources

Source	Which information does this source contain?
Workbook for Help a citizen initiative	Information about social or citizen initiatives and government participation
The 'Initiative' magazine of the Erasmus University Rotterdam	A look at the ins and outs of a wide range of citizen initiatives that have materialised in recent years
Dalfsen, F. van, Synhaeve, M. & Hoet, E. (2017). *Pioneering in Participation Land*. Berenschot, Utrecht	Many different perspectives for the 'What' of participation
Groningen Participation Workbook	A distinction between deciding together, doing and making together, informing each other and consulting and advising each other
10 lessons for council members about participation in natural gas-free neighbourhoods	One of the inspiration guides for the roles for the council and others

Getting started: explorer 🔭

To make the 'What' of participation in your municipality more concrete, we recommend that you rank different types of participation on the basis of a dialogue. Which types are generally compatible with your municipality and which are less so? How much influence can you or do you want to share as a municipality with residents in particular processes?

Working method: *1-2-4-all*

- **Step 1:** Ask participants what they want a participation process to look like in general (format, degree of influence and progression of processes).
- **Step 2:** Ask participants to think about this individually in silence (1 minute).
- **Step 3:** Form pairs and have them come up with ideas based on the individual reflection (3 minutes).
- **Step 4:** In a plenary session, discuss the question 'What do you mostly agree with each other about? And where do you differ from each other?' (4 minutes).

After a general picture has emerged of how the municipality more or less wants a participation process to look like, an initial draft of a participation plan format can be created (if required). This format can serve as a guideline for organising participation in future projects. It ensures that the municipality's general ideas are reflected in a draft participation process.

Getting started: innovator 🚀

As described above, as a municipality it is wise to consciously consider the range of participation types (which types already exist) and also which type best suits the subject or situation. One participation type that is often initiated more by citizens is the right to challenge. The right to challenge can also be anchored in the participation bye-law (see **Step 8**). If your municipality is already very active in terms of participation but does not yet have a clear vision on the right to challenge, this working method is a suitable starting point.

Working method: looking closer at the right to challenge

- **Step 1:** Split the group into pairs and get them to sit on chairs opposite each other.
- **Step 2:** Ask all the participants to read a short summary (provided by the facilitator) about the right to challenge and some practical examples of this.
- **Step 3:** Ask one participant of the pair to take on the role of supporter and the other to take on the role of opponent. Both should play their roles as credibly as possible and therefore consistently defend the other person's completely opposite view. This must of course be done in a respectful way.
- **Step 4:** After this short discussion (5 minutes), ask the pairs to review the conversation. Ask them to pay attention to new insights, key arguments (for and against) and assumptions that came up. Get them to write the findings for each category on Post-its.
- **Step 5**: The facilitator collects the Post-its and sticks them on a flip chart in three columns: new insights, arguments and assumptions.
- **Step 6**: The facilitator briefly discusses what he/she has noticed about the Post-its. If all goes well, the opinions of the participants will at least have been fine-tuned.

Step 5: How do you shape participation?

The title of the chapter already implies what this step is about: the 'How' of participation. The 'How' is often a lightning rod in the participation debate. When participation is in the news, the focus is often on the instruments: citizens' assemblies, referendums, the right to challenge (although it is called a right, it is used as an instrument) or a youth council. All of these instruments require an instruction guide in themselves, which shows that the 'How' of participation is a complex subject.

To make the subject a little more concrete, this guide explains:

- how the defined roles are filled;
- how a structured approach can be created;
- how methods, instruments and working methods are used;
- how representativeness and inclusiveness are dealt with.

There are now numerous guides, models and instructions that help shape participation processes. These tools are often intended to help civil servants when organising participation. However, this guide is not about these types of existing tools (a number of them are mentioned in 'Background and knowledge sources'). The quality of participation processes depends on whether these instruments are suitable for the participation issue.

Roles

In the previous step, we recommended that you think about the question 'Which types of roles do we have and to whom do we assign which role in participation processes?'. This step is about how these roles are filled: which rights, duties and tasks are associated with them?

In general terms, there is no absolute right or wrong way to fill a role. It is especially important **that the roles are filled** and complied with. Below, we include several examples of how roles are filled for a hypothetical participation process:

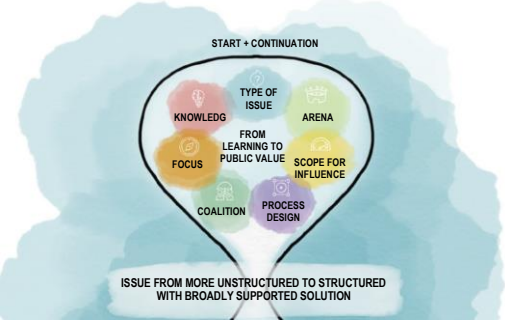
- The municipal council has a framework-setting role. The council then determines in advance what the process should look like (approximately) and which requirements it must meet.
- The alderman is involved twice.
- The administrative project manager organises the entire project of which the participation process is a part.
- Residents are asked to think along and may give advice on three scenarios that are being developed.
- Domain-specific civil servants are available to provide technical explanations.

And in this way, many more different ways of filling roles are conceivable. It is especially important that the roles are consistent with the broader participation issue. A guiding role and a lesser degree of influence by citizens requires an organisation that has the necessary resources and is authorised (also politically) to make decisions. A facilitating role and a higher degree of influence by citizens requires an organisation that can enter into a good conversation with participants and has the freedom to be somewhat flexible.

A structured participation approach

A participation process is more than a single contact moment between the municipality and residents. It is part of a longer, existing relationship, in which it is nice to know what you have in common.

Predictability, recognisability and transparency are all important qualities that help shape and maintain that relationship. A structured participation approach helps to achieve this. An approach with a number of steps or topics that is always adhered to, regardless of the specific participation instruments used.[17]



Example of a participation approach (Participation Learning Model)

This type of participation approach is often closer than people think. For example, by – always – examining the scope for influence and actors, a more or less structured approach is already being followed. By using this approach consistently (with, of course, the necessary space for customisation, variation and flexibility), a municipality does not have to reinvent the participation wheel with every project and it more quickly becomes clear what to expect. A structured participation approach therefore offers a type of **structured customisation**: predictable and recognisable approaches that take differences in issues, topics and target groups into account.

The use of instruments

As mentioned above, this guide does not showcase a range of instruments. However, we will show you how to weigh instruments. Ultimately, an instrument is a means to an end.

The scientifically validated CLEAR model is a very suitable way to assess participation instruments – also for inclusiveness, for example.[18] This model queries an instrument on the basis of the following five topics:

Can do	Do residents have the proper resources, knowledge and capabilities to participate?
Like to	Do residents also want to participate? For example, because they are part of something?
Enabled to	Are residents being given the opportunity and support to participate?
Asked to	Are residents actually being asked and mobilised to take part?
Responded to	Are the results of participation visible? For example, are residents receiving feedback about their input?

[17] Van Dalfsen, F., Wesseling, H. & Blok, S. (2021). *Learning in Participation Land: real-world smart participation lessons.* Utrecht: Berenschot.
[18] Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L., & Stoker, G. (2006). Diagnosing and Remedying the Failings of Official Participation Schemes: The CLEAR framework. *Social Policy and Society*, *5*(2), 281-291.

GOOD PRACTICES: THE SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE COUNCIL AT A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

In 2021, the municipality of Zeist asked its residents for help in bringing the municipal budget back into balance. The municipality ultimately adopted 40 proposals from the citizens' assembly. With 21 additional plans from the municipal council, they managed to finalise the budget for 2022. The participants knew in advance what would be done with their advice and evaluations were frequently carried out during the project. This example shows that the municipal council defines frameworks for the participation process in advance and fulfils a particular role.

The group of Zeist residents was granted a good deal of freedom given that they themselves were responsible for the sessions and the advice to be formulated. They could therefore partly define their own role within the framework set by the council. However, the final decision to adopt proposals was still the council's responsibility. The council also supplemented the adopted proposals with its own plans. In this way, the council is fulfilling its own role.

GOOD PRACTICE: PARTICIPATION STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

The municipality of Delft has a predictable and clear step-by-step plan (for residents) for participation processes: Delfts Doen. With this approach, initiators and the municipality follow a step-by-step plan with a set of nine rules. This is a general step-by-step plan for what needs to be done in a participation process and is therefore not specifically about making a distinction between working methods.

GOOD PRACTICE: PARTICIPATION KICK-OFF DISCUSSION

The municipality of Meierijstad holds participation kick-off discussions in which the issue and the motives for participation are explicitly discussed. Based on this discussion, a project initiation document is drawn up, which also specifies how often the municipal council will be informed and whether there is a possibility for adjustment.

A kick-off meeting ensures a joint start, forces additional research into the issue (What is going on, socially and politically?), gives the municipal council an insight into the council's role and provides the administrative organisation with clarity and peace of mind.

Background and knowledge sources

Source	Which information does this source contain?
Participation Guide (Democracy in Action & ProDemos)	An assessment framework for citizen participation that helps municipalities choose the right mix of participation methods
Citizen participation assessment framework for policy (ProDemos)	By answering the questions in the assessment framework, a municipality can argue whether citizen participation for a particular subject is a good idea or not.
More information about the Right to Challenge instrument	The Lokale Democratie website includes extensive information about the right to challenge: expert pools, guidelines and inspiration guides.
Overview participation instruments province of North Brabant	An overview of a number of instruments for each step on the participation ladder
Utrecht participation guideline The Hague step-by-step plan for participation	Examples of structured approaches
Digital inclusion Slide deck inclusive participation	Tips for digital participation Background, solutions and reflection in relation to inclusion
Participation guide to involve entrepreneurs (VNG)	To more closely involve entrepreneurs in participation as a specific target group
Rules of thumb for participation (Participation Knowledge Exchange, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management)	For more information, visit the website of the Knowledge Exchange

Getting started: explorer 🔭

In order to shape the 'How' of participation in the future more effectively, it is also important to actively focus on how participation currently works. Participation processes that have not yet been designed and rolled out according to a well-thought-out blueprint are usually and understandably messier and more intuitive.

By looking back on a completed (or ongoing) process, a municipality can reflect on what was actually needed or what could have been addressed more effectively with the knowledge we have today. This depends on the project, of course, but recurring points for attention may be identified if this is done more often.

Working method: one step back for one step forward

- **Step 1**: A trainer asks the participants to bring one or more participation processes as a case to the session. Check that the participants were involved in the process.
- **Step 2**: The trainer prepares cards showing one of the 'spheres' in the Participation Learning Model (see figure on page 28). In an ongoing process, these are the spheres from the 'start + run' part of the model. In case of a completed process, all of the spheres can be used.

- **Step 3**: The trainer places the cards so that they are clearly visible on a large table and asks the participants to choose one.
- **Step 4**: Each participant reflects on the sphere (for example, the scope of influence) of the participation process that is currently being used as a case.
- **Step 5**: Participants use the map to show how the process scores or scored on this theme and what is required for the process to do even better in the future (2 minutes).
- **Step 6**: The trainer makes sure that the most important take-aways are recorded in a document so that the group can use it as a reference.

This working method provides a better picture of how a process can be designed structurally better in advance next time.

Getting started: innovator 🚀

If your municipality already has a reasonable framework for a structured approach and phases, discuss this with another municipality that is also quite advanced in this area. Organise a small-scale inspiration or brainstorming session and exchange ideas. In any case, make sure that the scope of the session is clear so that participants know what is expected of them. This significantly increases the chance of a good 'harvest'.

Working method: checking on the neighbours

The following are examples of topics to discuss during such an inspiration or brainstorming session in the framework of the 'How' of participation.

Roles

- How the various actors involved in previous participation processes have fulfilled their roles.
- What other people encounter when fulfilling their roles in participation processes and how a framework could provide even better support.
- What the people involved in a participation process need (from others, from the approach) in order to properly fulfil their roles.

Framework

- How the framework has been drawn up by the other municipality.
- How the framework deals with different types of issues (balance between predictability and flexibility).
- Which instruments/formats have been included in the framework and why?
- How can a good start usually be guaranteed?

Needless to say, many other topics or statements can be used to conduct a useful dialogue or discussion. The main goal is to inspire or fine-tune considerations and in that way help create a clearer vision of how participation can be organised.

Step 6: Learning and evaluating

Everybody now realises that learning is important.[19] And when it comes to learning in the participation context, evaluation has emerged as the first and most important instrument. However, learning is more than evaluating, and, moreover, both learning and evaluating (in the context of participation) only take place to a limited extent.[20]

The legislative proposal provides ample scope for municipalities to give their own interpretation to learning, but the sample bye-law does suggest using certain types of learning, namely the final report, evaluation and monitoring.

Every type of learning starts by gaining experience. Whatever happens in a participation process, it always leads to an experience gained. Big and positive or small and negative, a great deal is learned on the basis of experiences. Often, however, lessons learned in this way are not used very much.

The trick is to make this learning more systematic. The most obvious solution is to develop **a light learning programme** in which evaluation – which is quite common in a general sense[21] in municipalities – plays an important role.

A light learning programme

By a light learning programme we mean a structure that does not demand too much extra effort from employees. Participation itself is often an *additional challenge* for employees, and learning even more so. At the same time, learning is too important to ignore. We would like to give you a few possible ingredients to help create such a programme.

Category	More focus on experiential learning	More focus on systematic learning
Target groups	Share experiences, regardless of the target groups	Learn about different types of experiences from specific target groups. But also: who has something specific to learn?
Learning objectives	Learn about open experiences with participation, without defined goals	Specific learning objectives: what does the organisation need to learn? (for example, in terms of the participation vision)
Learning methods	Joint meetings in which every experience counts	Use a mix of learning methods, from meetings to experiments or training courses

[19] https://platformoverheid.nl/artikel/we-moeten-het-leren-opnieuw-leren-waarderen/
[20] See also: Visser et al. (2019, pp. 23-24 & 41-45).
[21] As mentioned earlier, the specific evaluation of participation is less frequent. But many municipalities are familiar with evaluation in a general sense.

Category	More focus on experiential learning	More focus on systematic learning
Frequency and turnaround time	A number of shorter meetings at fixed times during the year	Different moments for different target groups (from peer-to-peer coaching in pairs to larger, mixed learning meetings)
Selection of projects	Select a small number of projects in order to practice	Select different types of projects (domains, size, complexity).

Needless to say, there are other possible categories. See also the section 'Getting started: innovator' for this step.

Finally, it helps to further highlight the growing interest in participation in the organisation. Focus on learning from participation, especially on the part of the executive and MT. For example, by appointing ambassadors or bringing a group of people together who are enthusiastic advocates of participation and who practice what they preach.

GOOD PRACTICE: SUMMER AND WINTER SCHOOL IN RAALTE

The municipality of Raalte organised a Winter School and a Summer School for its employees – great examples of learning in a group.

The concept of a summer or winter school is also ideal for a combination of learning methods. There is room for reflection about cases that have been brought in, more can be learned in workshops on the basis of the theory and all the participants can learn from each other.

By really implementing the concept of 'school', employees are more likely to be well-prepared (there is space for homework and assignments) and they enthusiastically make the time for it (it can easily take a day or part of a day). Finally, most employees really enjoy being back in the classroom again!

Background and knowledge sources

Source	Which information does this source contain?
Potjer, S. (2019). *Experimental governance. From possible to standard innovation.* Utrecht: Urban Futures Studio, University Utrecht	Different types of learning that can be organised: horizontal, vertical or local
Van Dalfsen, F., Wesseling, H. & Blok, S. (2021). *Learning in Participation Land: real-world smart participation lessons.* Utrecht: Berenschot	How you as an individual, organisation or society can learn about participation

Getting started: explorer 👀

As mentioned earlier, the legislative proposal gives you plenty of scope to organise your own learning, but the sample bye-law does suggest certain formats such as the final report, evaluation and monitoring. The following working method is suitable for all three.

The aim of this method is to encourage participants to think in terms of possibilities and to generate new ideas relatively easily. This working method is aimed at learning lessons (with the focus on experiential lessons).

The point is that participants leave the session with at least one action point for a future participation process, no matter how small, that can be implemented immediately. In this way, participants focus on their 'circle of influence': what is within their capabilities (mandate, resources, expertise, etc.). So they do not have to worry about impossibilities and obstacles. By generating many ideas and sharing feedback, participants gain new insights and can draw inspiration from them.

Working method: circle of influence (inspired by liberating structures)

This explanation is based on an interim evaluation.

As a facilitator, ask the question: "Which three actions are within your capabilities and can you take immediately after this session to promote the participation process?"

- **Step 1:** Have everybody first individually create their own list of ideas (5 minutes).
- **Step 2:** Ask individuals to share their ideas in groups of two to four (3 minutes per person, one person at a time).
- **Step 3:** Have group members consult with each other (ask questions, give advice) (5 to 7 minutes per person, one person at a time).

Save the lessons in an accessible way so that everybody can access them quickly.

Getting started: innovator 🚀

Working method: create a draft light learning programme

That could look like this:

- **Step 1:** Formulate a **learning vision** for the organisation: which role will learning play in the municipality?
- **Step 2:** Make somebody in the organisation **responsible** for the learning programme (on administrative and/or civil servant level).
- **Step 3:** Formulate **learning objectives**: what do we want to learn? Why?
- **Step 4:** Discuss **who** will learn: every layer and every substantive domain of the organisation? Do the political and administrative levels also take part? (Yes please!)
- **Step 5:** Combine the **learning resources** in the theory with learning by doing in the organisation.
- **Step 6:** Draw **dots** on the horizon: one pilot every quarter? When do we get together? When do we plan a knowledge meeting? When do we adjust the light learning programme?
- **Step 7:** Share your **findings if/when the learning programme produces results**. For example, in the shape of an end product (other participation frameworks or a workbook), a working method or a new cultural view ('the council should have the first word', 'participation should take place as early as possible', 'administrators should take a back seat during the participation process' or 'making mistakes is part of the process').

Step 7: Implementation programme

Based on the results of the above six steps, a few points will undoubtedly emerge that your municipality can work on. To really shape certain participation ambitions, it helps to summarise them in an action or implementation programme.

The implementation programme describes priorities and activities in the light of the vision: what will the municipality and its residents do to realise that vision? The specific content and format of an implementation programme are not fixed because they must of course be compatible with the local context. For example, an implementation programme can deal with different aspects of the 'Why', the 'What', the 'How' and learning. The following are a number of topical examples:

Why

- The focus in the vision is on working on **trust**, so we examine how we can demonstrably work on trust issues in participation processes
- We will **consistently share more influence** with residents

What

- We will stimulate **citizen/resident initiatives**
- We will try to find the **suitable roles** in our municipality
- We will focus on more types of **joint decision-making**
- We will specifically organise participation for **young people and expats**

How

- We set up an initiative fund (to stimulate **initiatives**)
- We always estimate the degree of **representativeness** of projects
- We ensure that residents can always contribute ideas in three different ways to increase **inclusiveness**
- We will improve our **participatory budgeting** instrument

Learning

- We **evaluate** at least four projects
- We organise a **citizens' assembly** whereby we conduct a pre-measurement and a post-measurement of **specific indicators**
- We appoint somebody who is **responsible** for learning

In the context of this implementation programme, we pay extra attention to two topics: **representativeness and inclusiveness**. We receive many questions about this, but the good practices in this area are even less readily available. At the same time, they are extremely important in the participation issues.

These topics often concern target groups such as young people, people with disabilities, distribution across education and income levels, etc. **It is necessary to think about these target groups in order to work on inclusiveness**. Which groups are missing, why and what is needed to include them?

Representativeness soon gives rise to a discussion that is consistent with **Step 1**: Is participation actually representative? A fair question, but one that often leads to the objection: how representative is representative democracy? This is against the backdrop of the declining number of voters, the demographic characteristics of (local) politicians, perverse (media) incentives, etc.[22]

In the context of this guide and the implementation programme, **a different approach to representativeness is required**. An approach that involves finding the synergy between representative and participatory democracy. We include three examples of this type of approach.

- Representativeness is always about the relationship with a larger whole: a street, neighbourhood, village, community, city, etc. The question of whether something is representative therefore depends on the whole. By thinking about representativeness in this way, it is a little easier for the council and Municipal Executive to be on the same wavelength.
- Participation is generally not regarded as the perfect remedy for general representativeness. Yet it is often a very good addition. Take, for example, the process of co-decision, where residents indirectly add to a Municipal Executive or council decision. Then literally more perspectives are involved. In addition – but in the same vein – specific interests, ideas and perspectives can be consciously sought in a participation process as a quality boost or as an extra out-of-the-box addition. This is at odds with the search for a cross-section from the street.
- Lastly, the municipal council can be the representative check and balance. Since elected representatives represent a municipality, they can be the representative counterpart of a less representative participation process (based, of course, on agreed roles, role interpretations and rules).

The implementation programme is a great opportunity to work together on the difficult topics of inclusiveness and representativeness. The search for the right interpretations, resources and outcomes will differ for each municipality.

Getting started: explorer

To arrive at an initial draft of an implementation programme (in itself a step that not many municipalities have yet taken), the following working method can be used.

Working method: make good use of Mentimeter

The option to create word clouds in Mentimeter is a good way to retrieve desired activities that are open. This can be done in two ways:

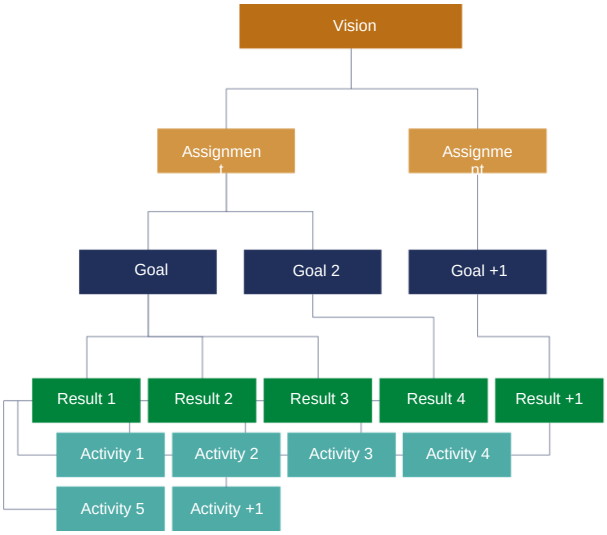
- Create a word cloud in one go. The most frequently mentioned words are displayed as the largest. These are then the priorities in the implementation programme.
- In two rounds. First a round of creating and carefully examining the word cloud. Which words are depicted the largest and are they still related to other terms in the word cloud? On this basis, a number of categories or activities can be selected for the second round (for example, ten categories). Participants in the second round rank these categories or activities (in this example from 1 to 10) and a priority list is created that serves as the implementation or action programme.

[22] Rosanvallon, P., & Goldhammer, A. (2008). *Counter-democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust* (Vol. 7). Cambridge University Press; Engbersen, G. *et al.* (2021). *The low-trust society: the social impact of COVID-19 in Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam & the Netherlands*; Gemeente.nu (2022). Municipal election turnout sinking to low point.

Getting started: innovator 🚀

Working method: structured development

For a perfect match between the vision and implementation programme, leading municipalities can develop the vision in a very structured way in a series of activities. For example, using the diagram below. It is advisable to work this out together and in rounds.



- **Round 1:** developing the vision (Step 3 in this guide) in a number of assignments.
- **Round 2:** developing the assignments into a number of goals.
- **Round 3:** developing goals into a number of results. When the results are achieved, it means the goal has also been realised.
- **Round 4:** translating results into activities. What needs to be done specifically to achieve the results?

This type of elaboration requires quite a lot from the participants. For example, a clear understanding of the terms assignments, goals and results. What do participants understand by this? But also a shared interpretation of those terms: which relevant results lead to a goal? When all the goals have been achieved, does it mean that the assignment has also been completed?

Step 8: Lastly, the bye-law

In this guide, we see the bye-law as the culmination – as a legal anchor – of all the previous steps (and the products that result from these steps). Ultimately, the participation bye-law is also a means of working together towards better participation in the municipality. Needless to say, an agreement that the municipality must comply with – a bye-law – helps to achieve this.

Not many municipalities have a recently updated participation bye-law. In the period from December 2022 to March 2023, a number of pioneer meetings were organised to learn about lessons, questions and other points for attention with several municipalities that already have a bye-law or are working on one. In this last step, we discuss the results of those meetings.

More than one road can lead to Rome

During the meetings, it became apparent that all the municipalities that have a bye-law have gone through the process of achieving that bye-law in a different way.

- In Capelle aan den IJssel, there was a need to draft the bye-law after the results of the QSLD. Young council members from various parties were asked to participate and topics were discussed at seven meetings. Input from a citizens' panel was also included.
- The municipality of Middelburg also had a specific reason to improve participation: a number of evaluated projects. This gave rise to a relatively extensive bye-law, but the municipality held extensive discussions about various articles in the bye-law.
- In Velsen, the participation bye-law is the culmination of a whole series of efforts: a search by the council in a programme interplay, developing a shared language and putting the internal interplay in order. Ultimately, after an extensive process, a Participation Policy Framework was created. The participation bye-law in Velsen is – as stated in the bye-law – based on the participation policy framework and is intended to serve as a legal basis for the participation policy.

Everybody is expected to perform a different task

Drawing up a participation bye-law is not a one-man job. It requires the involvement of different actors inside (and outside) the town hall. This raises the following questions:

- Who should be the prime mover of the process? The process can vary from simply writing a bye-law to organising multiple activities and meetings to improve participation in a municipality in a broader sense.
- Which roles will be played by the council, the clerk's office, the Municipal Executive and the civil servants in the process? What is expected of these actors?
- How are residents involved? Working on *participation without organising participation* is very paradoxical. But what do you want residents to think about or decide on with regard to this dossier? Learn about how they see democracy? Or vote on prioritising articles of the bye-law? (This doesn’t seem like a great idea to us.)

So there is no one way of assigning the various actors a role, as these three examples show. It is therefore important to think carefully about what is expected of everybody and to agree on these expectations.

The bye-law in itself is not a panacea.

In our view, the participation bye-law is a means of working together towards better participation in the municipality. For various reasons, drafting a bye-law is not yet so effective that it magically leads to better participation:

- The bye-law does not easily become mainstream in a municipality.
- The bye-law itself does not provide a great deal of support when actually organising participation. This requires policy or a set of instruments.
- The bye-law is not the answer to all kinds of pressing questions about participation: take, for example, the shifting relationship between representative and participatory democracy. Or the fact that no matter how good a process is, dissatisfied residents can always report to the council afterwards.

In the pioneer meetings, we also learned what the bye-law does do:

- The bye-law is a good incentive in the municipality to take the organisation of participation in projects more seriously.
- The legislative proposal does create a certain degree of urgency to tackle the participation issue in a municipality.
- The legislative proposal provides the opportunity – in addition to drawing up the bye-law – to work on the participation issue in a broader sense: how are we doing in terms of participation? Which ambitions do we actually have? Does the policy still work? What should we do to improve participation in practice? Do we want to start experimenting?

Getting started: explorers 🔭, innovators 🚀 and everything in between

Most municipalities haven't yet started tackling the bye-law issue, so everybody is actually still a bit of an explorer. We therefore conclude this step with a few bits of advice for all municipalities that are getting started with the bye-law.

- **Focus on more than just a bye-law:** because improving participation requires so much more. It requires time and space for employees, awareness among the administrators and management, support and positioning of the politically-shared language and concepts to ensure that they are about the same thing, clear policy that helps employees and residents to follow a good process, plus a toolbox so that the right instruments can be used for all of these different issues.
- **Create urgency:** the legislative proposal is a good reason and a strong trigger to start working on improving participation in the municipality.
- **Think carefully about the specific content of the bye-law:** some topics fit better in policy than in a bye-law. One issue that came up a number of times was whether or not to include instruments in the bye-law. Why one instrument and not the other?
- **Learn from and with neighbouring municipalities:** there is no single answer model of the correct process to arrive at a bye-law. Help each other and learn from each other!

Colophon

This guide was created in collaboration between Berenschot and the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), on behalf of the VNG.

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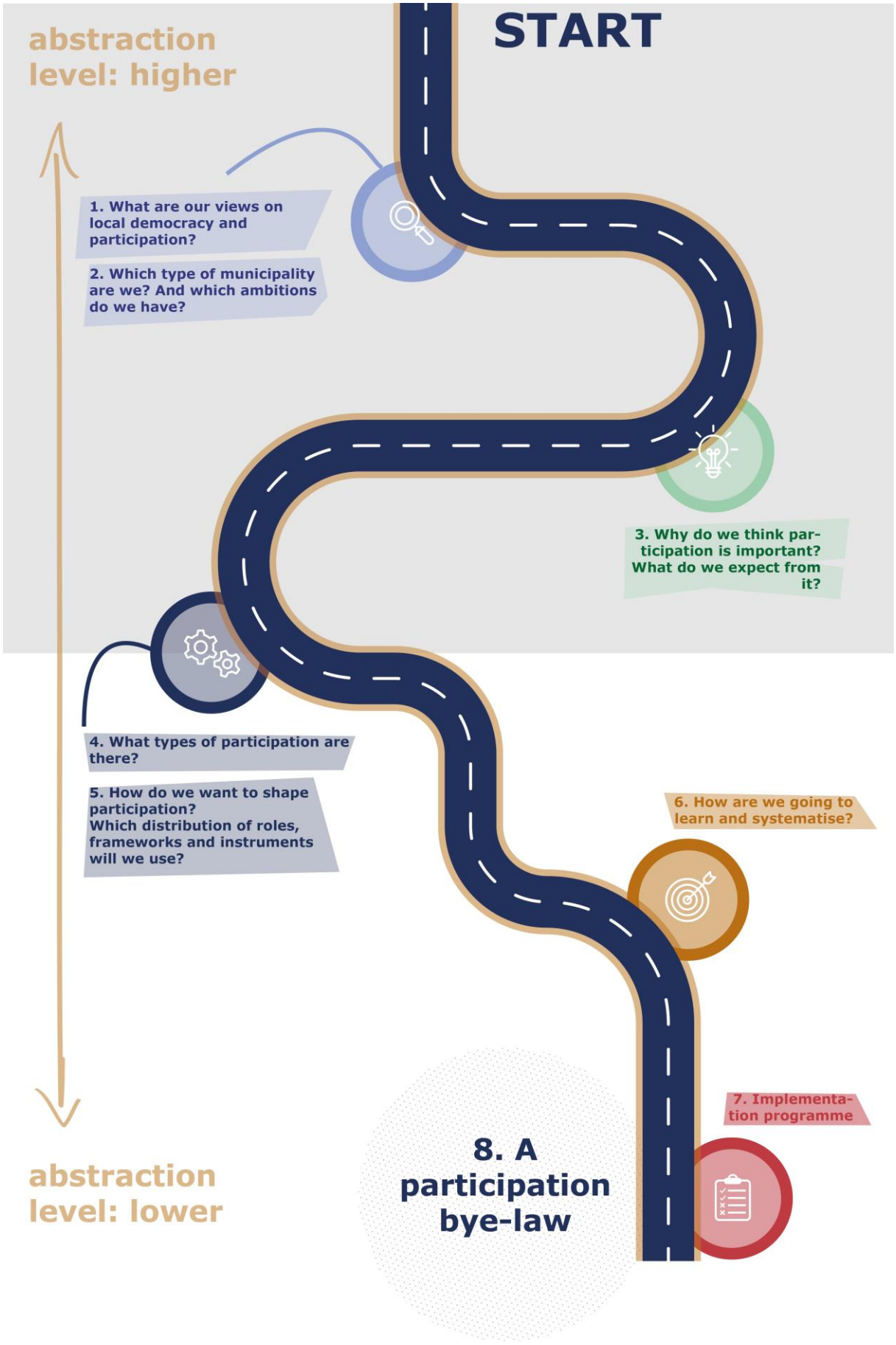
START
abstraction level: higher
1. What are our views on local democracy and participation?
2. Which type of municipality are we? And which ambitions do we have?
3. Why do we think participation is important? What do we expect from it?
4. What types of participation are there?
5. How do we want to shape participation? Which distribution of roles, frameworks and instruments will we use?
6. How are we going to learn and systematise?
7. Implementation programme
8. A participation bye-law
abstraction level: lower