

# Learning by doing

## *Government participation in an energetic society*

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# Foreword

*The Energetic Society* was published in 2011 by the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (*Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving* - PBL). In this trends report, PBL indicated that exploiting the potential of the energetic society required the Dutch government to change the way it thinks and acts. In 2012, the energetic society was identified as one of the seven themes on the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment's Strategic Knowledge and Innovation Agenda for 2012-2016. In the Agenda, the Ministry posed the following question: "What are the frameworks for action in order to serve and mobilise the energetic society in light of current societal challenges?" To answer this question, the Ministry approached the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, which then contacted the professionals at the Netherlands School of Public Administration (*Nederlandse School voor Openbaar Bestuur* - NSOB); this essay by the NSOB and PBL is the product that resulted from that inquiry and the subsequent collaboration it prompted. In terms of frameworks for action, the authors note that all the cases studied concern "a combination of ambition, large interventions to provide direction and small interventions to offer support to social initiatives." This essay assumes that the energetic society does not call for "less government," but instead for "another government." It calls for a government that is able to skilfully combine classic government roles (lawful, performing) with new roles (networking, participatory and facilitating). One particularly interesting aspect of this essay is its examination of the tensions inherent to the underlying differences between traditional governance and the role that the energetic society wants it to perform instead. We also offer engaging practical options for the individual civil servant to take action. The practical guidelines presented in this essay must now be implemented within our Ministry and the civil service, in order to make the transition from occasional successes to a broader, more cohesive approach. From 2016 to 2020 the Ministry will focus on strengthening the participatory and facilitating government, and on combining this new role with traditional roles. The tension between the vertical government and horizontal society calls for civil servants and managers at the Ministry to experiment further and to learn from these experiments, particularly when they fail. So let's get to work!

Siebe Riedstra, *Secretary General, Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment*  
Hans Leeftang, *Director Knowledge, Innovation and Strategy Department,*  
*Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment*

# 1 Issues surrounding the energetic society

## 1.1 *Changing relationships between government, market and society*

There has been a marked increase in cooperation between the government and parties from across civil society, spanning from individual citizens and civil society organisations to businesses and small social enterprises. These interactions sometimes emerge through formal, organised working relationships, but just as often they grow from informal, temporary or ad hoc arrangements. With names like ‘the participation society,’ ‘the energetic society,’ and ‘do-it-yourself democracy,’ citizens and enterprises are increasingly present in the public domain and lauded with both praise and an increasingly more significant role in civil and government affairs; these groups represent a growing class of bottom-up, grassroots-movement citizens and organizations. In a trend that runs parallel to these organizations’ growing prominence, the government has increasingly looked to others to carry out public tasks from a top-down perspective; as civil society has increasingly engaged a number of diverse areas, the government has responded by relinquishing control of several of them. Decentralisation has meant that many tasks in the area of healthcare and welfare have been shifted from the purview of national government to that of the municipalities, where public participation has grown to occupy a key role. These tasks are decentralised under the assumption that connections with communities can be better implemented at the local level. In a way, the assumption that communities’ strength is something worth leveraging has become a key part of policymaking. Government cutbacks are regularly coupled with calls for the public to take initiative and responsibility for its own sake, and to demonstrate resilience. Cooperation with other stakeholders is no longer a matter of choice; contemporary government either cooperates with other parties at all times, or withdraws entirely. The other parties that step in to fill the void introduce all kinds of initiatives, which in many cases then lead them towards areas dealt with by government, whether intentionally or not. The relationship between government and society is therefore highly dynamic.

It is easy to use words like ‘participation’ and ‘coproduction’, yet grasping what they entail is not quite as simple. These are words that are often nonchalantly written into policy, but not quite as simply put into practice without further initiative. Public efforts and greater citizen responsibility and initiative, for example, cannot be directly ‘implemented,’ nor can they be enforced by agencies or through regulations. Participation is not an activity that can be imposed top-down, nor is it an executive task that can be outsourced. Participation does not, after all, occur simply because the government says it should; it is instead a product of people believing something is possible. Participation has since evolved beyond the concept of public consultation and interactive policy that was developed and introduced in the early ‘70s in response to citizens’ objections to interminable delays. Through legislation, citizens were given an official say, indirectly compelling the government to listen to them at an early stage in the policy-making process. Thereafter, citizens and interested parties were officially part of the policymaking process, and literally ‘participated.’ Formally and legally, they were given a voice in policy. In this sense, civic participation and interactive policy development are long standing and deeply rooted concepts in Dutch public administration.

Nowadays, however, the situation is different. Governance based on energy in society is not a question of inviting or calling upon citizens to help the government find solutions, but is instead driven by citizens taking initiative to achieve something for themselves in areas where government is inactive, or previously suffered failure. These citizens enter the public domain, but not by invitation. They take the step themselves, on their own terms, and in their own way. The movement therefore comes from society itself, initiated by committed citizens and businesses that recognize opportunities, or sometimes take action out of necessity. For the government, this means a confrontation with parties who have taken it upon themselves to act, do not seek permission and sometimes directly compete with ongoing government activities. These initiatives are often partially compatible with government objectives, but can also have the effect of exerting pressure on seemingly unrelated government work, or on the conditional framework that government establishes for itself. This positive community engagement with potentially adverse consequences for government interests spans a variety of diverse initiatives including, for example, organising public spaces, taking initiative to improve traffic safety, promoting efforts to generate sustainable energy, taking action to ensure safety in the neighbourhood,

and taking responsibility for housing asylum seekers. The examples are legion and all have a similar trait: *they make a contribution, but they also have an abrasive effect*. This effect can be immediate, or might instead affect future prospects. Is it sustainable? What if it goes wrong? Is it sufficiently open to others? Each initiative has opportunities and questions inherent to its activities and circumstances. What they all have in common is that the grassroots movement propelling them forward continues unabated and self-propelled, and is therefore self-governed regardless of the answers to the questions posed. For example, self-arranged childcare, through which parents of a neighbourhood look after one another's children according to a weekly schedule, is in place and will continue, even while the government is busy considering which policy and supervisory regime should apply to this activity. In this respect, policy and law are dictated by external factors; they don't lose full control over processes because of slow progress, but rather due to events that are the product of an inherently unpredictable social dynamic that effectively takes government by surprise. The fact that these movements have their own dynamic is important since it means that they do not wait for the government to reach a decision; they continue to develop regardless of the government's position. They occur on their own and the government has to do 'something' with them. This response is partially in reaction to what is already being done, and partially proactive in an effort to encourage further efforts and strengthen initiatives, or to offer existing practices a greater platform and thus disseminate them on a wider scale.

In terms of the relationship between government and society, there has been more than just a shift in focus, there has also been a shift in initiative. Policymaking is no longer about encouraging civic participation, but rather about determining how to effectively boost government participation. It is not a question of optimal use of the government's energy, but of harnessing, mobilising and supporting the energy in civil society to achieve social objectives and public values. It is no longer just about the citizen who participates within government-defined boundaries, because citizens are already participating regardless of those established boundaries. Members of the community have their own aims and strive to achieve them. They straddle the processes defined by government and occupy a role therein, working at times of their own choosing with independent means and methodology. The relationship between government and citizen has thus become increasingly reciprocal in nature and, as a result, less delineated as well.

### *The Living Wall*

One project that exemplifies this trend towards an increasingly reciprocal relationship is 'The Living Wall.' Rijkswaterstaat, the executive arm of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, and the Municipality of Utrecht reached an agreement about widening the motorway next to the district of Lunetten in the southeast of Utrecht. In order to limit noise pollution, a barrier was planned between the motorway and the district. Rijkswaterstaat organised a residents' evening to discuss the plan. However, a number of residents expressed concerns, not so much about the noise, but mainly about the deterioration in the *air quality* due to ultrafine particle emissions from the motorway. The general feeling was that air quality was already bad, and would only worsen as a result of the motorway expansion. A group of residents then set up their own committee with 30 members, with roles correlating to professional and special expertise, and included architects, sustainability experts and entrepreneurs. As a group, they worked out an alternative design for a 'living wall,' which acted as a noise barrier that was higher to limit noise pollution, but also filtered the air. The initiators prepared a business plan to cover the additional costs. Together with investors, they suggested raising the height of the noise barrier, using it for student accommodation or office space, and also proposed providing space for allotments and sustainable generation of energy. In addition, they proposed another option for a noise barrier, which could be achieved by relocating the nearby municipal waste-separation plant of Utrecht to the site, so that it would effectively serve as a noise barrier. According to the committee, the plant's relocation would lead to lower traffic levels and would have the additional benefit of providing areas for park and green space in the newly freed space it had previously occupied. Moreover, its relocation could provide the foundation for the establishment of new links with smaller businesses engaged in the reuse of materials and recycling. The project attracted media attention and, as a result, was presented to both the aldermen of the municipal council and potential investors. Rijkswaterstaat have since lent their support to the initiative, and what started as an exercise in providing information and public consultation unexpectedly grew into an innovative grassroots initiative. The proposals challenged the prevailing attitude that the project could be either a barrier, or a green zone, or a residential area, but not a combination of all these functions. From an entrepreneurial perspective, other options were conceivable and logical, and this created a different dynamic from the original formal consultation between Rijkswaterstaat, the municipality and citizens.

This residents' initiative shows how the government's top-down approach to physical infrastructure was commandeered by the 'users' or 'objects' of the policy and transformed into a bottom-up process. Although this initiative was based on the expertise and motivation of local residents and entrepreneurs, the municipality is still closely involved as a facilitator. This puts society in competition with the government, which leads to innovative design that is characterized as being both sustainable and valuable. At the same time, the initiative also raises a number of questions. For example, where does responsibility lie for the safety risks associated with a project? If there is a shift in initiative, do liabilities also shift (Peeters, 2014)? Moreover, regardless of the sustainability of the Living Wall, people will soon be living and working in a noisy area in which, according to environmental standards, they should not be. Beyond that, though the residents' initiative might represent the interests of the district of Lunetten, it's conceivable that they might conflict with the interests of others in the public domain. Won't having a higher barrier that keeps out particulate matter simply result in moving the problem to the other side of the motorway, and put that problem squarely upon the shoulders of a neighbourhood where residents are less organised? Is it not the role of the government to safeguard general public interests? Participation is therefore not a model of governance that always guarantees the best results; it is also a development that raises objections and must be critically evaluated (Van Twist, Van der Steen and Wendt, 2014). What if people lose enthusiasm after a while and the Living Wall deteriorates?

There is no conclusive answer to such questions. There is no manual for civil servants on how to approach this matter, and it is hard to say whether it is even possible to write one at all. However, lessons can be learned from empirical studies of such cases. The insights from *The Energetic Society* (Hajer, 2011) and *Pop-up public value* (Van der Steen et al., 2013) together offer a perspective on this sort of new and upcoming dynamic and the opportunities they present to the government. These insights have been applied over the past year to a series of practical cases, in which there were opportunities to provide more *energetic responses* to such issues and then determine the consequences and causes of their outcome. The studies carried out by PBL and NSOV were in turn built on earlier conceptual work and therefore practically applied, though not by way of 'implementation.' Instead, we conducted our studies by considering if and how these insights could be applied more broadly, and what new questions their application could potentially raise. This yielded two results: insight into a more struc-

tured and focused way of working with social energy, and reflections on the new challenges and dilemmas presented by this insight.

This essay seeks to answer the question of what a government's role should be in an energetic society. In this respect, the issue still concerns *governance* by the government, but in a *form that goes beyond* the government operating above society and the market at the top of a hierarchical governing system. The image of an active and assertive society means that the government is simply a party that acts in between or alongside society, but continues doing so in very specific competences and areas of expertise including legislation, maintaining public order, maintaining monopoly of the legitimate use of force, and imposing penalties and taxation. With its special responsibilities, the government also remains the custodian of the public interest in an energetic society. It does this by, for example, determining public objectives. The government is never a stakeholder in the same way as other active parties, but in order to achieve its goals it increasingly depends on what those other parties do. Many problems, including climate change, the loss of biodiversity and resource scarcity, are too big and too intractable for the government to solve alone. This calls for adaptation to a new role for the administration, the official organisation and for individual civil servants. In this essay we use empirical material from sub-studies in the area of sustainable mobility, organic urban-area planning, enforcement and local climate initiatives to explore overarching lessons on this theme. What do the changing relationships in society mean with regard to proper governance, organisation, politics and the professionalism of government?

## 1.2 In search of the government's role in an energetic society

The changing relationship between government and citizens has long been the object of study (WRR, 2012; SCP, 2012; Hajer, 2011; NSOB, 2010; ROB, 2012; RMO, 2013). The shifting shapes of both society and government means there is a constant search for the most suitable relationship between the two. Some lean strongly towards the *authorisation of discourse*, based on the question of whether it is permitted, whether it works, and whether it is appropriate (Hemerijck, 2003). Sometimes the relationship is practical and pragmatic, sometimes normative and moral. The issue of whether it is possible is for some a practical question about the actual possibility of self-governance and self-organisation, while for others it is more an articulation of whether or not it is appropriate: Is it all right to do it like that?

Are there no exceptions? Does that approach not result in major shortcomings or inequalities? Others see the issue as a puzzle to solve; to do so, they explore practical ways to embed bottom-up initiatives within existing government structures, or to give substance to them outside structures. Here, some are more pragmatic, while others take a more normative approach (Van Twist et al., 2014). For the first group, self-organisation is a possibility that has both advantages and disadvantages. The second group sees self-organisation as a viable option for the government. There are others still who do not envisage a system based on just one of these approaches, but rather believe in a combination of the two. Not *either-or*, but *and*, with all the complications that arise from dealing with the constantly evolving relationships involved.

Two messages, which are more or less the same, resonate in different ways on the subject. On the one hand, there is a growing bottom-up movement forcing the government to reconsider its own role and position. It is a role that is involved yet modest, and neither in the foreground nor fully, unambiguously in the background. It is a government that does not always take action itself, but makes things possible by providing support, being flexible, having an eye for the local context and by stepping back in certain areas at the right time. On the other hand, it is a government that makes cutbacks and must increasingly consider different tasks and organisational models as a result. Both messages imply a shift in emphasis towards a government that enables and facilitates developments and initiatives: an *'enabling state.'* One caveat in this respect is that a government that is constantly considering the fact that its responsibilities lie in the energetic society will ultimately view relinquishing responsibilities as a legitimate option. It is, of course, not quite so simple to do so. We will have to examine when the energetic society can and cannot perform certain roles, and what this asks of the government.

In this essay we have chosen to approach the development of a relationship between energetic society and government as one that complements the existing repertoire of governance. This approach does not therefore focus on a transition in which the government reverses and reinvents itself, with the result being that everything is done differently. Instead, it focuses on how developments complement the traditional repertoire, which in some fields or subjects indicates that solutions fit 'just' well enough. Energetic society and pop-up public value are in that respect *positive concepts*: they emphasise the government's ability to also achieve

targets in the middle of a complex and involved society. That by no means heralds the end of public governance, and does not even per se mean that the government withdraws. Instead, it means a change in the government's role. Sometimes it is closer and has a more active role, while at other times it operates at a distance, leaving space by being less involved. In some areas, it achieves results without having its own explicit agenda, while in other areas it has grand, explicit ambitions. By first taking a couple of very strong systematic measures it can then leave space for local and creative – energetic – interpretation. In all cases, its new and developing role requires an additional, evolving repertoire of actions. With regard to the processes for creating new legislation, for example, it can foster the energetic society by allowing it the space to blossom and flourish. The challenge for the government is to develop an adequate repertoire through which energy is recognised, utilised and mobilised. It also means that when this energy finally runs out, the government needs to be prepared to deal with the consequences.

This essay refrains from making major considerations about the changing relationship between *the* government and *the* society. Such major considerations do not offer a productive way to start a discussion about how to interpret the relationship between the two. We opt to focus on the specific issues, and then to see what the appropriate relationships are in these cases. The essay is therefore NOT a generic review, but rather a situational and specific perspective on roles, tasks and relationships. The reason for this is as simple as it is pragmatic. Interaction between government and civil society is in each case subject to differing local circumstances, other forms of stakeholder involvement and the different levels of involvement by stakeholders in both elements. This involves local as well as highly significant differences, which are not an additional element in the relationship, but constitute its very essence. The relationships and roles are therefore different in all instances, based on local characteristics and temporary associations.

While a far-reaching, top-down approach may be legitimate in one domain, other domains may call for the government to act in a more modest capacity. Hierarchical government often remains the best option for matters of national defence or maintaining public order, but even with regard to issues such as these, more network-oriented approaches are sometimes worth consideration (depending on the context). In other areas, numerous possibilities are presented for horizontal relationships and government

participation. The message here is that the role of government is determined by an assessment of local dynamics and the target or issue that the government is focusing on. Successfully tapping into the energetic society requires the ability to carry out this assessment well, to choose the right repertoire, and to implement it in the right way and in the right place. Such an assessment does not require the government to undergo a radical transition, it only requires meeting the challenge of aligning itself as well as it can with events and trends in society. Sometimes such an aim is achievable by through responsiveness or by offering space to other parties, sometimes through strong governance and maintaining a consistent line, and sometimes by withdrawing and leaving room for others to act. Variability and variety therefore constitute the basis of the relationship between the government and society; the energetic society also means an inherently multiple and layered government.

The role of government in an energetic society can therefore only be considered by focusing on specific fields and examples within these fields. The policy area of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment lends itself perfectly to such an analysis. Fields like energy, climate, mobility, urban area development, land quality and water management involve many 'big' projects, stakeholders and interests, which are at the same time surrounded by energetic citizens and entrepreneurs (and researchers) who develop their own local initiatives. Sustainable mobility can, for example, only be realised if people actually start using electric cars, use bicycles more often and integrate public transport into the way they think and act. The government continues to maintain a significant role in this regard. We are all familiar with the phenomenon of parents taking their children to school by car because they consider traffic too dangerous to travel by other means. But in doing so, they contribute to the very congestion and unsafe conditions around schools that they were concerned about in the first place. The government can change the 'default' for a given situation by offering more room in infrastructure. It can also take a less benign approach by making the traffic situation less car-friendly, thus discouraging car use altogether. In this way, the government can help stimulate and support a given cause, influencing the everyday choices that people make by influencing their perception of the options before them. This effort is not just a government responsibility though; innovation in urban area development planning only gets off the ground if there are entrepreneurs who are willing to make an effort to achieve it, or citizens who feel a connection with the subject matter that can stimulate and mobilise each other. Progress in

this instance does assume however that policymakers are also amenable to the cause and approach.

How to respond to the energy in society is not an easy question, but it's a conundrum that offers the potential for new, creative possibilities. "Ninety percent of the people who visit me explain how something is *not possible*", a high-ranking civil servant recently complained. These percentages may be slightly different depending on where you are, but the perception that a significant amount of potential social energy is difficult to unlock is a valid one from the government's perspective. Energetic initiatives are great, but they often run up against existing laws, standards, procedures and policy rules. Though an energetic initiative might at first appear impossible, it may be necessary when it's eventually revisited— and more so than when it was first proposed. Harnessing the energy in society therefore requires the government to question its own rules, procedures and patterns. If people outside the process say that "it is possible," then government should pursue the initiative. This should not be the case always and everywhere, but it should at least be a guiding principle. How can the policy officers of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment productively and actively engage with the energetic society? Just as such a quandary applies to municipalities, other ministries, executive organisations and other large and small public services, it serves to say that officers can also become more proficient at working in a mixed arrangement. The continually evolving relationship between government and society means that existing procedures and rules are often challenged in a context lacking a working blueprint. Working in and with the energetic society involves searching for the best way for policy officers to act in specific situations and contexts, and to search for exactly what strategies or tools work best and when. A search for tailor-made solutions involves looking at problems on a case-by-case basis in context, and what that means in terms of creating and promoting successful government action. This last aspect must be looked at in its entirety, and the government's role and options must be fully considered in order to achieve success. For example, any given situation might call for refraining from government intervention, nurturing an initiative, scaling it up, or maybe stopping it. Across the board, regardless of context, such a search in any case assumes that government is actively curious and interested in the obstacles faced by citizens and businesses. This essay is about that search.

# 2

## Four perspectives on the government's role

### 2.1 Movement in the relationships between government, market and community

In this essay we consider public value as being comprised of services which serve a public utility, and the provision of which goes beyond just the individual recipient of those services. This public value can be realised through various 'production models', which are often indicated by the three components of *market*, *government* and *community* (WRR, 2012; Hoogenboom, 2011; Van der Lans and De Boer, 2011; Gray, Jenkins, Leeuw and Mayne, 2003; O'Flynn and Wanna, 2008; Hall, 1995; Mort, Weerawardena and Carnegie, 2006). Figure 1 depicts the dynamics in the production of public value. Privatisation and citizen participation exert an influence from above, while active citizenship and social enterprise do so from below.

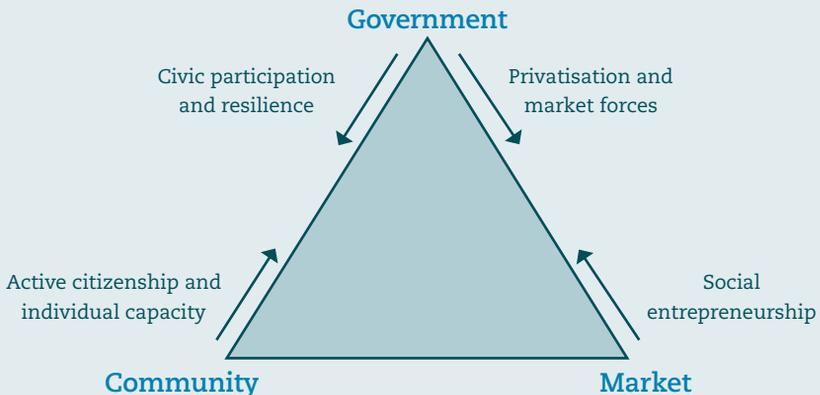


Figure 1. Changing relationships between the government, market (businesses) and the community (citizens) (NSOB, 2013).

The relationships that determine the way in which public value is produced are distinct to each era. For a long time, most public value was produced in the lower part of the triangle: by the market and the community, with the government occupying only a very modest and often complementary role. The notion that public value belongs to government and is now being slowly transferred to other parties is a historical error; rather, it is the other way around. The modern role of government is relatively young. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s when public value grew strongly collectivised and production shifted predominantly from the community and the market to government that it gradually started becoming what it is today. During the rapid expansion of the welfare state, tasks were placed under the purview of the government, and then greatly expanded. For example, within a few decades' time, the national insurance system developed into a comprehensive social security system that not only provided insurance but also social betterment, connection and care (WRR, 2006). The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a turning point in the 'upwards' development in the triangle. The major operations of market forces, liberalisation and privatization brought production in all sorts of areas back to the market. This development continued at least until the beginning of this century, although it now appears to have slowly come to a halt. Conversely, what we see nowadays in all areas is that the government is trying to forge an approach based on the means and capacity of civic society to be self-governing, in an effort to transfer tasks to citizens and civil society organisations (ROB, 2012). A key aspect of these reforms is that the initiative for movement comes from the top of the triangle: the government seeks ways to transfer production to the market and the community. Privatisation involves the transfer of tasks from the government to the market (Kay and Thompson, 1986). The concepts of participation, individual means and resilience are often used in the context of delegating public authority tasks to the community, either to organised groups or to individual citizens (Tonkens, 2009), based on the understanding that the community itself will do what the government previously did for them. The community will not do so because it wants to, or because it requested it, but because circumstances dictate its necessity. Instances that might require such transfer of responsibility could include, for example, government cutbacks, a diminished government capacity to continue carrying out certain tasks, or simply enough, new insights that citizens and businesses can do a certain task better than government.

Opposite this top-down movement are various initiatives emerging from the bottom-up. These bottom-up initiatives generate public value, but rise

on the basis of self-propelled initiative instead of by request (Rose, 2000). Market parties seek each other out and form coalitions that provide public value. Citizens take responsibility for public spaces (Schinkel and Van Houdt, 2010). Social entrepreneurs offer independent care for the elderly, and generate money and social value in the process (Schulz, Van der Steen and Van Twist, 2013). The government often plays a supporting role in this respect through, for example, budgeting or the Social Support Act. In spite of its support though, the initiative itself lies within the market and civil society, with the government instead participating. Thus, the public domain becomes filled with all sorts of parties working together to realize public values. Not 'together' in the sense of closely collaborating, but in the sense of accumulated efforts. We refer here to *socialisation*: the determination and the production of public value occurs increasingly in the lowest part of the triangle, whereby the government vacates the central position in the public domain or shares it with others (Van der Steen et al., 2013). This is where the network society comes into contact with the core of the government. Attempts to generate public value are increasingly a matter of interacting with a multitude of parties – market or community, individual citizens and large businesses – which are all equally active (NSOB, 2010).

The power possessed by networks to produce public value is the central notion underlying the 'energetic society' (Hajer, 2011). The community is sufficiently energetic and creative to address issues by itself, not only in the field of sustainability, but in all sorts of other areas too. The government's role is therefore not to solve problems for the citizens, but to ensure that citizens, businesses and other involved parties are in a better position to deal with their own issues and to give free rein to their creativity and capacity to learn. The network society ensures that parties in the community and in the market – often in various combinations of the two – are increasingly in a better position to generate value, which was unlikely prior to its emergence. Public value in this respect is not so much the outcome of the government producing it, but is instead the result of smart arrangements among participants in the energetic society that work to harness the network's energy and help achieve government objectives.

## **2.2 *Developments in the governance role of government***

Discussion of the socialisation of public value and governance of social energy is part of a larger development in both the consideration and the

practice of public governance. The various views and development in this respect are illustrated in Figure 2 (Van der Steen et al., 2013; Bourgon, 2011; Van Eijck, 2014). Governance has developed from a primary focus on basic principles like good governance, legality and procedural diligence, to concentrating on delivering quantifiable results and organising how to best implement them. This is the movement from bottom to top in the diagram, which demonstrates the relationship between primary emphasis on the *framework conditions for results* (diligence) and *results within the framework conditions* (effectiveness and efficiency). The movement from classic public administration (Weber, 1978; Wilson, 1989) to New Public Management (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Rhodes, 1996) is embedded in political-scientific literature. Procedural diligence and the importance of good governance still apply in both cases, although in the case of New Public Management there is an overwhelming emphasis on measurable results. This emphasis is in fact so strong that the principles of measurability and predictability are imperative for the objective itself; targets are only 'real' if they are quantifiable. The outputs only exist if they can be expressed in terms of indicators, even if we know from prior research and experience that the results of many government efforts cannot be fully expressed by such indicators, if at all.

A second development is the perceptible movement from a form of governance extending from the government to the outside world towards more involvement from the outside world into governance. Instead of primarily extending from inside out, governance occurs to an increasing extent from the outside in, or at the very least, features in-depth cooperation from parties outside government in the processes of governing. This is the movement from the left to right that is depicted in the diagram (figure 2). The upper-right area of the diagram therefore primarily concerns the government seeking other formal partners to achieve its own objectives, like cooperation in umbrella organisations, setting up organised forms of consultation, or working towards objectives through public-private partnerships. The government cooperates, but does so through its own initiative and as the main actor. Network governance (bottom right) adds another dimension: going beyond the involvement of society in government production towards independent production in which the government is or is not involved. This concerns parties who become active of their own accord, previously described as the development from civic participation to government participation. Parties generate public value through their own initiative: take, for example self-organisation, in which social entrepre-

neurs or enterprises take initiatives in the public domain. They determine their own objectives, set their own priorities and forge their own partnerships. The government can participate, but it is not a given that it will, and it is not the primary voice regardless of whether it does. The question of whether the government participates is not so much its own choice, but is rather determined by the other parties in the network. The government is therefore sometimes left on the sidelines, without any involvement in the initiative or its development. In other cases, the government is more involved and acts as a full partner.

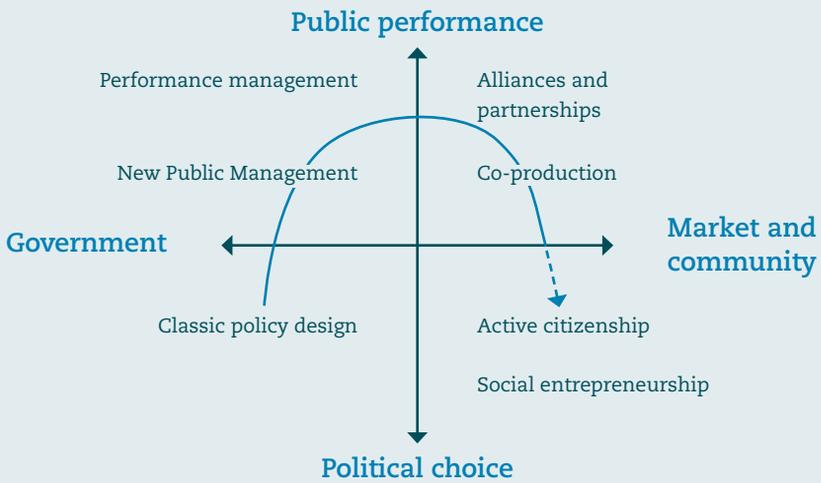


Figure 2. Dynamics in governance and organisation (NSOB, 2013).

The development towards the right-hand side of the diagram has consequences for the way in which the government organises itself; where the government engages in co-production with other parties it must also abandon its traditional compartmentalised structure and adapt its organisation to the needs and dynamics of the outside world. The government's own standards, principles and views on good organisation can diminish in relevance as input from others grows in importance. The more government gravitates towards the centre and right-hand side of the diagram, the more it needs to align itself with the nature, form and structure of society. In this scenario, others do not have to adjust to the manner in which the

government works; rather, government is compelled to organise itself in a way that complements the prevailing social dynamic. Rather than foisting ready-made solutions on society, the government must ascertain how citizens perceive specific issues and then respond to them in order to shape its organisation in a manner that best caters to their needs. Policy will thus become increasingly interactive: conceived and implemented with, rather than for, others. Social parties do not wait around for a solution to be ready; they develop their own solutions for their own problems. This reality calls for both sides to adopt a new approach for working together in new relationships. For a government that operates increasingly on the right-hand side of the diagram, the realisation of policies thus depends on its ability to make productive connections with other parties. The focus is therefore less on tightly controlled policy-making and implementation, and increasingly on managing interactions between parties (Van Bueren, Klijn and Koppejan, 2003). Different relationships are therefore literally accompanied by different forms of work and other competencies. To operate properly on the right-hand side of the diagram the government has to change its approach, the way it is organised, and how it acts.

#### **Four perspectives on the government's role**

Here we explore the question of how government relates to the 'energetic society.' Which is the most appropriate position in the above diagram? Should the government seek alliances, co-production and connections with active citizenship and social entrepreneurship? Or should it focus precisely on performance management? Should it limit itself as much as possible to issues of legality and equality? There are different opinions on how this question should be answered. Based on the above diagram, we can distinguish four possible roles (governance models) for the government:

##### ***The lawful government***

The legitimacy and legality of government actions is key from the perspective of the *classic government*. The government is hierarchically organised, with a clear division between political primacy and administrative loyalty. Public interests are determined on the basis of political debate. In policy, political objectives are translated into rules, procedures and the allocation of resources. In implementing policy, civil servants must above all act with circumspection, impartiality and integrity. The objectives must be 'SMART', in the sense of being concrete, controllable and quantifiable. The relationship with society and the market is vertical and takes shape primarily through safeguarding rights and obligations.

### ***The performing government***

The classic government model was followed by promotion of the *performing government in its stead* (Hood, 1991; Stoker, 2006). Here, the belief in market forces takes precedence, with the government continuing to occupy a hierarchical role. Political ambitions translate as much as possible into output-oriented and measureable objectives, and in implementation the focus is on the purposefulness and effectiveness of interventions. Some tasks, particularly the 'PIOFACH' support services (Personnel, Information provision, Organisation, Finances, Administrative organisation, Communication and Housing) from the business operations of organisations are 'outsourced' to private parties, as a result of efficiency considerations. However, exerting policy influence and implementing public value remain organised within government. Citizens, from this perspective, are customers that must be served as well as possible. The civil servant is therefore expected to take an approach that is results-oriented, customer-conscious and efficient (Noordegraaf, 2004). The relationship with society and the market is vertical and primarily shaped through performance agreements and transparency (Aguinis, 2009).

### ***The networking government***

A movement has risen in recent years that prominently features *networking government* at its fore. A key shift in this respect is that the government does not operate in isolation, but instead together with other parties in a more horizontal relationship (Rhodes, 1997; Castells, 2000). Objectives are not therefore determined within government, but through interaction with key partners from civil society and business (Christensen and Lægheid, 2007). This takes shape in public-private partnership structures (PPP), alliances and covenants. More horizontal coordination takes place between stakeholders and joint decisions are made and set out in 'agreements.' Consultations mainly take place between established parties, united by umbrella organisations or trade unions. The role of policy is, to a large extent, to translate social preferences into concerted practices. The civil servant is expected to be aware of the environment, and responsive and collaboratively oriented. The relationship with the market and society becomes more horizontal and takes shape through negotiations and compromises.

### ***The participatory government***

Finally, there is a fourth approach gaining ground that is founded on the 'resilience' of society. Here, the relationship between government and society is reversed in comparison to classic government, and policy

choices are as closely in tune as possible with what happens in society (Alford, 2009; Alford and O'Flynn, 2012). The government as far as possible calls on the resilience and plurality of society, and less on central actors and established parties (RMO, 2013). Society and, to an increasing extent, the market enter the public domain as volunteers and social entrepreneurs, and take over government tasks. From this perspective, public value is not determined within government, but within society by citizens and business. Here, the chief role of the government is to lay down a framework and offer support. The civil servant is expected to play a facilitating role, sometimes through active engagement and sometimes by deliberately withdrawing. The government maintains a prudent and modest position and, where possible, tries to align itself with social initiative. The emphasis is on government participation rather than civic participation. The relationship with the market and society is primarily a *participatory government*, which provides space and support to social initiatives, and cooperates with organised and non-organised partners (Van der Steen, Van Twist and Karré, 2011; Schulz, Van der Steen and Van Twist, 2013). The collection of essays *Publieke Pioniers* (Public Pioneers) contains various practical examples of a participatory and facilitating government at levels of central, provincial and municipal government (Huijs, 2013).

	Lawful government	Performing government	Networking government	Participatory government
Determination of objectives	Political primacy in establishing public interests	Politically oriented, focused on providing significance to measurable performance agreements	Societal establishment that works in consultation with network partners	Citizens and businesses develop social value
Role of policy	Political ambitions translate into rules, procedures and strict allocation of resources	Political ambitions translate into management agreements and results deliverables	Societal preferences translate into concerted practices	Societal initiatives translate into a framework and support system
Civil servant traits	Circumspect, impartial and integrity-driven	Results-oriented, customer-oriented and efficient	Environmentally-aware, responsive, cooperatively-oriented	Restrained, measured, circumspect, networker
Government organisation	Hierarchical, political primacy with emphasis on the value of administrative loyalty	Objective and results-driven through performance agreements	Connected and coordinated with an established network of actors	Prudent, distanced, modest
Governance	Exercises rights and obligations, bureaucratic	Strikes performance agreements, determines objectives	Strikes compromises and agreements in accordance with dialogue partners	Operates from a perspective of public objectives but seeks connection with societal initiative

Figure 3. Schematic overview of the four perspectives on the government's role.

# 3 Differentiation of governance models

## 3.1 Mixed and layered governance practices

In the previous section we outlined four governance models and chronicled their developments. The models represent various movements, each with their own perspective on government actions and the relationship between government, society and the market (see figure 3). Distinguishing four perspectives and addressing them in order implies a *transition*, passing from one to the next. Change involves learning the rules of the new model and then discarding the rules of the old one. However, in our view, that type of wholesale change is not applicable to governance models. It is not a case of one model entirely replacing another, but instead an instance in which a new perspective is superimposed over a previous approach. This results in an increasingly mixed perspective, in which various models with their own principles and standards come to stand alongside one another. Practice does not call for a new, uniform model that can be applied to everything, but rather for a model that is capable of handling a variety of diverse elements simultaneously. There are initiatives from networks, in addition to partnerships with existing and established parties. These occur within the core values of public administration: lawfulness, legal equality and legality. All actions taken in this respect are in accordance with the rules that govern accountability and performance agreements, with certain issues calling for greater dominance by a particular quadrant. For some questions, the left-hand side is dominant, while for others the right-hand side is more suitable.

In practice, these models coexist in various combinations and differ in the significance of their overlap depending on circumstance. This can lead to tension: how much space are ministers, members of the provincial executive, aldermen or civil servants willing and able to offer civil society parties, if the House of Representatives, provincial council or municipal council primarily focuses on performances and successes? What is the role and function of agreements – within sectors but also in the coalition agreement – in harnessing energy in the network? These questions are not

intended to diminish the importance or wherewithal of a coalition agreement, but do indeed capture the quandary associated with any given network rising in prominence. Starting with a detailed coalition agreement can hinder the organic development of a dynamic; the government, however, has the potential to avoid such a pitfall by explicitly stating its ambitions, and then contributing in precise ways to the developing dynamic. For a government wishing to channel the energy of a network, the question must always be: what is the significance of this intervention for the network dynamic, and is it in line with our intended goals? For example, expressing ambition for 'more sustainable energy' in a network can have wide-ranging results depending on circumstances and the manner in which it is introduced. If government's stated ambition is too heavily regulated, micro-managed or subject to all kinds of conditions, then the dynamic in the network is likely to come to a grinding halt. But if the ambition leaves room for initiative, experimentation and new solutions from people 'outside,' it has the potential to provide the spark for renewed, vigorous energy development in the dynamic.

The various approaches are therefore akin to layers deposited on top of one another. It is not a question of *transition*, but of *sedimentation* (Van der Steen et al., 2013). The government always and by definition is tasked with safeguarding legitimacy and rule-of-law principles; the perspective of the lawful government is present in all government actions. This involves actively promoting and, where necessary, upholding the rule of law and its corresponding principles. This also involves the government promoting its own actions through principles of rule of law, in order to reaffirm its democratic legitimacy. Setting rules and upholding the law are among the core tasks of the government, and will always play a role in the public domain. The monopoly on the legitimate use of force is the ultimate expression of this. In the same vein of thought, however, this ultimate expression might also be seen as the decision not to make any rules, keeping in mind and promoting the principle of self-regulation. Regardless, there is an autonomous and self-determined interpretation of the legal frameworks and rules in the public domain, which ensures that the government must actively accommodate dynamic, or at the very least consciously and actively refrain from intervention in these self-determined forms and agreements.

Just as the government cannot do without rule-of-law principles and legitimacy, it also cannot act without a results-oriented perspective. This approach guarantees accountability for the spending of public funds; it

ensures that efforts and outcomes are inexorably related to one another. The translation of political decisions into policy objectives is always present, even if it's eventually decided that decision-making and responsibility are in some instances best left to the public. Even then, it is important to consider desirable outcomes, the way in which they can be achieved, and how to best internally administer and arrange them to achieve success. Accordingly, the question becomes a matter of which principles and techniques will best facilitate that. New theories of public management and performance management are firmly based on a particular performance-related approach, in which the focal points are measurability and predictability, according to a specific set of measurement rules. The audit model is dominant in this respect, with outcomes only counting if they are quantifiable, announced in advance, and within the scope of the auditor. Unexpected results, including those difficult to quantify like by-products and long-term benefits that do not easily embed within a system, are barely considered. One of the challenges is how to address this differently: is it possible to arrange for an approach with responsibilities that are more in line with the principles of a network and its social energy?

Working in networks is anything but new; government organisations have always been to some extent dependent on other parties to achieve objectives. Chains of parties work towards objectives on the basis of agreements or other arrangements for optimal cooperation; these various elements are interdependent. The government makes arrangement with housing corporations about, for example, the sustainability of the housing stock, or to improve the quality of life in neighbourhoods. The Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate works together with dozens of businesses in a variety of sectors (high-risk materials and products, inland shipping, bus transport, transportation of goods, taxi services, merchant navy, aerospace, hazardous materials) on the basis of compliance agreements (Van de Peppel, 2013). In this manner, a great deal of public value is provided a platform in networks of organised and institutionalised parties, and often results in the further institutionalisation and formation of established parties. These are partnerships which simply, and which do not have to be continually reaffirmed and renewed. The challenge for government, if it wishes to exert policy influence on energy in society, is to consider whether these organised network movements contribute to the social dynamic. Sometimes platforms and agreements will serve as a vehicle for harnessing societal energy, while other times this energy instead represents a counterproductive obstacle.

In addition to government-organised networks we also see, as has been said, the emergence of self-organised and independent initiatives (Huijs, 2013; Overbeek and Salverda, 2013). The government was always to some extent dependent on the efforts of society and the market, but policy initiatives that focus on, for example, social cohesion in the neighbourhood, only succeed if local residents embrace and actively support them. Conversely, you can only create policy if social trends are clear, along with solutions to either help support or solve them. Meaningful connections between government and society can only be created if people see a purpose in them, or have an immediate stake in their survival. People are not generally motivated to action by appeals to their moral principles, but rather by self-interest; the cause that motivates individuals to action could span from interest in positive improvement, for a cause they are personally dedicated to, to motivation to fix or put an end to something negative they are consistently frustrated by. In the growth perspective for this fourth layer (which, from the perspective of this essay, should be further developed and deployed) the question is how this compares to other governance models. If a government wishes to mobilise society's energy, it must determine how to best organise itself in order to balance and maintain the individual characters of both society and government.

In practice, the four models of governance described above coexist in government organisations and arrangements, with elements from each operating on top, alongside, or even intertwined with one other. On a single government worker's desk, there might be files with content emphasizing a bottom-left (classic government) approach, and others with elements from a bottom-right (participatory government) approach. Similarly, a party might be working with one model in mind, while another tackles the same issue using a different model. Seen from this point of view, there exists significant variety in governance models and procedures in practice. This is certainly the case within systems, where sometimes one model applies and sometimes another, but it is also true in organisations where internal rules can lean heavily towards the bottom-left and top-left areas – legitimacy and performances/results – while working practices might take shape through approaches on the right-hand side. In our view, it is precisely this variety that characterises the current approach to governance. Sometimes one model or approach works best, sometimes another; what is important and integral to modern governance is the ability to see the difference. In this style of governance, success does not so much require a focus on the new, but instead on a government's ability to deal with multiplicity. Ideal gover-

nance should not focus on casting aside existing methods, but instead on realigning traditional practices and emerging approaches to society's advantage. The balance this requires is more in the vein of synchronisation than it is transformation; the issue is not one of adopting a new repertoire, but instead about the art of identifying which approach is best suited for a given situation.

An increasingly complicating factor is that other parties always influence the choice of governance model. In practice, varied elements from the right and left-hand side are almost always present, which can result in tensions. For example, inquiries by the House of Representatives about the costs and performances of a given policy programme might make it difficult to rely on the model of *performing government*, even if there is a 'networking' impulse at the foundation of the programme. And if the private sector 'partners' are associated with fraud, that brings the role of the *lawful government* expressly into play. Its prevalence, however, is not unique to a case of fraud, but would be relevant to a multitude of other instances; it would, for example, play a prominent role in the event of an individual or organization bringing a case before the court demanding equal treatment and legal equality. The choice of governance model is therefore not just based on rational considerations of the most effective option but is also part of a dynamic interplay of forces in which initiatives, incidents and public perception all play a role.

### 3.2 *Switching between the vertical government and the horizontal society*

To an increasing extent, the principles of the *government as a network organisation* are applied alongside those from the left-hand side of the diagram. The network approach is similar to that of a participatory government and major public issues are regularly dealt with by making broad agreements between political parties, trade unions and sector organisations. The Dutch 'polder model,' for example, features compromises between numerous established parties. In order to ensure the legitimacy of an agreement, it is important to begin new initiatives by having 'everyone on board' (as was the case, for example, in the Green Deal, the government's sustainability agenda and low-carbon roadmap, the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth). In this respect, the Netherlands' approach differs from, say, that of the *Energiewende* in Germany. In the Dutch model, objectives are not just set from within government, but also emerge from consultation with civil

society partners. Rather than representing the political objectives of a minister, the agreements are founded on broader efforts. Representatives from civil society and/or the business community are provided a voice and thus have the opportunity to address issues as partners.

Nonetheless, there are key differences between the participatory government and the government as a network organisation. An approach based on such agreements means determining compromises in advance. As a result, it is difficult to actually implement radical innovations, or to adapt to changing interests or perceptions of problems. For example, many point out that the interests of the petrochemical, automotive and energy industries prevent the rapid transition to a climate-neutral transport system. An approach based on agreements also means that newly emerging interests have little influence because only established parties are provided the opportunity to voice their concerns. Society is, though to a diminishing extent, represented by traditional interest groups. In this respect, the energetic society has a limited influence on already decided upon decisions. This approach reinforces the *power of vested interests*, and while it may make it easier to reach compromises, it also offers little scope for innovation and bottom-up initiatives.

An attempt by government to move to the bottom-right (government participation) often results in the emergence of a networking government. When government aligns itself with civil society, the resulting relationship can quickly take shape in the form of consultation with 'civil society partners', whereby the government ends up with the larger, institutionalised interest groups. The movement to the lower right does not therefore happen on its own, since the natural tendency is typically to seek out familiar parties. The Energetic Government, an essay collection published by Wageningen UR at the beginning of 2014 and commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, offers inspirational visions by professions from the fields of science, business and government on how the government can interpret a participatory role (Overbeek and Salverda, 2013). One practical example, in which the government has been particularly successful in terms of participation and facilitating an energetic society, is the Phosphate Value Chain Agreement (Ketenakkoord Fosfaat). This agreement was signed in 2011 by over 20 Dutch companies, knowledge institutions, NGO's and government bodies in an effort to end the phosphorous cycle in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe and the world. Its success was a clear result of: "Responding, responding, responding, the right timing, the right framing and the right interventions" (Passenier, 2013).

Conversely, the role of the participatory government may also emerge from a less compromising source; founded in, for example, mistrust by society of government intentions. In instances where the government expresses desire to 'engage' and 'facilitate,' society and the market might at times respond with suspicion. Although all parties make efforts at realising public value, by no means can it be assumed that their underlying interests are the same. The aims of an initiator are not necessarily in line with those of a policymaker. Rather than being perceived as a partner, a project initiator might be regarded as a competitor. If the government attempts to align its approach with activities in society, its newfound presence after doing so carries the risk of inadvertently competing with and effectively crowding out actors already engaged in those fields. Sometimes projects are able to better develop if they can stay 'under the radar' for a while, without being assigned a label. The dividing lines between volunteer work, participation, social entrepreneurship and market activities are by no means always clear, and pigeonholing an initiative can be restrictive. For example, providing a subsidy for volunteer work might in turn obstruct an organization's transition from start-up to its development into a successful, self-sustaining project. Many initiatives cannot be easily categorised, or may change in nature. Take the Rotterdam Reading Room, which was created through the efforts of a civil society initiative and is not a library in the typical sense, but is instead a reading room where books are 'given away' (Sterk, Specht and Walraven, 2013).

The governance model of the participatory government is still the least developed. There are however all manner of examples in which the energetic society thrives and where the government has been able to productively engage with it.

### ***Government facilitates greening of the economy through Green Deal***

The government's Green Deal approach is an example of successful participatory governance. This approach clearly entails a role for the government that is different from its traditional one, namely by virtue of 'offering room' to new cooperative alliances that stimulate greening of the economy. This approach reflects the concept that dynamic and innovative power in society can be far better harnessed if the government removes obstacles and thus creates space for bottom-up initiatives. Society then assumes a much greater responsibility for realising the greening of the economy. The government identifies a facilitating role for itself in this respect: it strives to foster conditions for allowing civil society initiatives to come to full

fruition. This includes removing constrictive regulations (legal), bringing the right people together (at the right time), coordinating and directing processes (social), and facilitating access to capital markets (economic) (Kruitwagen and Van Gerwen, 2013).

The Green Deals began at the end of 2011 and new Green Deals are still regularly implemented, like the 2013 Innovation Relay (*Innovatie-estafette*). Based on the PBL evaluation conducted at the time, we were able to address the start-up of the initiatives, but do not yet have sufficient data to evaluate the subsequent results. In this ex-ante evaluation, PBL provided the following guidelines for the facilitating role of the government (Elzenga and Kruitwagen, 2012):

- Provide clarity by elaborating on a vision which you, as the local government authority, strive towards. Offer some degree of security to the initiators, be predictable and make your policy principles clear. One such example of this type of clarity is a 'wind on land' structural vision, in which you indicate locales where it is permissible to build extensive wind farms, along with where it is not permissible to do so.
- Re-evaluate existing spatial planning laws and regulations that may have an obstructive effect, like the difference in the energy taxation regime for smaller consumers as compared to cooperatives. Are the defaults good for providing room for civil society initiatives, or for encouraging them?
- Invest in new partnerships between local or regional market parties and municipalities that seek new solutions; central government must sometimes initially play an active role to encourage the formation of new partnerships.
- Organise and add to knowledge where it is lacking; for example, create guidelines explaining how to effectively motivate homeowners to take action for a given cause. Support experiments with various communications methods and arrangements, and make life easier for those conducting and participating in the experiments (remove red tape).

### ***The Room for the River exchange decision***

A second example of decentralised activity successfully linking up with centrally established ambitious objectives is the so-called 'exchange decision' from the 'Room for the River' programme. The programme aims to improve the capacity of Rhine River branches to be able to safely cope with a discharge capacity of 16,000 cubic metres of water per second. Another of the programme's objectives was to improve the overall environmental

quality of the river region. The budget earmarked by the government for the operation was released publically, and the programme was organised on a modular basis. Regional representatives were invited to submit alternative, creative plans that they believed would be more attractive for their regions and better for the national plan as a whole. The government plan would then be ‘exchanged’ for the multi-functional regional plans. A multi-disciplinary quality control team was put together to assess the alternative plans and provided advice to the programme management team. The exchange plan resulted in a number of public-private partnerships, which significantly reduced resistance to the measures taken to environmentally adapt major rivers and consequently sped completion of the project (Hajer, 2011).

Both of the cases described above are successful examples. However there are undoubtedly a myriad of examples where the government has been much less successful. Take the case study below, about the prospects for action by energy corporations. Prime Minister Rutte also recognised this in a recent letter to the House of Representatives about the participatory society: “The government is trying to keep up with new forms of participation, but all too often chooses an approach based on classic, hierarchical relationships (formal, problem-oriented, risk-averse and controllable) and implements policy which – unintentionally – constricts social initiative, and as a result this societal potential remain untapped”<sup>1</sup>

These less successful examples are, however, not as well researched and documented as their successful counterparts. Some have rightly warned that there is an undesirable bias in this respect (Uitermark, 2014; Schrijver, 2013). Unsuccessful examples and failed experiments can also, and perhaps more effectively, provide a better understanding of how the government can take a more successful approach in subsequent situations.

### ***Compliance agreements of the Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate***

One perhaps surprising example of the relationship between the government and the energetic society is the compliance agreements entered into in recent years between the Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate and a group of businesses. It is an example of how groups of similar businesses can become more closely involved in effective and efficient

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the House of Representatives, 7 April 2014, reference 3748027.

laws and regulations, and what that means for the way the Dutch government thinks and acts. Mutual trust forms the basis of this approach. The compliance agreement strengthens the relationship of trust between inspectors and businesses, and is intended to further increase the compliance rates of these businesses, while at the same time focusing greater attention on supervised parties that aren't performing as well. Only well-performing supervised parties qualify for a compliance agreement. The effects of this approach on participating businesses, primarily in the transport sector, were studied and recommendations were made with respect to supervision, policy and the businesses (Van de Peppel, 2013). The main questions were as follows:

1. What effects do the compliance agreements have on compliance by businesses?
2. What is the appeal of this approach for businesses? What obstacles are there and how can these be reduced?
3. To what extent can the experiences of the approach taken by the Inspectorate be translated into effective policy, in other areas as well?

As the “best performing inspected parties”, these businesses represent the forerunners of their sector. They were characterized as having a positive view of the compliance agreement, which led to greater risk awareness, improvements in business processes and internal supervision, and therefore contributed to compliance with regulations. The initiative also seemed to have a positive effect on image and customer appreciation. Some businesses expressed hope that their improved image would outweigh any disadvantage they experienced from the unfair competitive edge gained by companies with poor compliance records. On the other hand, these same leaders appeared ambivalent about extending the approach to the ‘laggards.’ Supporters emphasised the importance of a level playing field, and preventing unfair competition, while opponents claimed that the agreements would become increasingly diluted, resulting in the loss of their initial value. Several businesses with compliance agreements suspected the Inspectorate would be incapable of raising the business performance of those with poor compliance records by transferring capacity to them, which thus undermined support among businesses for continuing the agreements. The response to the initiative was a clear illustration that a reliable government is essential in an energetic society, and that no expectations should be created if they cannot be truly achieved.

### *Tension in practice: constrained energy cooperatives*

It is not always easy for parties in the energetic society to translate their ambitions and ideas into action. At the beginning of 2014 there were over a hundred energy cooperatives in The Netherlands, but with limited collective power as a result of a relatively restricted framework for group action (Elzenga and Schwencke, 2014). The activities of the energy cooperatives are often limited to collective procurement of solar panels, small-scale and short-term energy-saving actions, the resale of renewable energy and the management of an information desk. Larger projects, like solar power stations, wind turbines and major energy-savings projects for private housing stock are more difficult for them to carry out.

The position of energy cooperatives is determined by a combination of municipal and national regulations. Elzenga and Schwencke (2014) indicated that changes in regulations often lead to uncertainty, which results in stalled plans. This applies, for example, to the ‘unburdening principle,’ through which energy cooperatives finance and manage solar installations at schools. Whether the supply of solar energy under the new postcode radius scheme (*postcoderoosregeling*) will be attractive to energy cooperatives remains to be seen, but initial reactions indicate that the results of the revenue model are likely to be marginal at best.

This illustrates the tension between the various government models (figure 2). From the participatory government’s perspective, the government would have to make efforts to widen the framework in order to encourage action by the energy cooperatives. However, from the perspective of the performance government, it would first have to be established that expanding opportunities for energy cooperatives would be the most effective way to make progress in energy savings or best promote the use of renewable energy. Providing cooperatives with experimental space to explore this further does not fit the ideology of the performance-driven management model, or happens to such a limited extent that there is barely room or incentive for innovation to take place. The approach is therefore restricted within the boundaries of the established framework, while innovation and social energy lie beyond those boundaries. This puts constraints on energy cooperatives, which have become too big and numerous to disappear, but too small to be able to significantly develop.

### 3.3 A mixed governance model

It is a struggle to find the ideal balance of governance models that complement the energetic society, and consciously harness its dynamic from bottom-up. Based on the diagram (figure 2), the government's approach is shifting towards the right, either through interaction with formal networks and chains, or through interactions with informal, unorganised and ad hoc networks. In addition to governance and decision-making, the energetic society requires consultation, facilitation, room to act and 'not too much inconvenience.' More precisely, it is not just moving towards the 'right' but is moving towards the 'bottom right,' which means that interaction is going beyond the existing and more established parties.

This type of trend often gets in the way of progress. It is the difference between entering into an energy or sustainability agreement with administrative partners and business representatives, and creating room for local, upcoming partnerships comprised of groups of citizens and social entrepreneurs. While the first approach is not necessarily wrong, it is fundamentally different from the second approach. The energetic society often skips the organised partnerships and vested interests involved in the first instance. They do come to play their role, but do so in the form of a 'pop-up dynamic.'

If the government wants to move more to the 'right,' it could do so in the manner typical of most organisations: on the basis of internal rules, procedures, policies, and agreements that are highly 'left' oriented. While the government wants to focus its work in the realm of the right-hand side, bureaucracy is predominantly based on principles on the left-hand side. In the event that socialisation gains ground as an idea, it is often given shape by organisations with strongly government or market-oriented mindsets. Consideration of responsible and planned performances are ingrained in routines and procedures, while the activities of the network, and decisions to transfer responsibility for certain tasks to citizens, is born from other principles. The organisation of government is essentially given shape by the principles and values comprised by legal frameworks, legal equality, transparency, efficiency, hierarchy and bureaucracy. Thus, a land-use plan is established on a top-down basis by a municipality and acquires the form of a 'blueprint' for the town with some room for further interpretation by entrepreneurs and residents. There may be opportunities for the public to express their views, but it is ultimately the municipal authority

that coordinates the process and makes a decision. Precisely because area development is such a complex subject, authorities typically choose a tight and uniform approach with little room for flexibility in order to avoid conflict. The energetic society is characterised by diversity and unpredictability, where the plans and designs may change over the course of the process, and form no more than an element in the interaction. In that framework, the PBL highlights the contrast between the *planned city* and the *spontaneous city* (PBL and Urhahn, 2012). The spontaneous city makes use of right-hand principles while the planned city is primarily built on the concepts on the left-hand side. In both cases, government and the community must engage with each other; the development plans have to be 'sold' to the outside, and there must be acceptance among stakeholders in order to be able to realise the plans. Just as the spontaneous city usually takes shape in the context of government rules, existing plans, designated land uses, and limitations in what is and what is not permitted, the creativity and innovative drive of social entrepreneurs and volunteers stand in contrast to the *planned approach* of the land-use plan. But this does not mean that the government does not have a role to play in such a scenario; put cryptically, this spontaneity is not yet fully spontaneous (PBL and Urhahn, 2012; Soeterbroek, 2012). These conflicting worlds and systems of logic, which are nonetheless required to relate to each other, form the basis of tensions inherent in governance of the energetic society. Accordingly, based on context and government requirements, we must pose the following question: what is the best approach, based on prevailing principles in society, from a contextual perspective and taking into account government requirements?

Acting as intermediaries, policy officers find themselves standing at the crossroads between the 'vertically' organised government and the 'horizontally' functioning society. Both pursue ambitions in the field of societal value, but their efforts do not always go hand in hand. It is of course the case that policy officers cooperate with society to form and create ideas and initiatives, but it must also be taken into account that within policy officers' organisations there is a firm emphasis on rules and procedures. For the civil servant, this means constantly switching between an organisation that wants certainty and continuity and an environment that is intrinsically uncertain and in flux. It also means dealing with ambitions that may or may not be different from one another, but are in any case expressed in a different language. The civil servant therefore operates in a field of constant tension, and by playing the role of the 'connecting professional'

(Binnema, Geuijen and Noordegraaf, 2013) is tasked with trying to bring both worlds together as best as possible (figure 4). Civil servants play a dual role in their relationship with citizens; they can stimulate ambitions, ideas and initiatives in society, and can also use their knowledge of civil society to examine/scrutinise the government's own ambitions, rules and procedures. In this respect, they operate 'outside' the government structure, but by definition they do this on the basis of rules and conditions 'inside' of it. The connecting professional is therefore always switching between what society wants and what is possible within their own organisation.

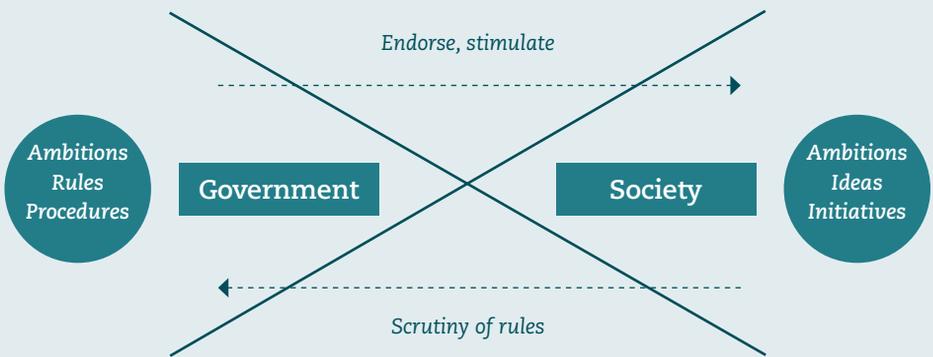


Figure 4. Field of tension between 'vertical' government and 'horizontal' civil society.

### 3.4 Why switching is problematic

Switching between the logic of the outside world and the logic of one's own organisation is not always easy. It is a balancing act with inherent tensions and dilemmas and requires the consistent provision of practical answers in order to successfully overcome obstacles. Though 'switching' and 'connecting' sound great, they are difficult to achieve in practice. As case studies reveal, an even balance between governing and harnessing the potential of the energetic society means constantly overcoming unforeseen obstacles. The following five obstacles regularly present themselves in various forms:

1. Vested interests
2. Risk aversion and a culture of ‘settling scores’
3. Structure of the internal organisation
4. Unwritten rules, habits and work practices
5. Scepticism and normative criticism

#### *Power of vested interests*

The first obstacle observed in the case studies is the *power of vested interests*. Such interests represent the status quo and in many cases are disadvantaged by a transition. They benefit from the default situation and defend it vigorously as a result. The interests of the petrochemical, automotive and energy industries, for example, stand in the way of a rapid transition to a climate-neutral transport system. The challenge in these sorts of cases is to focus on the problem and arrive at solutions based on that problem’s individual merit and context, rather than from the perspective of vested interests, or from the institutions involved. This does not necessarily mean ignoring these vested interests, but it does involve recognizing them as such and treating them as just another ‘regular’ interest among others, instead of allowing them to occupy a fixed point of departure for the ground rules and the default situation, which would thus force other interests to jostle for a position. Vested interests are taken into consideration in policy design, but they do not determine the ground rules, and certainly should not dictate the required outcome.

#### *Risk aversion of civil servants and administrators*

A second obstacle we have seen is the political culture of ‘settling scores’ and the resulting *risk aversion* of civil servants, administrators and politicians. The current system is not directly geared towards undertaking risky experiments. It is possible, but experimentation is not by default valued in the political administrative system. Those taking a different approach shoulder a significant burden, as smaller or bigger problems create political liability. The political system is poorly structured to contend with experimentation and innovation that carries a risk of divergent outcomes. This results in risk aversion and an unwillingness to tolerate uncertainty. Risks are mitigated and managed, making it unattractive for any administration embrace an uncertain initiative, no matter how promising. Furthermore, the burden of proof for innovation is high; a party wishing to do it ‘differently’ must substantiate in detail how this success will be achieved, preferably guaranteeing success and ruling out accidents. This is not possible of course; if it was possible to document something in such a way, it

would by definition be impossible to classify it as an innovation. We see this pattern in all layers and at all levels of government, with the same political-administrative risk aversion also transmitted from the public sector to implementing organisations. Civil servants try to protect their administrators and therefore limit divergent practices. They are less inclined to pursue promising yet sometimes risky experiments with citizens or businesses, even if they see value in them. The organisational frameworks in which civil servants, administrators and politicians operate are such that they pose a significant barrier to renewal. A different approach is possible, but only with a great deal of conviction, attention and personal commitment. The paradox in this respect is of course that the existing system and the status quo it protects produce just as many risks. Its protectionist tendency risks limited returns, as well as failures and accidents. We fear innovation because of what might happen, but we are well aware of the abundant number of disadvantageous incidents that are in fact already happening as products of the prevailing system. Persisting with an approach that involves existing risks and vulnerabilities is apparently still more appealing than trying a new approach. This does not make innovation impossible, but it does make it a great deal scarcer and difficult to achieve. This is not because the public administration system is full of people who avoid risk, but because the system is structured in such a way that the 'yes, but' element of the approach to innovation is more strongly represented than examining the possibilities and consciously managing the risk.

### *Structure of the government organisation*

A third obstacle stems from the *structure of the government organisation*, which is still often strongly sectorial and vertically based. Societal issues often concern a multitude of areas that are fragmented throughout the organisation. The government has a functional structure divided into departments with specific responsibilities, each possessing a work force with the necessary knowledge and expertise to successfully complete its tasks. That is in itself a productive model, but only if the issues stay limited to those compartments within the organisation. This is often not (or, depending on the circumstances, is no longer) the case, which creates specific problems for civil servants dealing with solutions focused on social energy. An energetic society calls for a facilitating government that thinks beyond its own boundaries according to trends in the prevailing social dynamic, and in doing so also thinks and operates more like a horizontal network. This is difficult for public sector organisations to achieve, but not impos-

sible. If responsibility is less central (“that’s not one of my responsibilities”) and civil servants actively seek solutions (“where can we join up activities”) then many issues of hierarchy and internal organisation can be dealt with effectively. That often works in individual cases, on an ad hoc basis and in often-temporary support structures like programmes and umbrella projects that, in spite of their short-term nature, are already an improvement. However, if the government wants to work on a more structural basis in new societal coalitions, then temporary solutions are insufficient. Working in and as a network where the focus is on social energy calls for adjustments in the administrative hierarchy and in the method of governance and accountability. This applies widely and includes assessing the employees operating largely in the network, those who are ‘outside’, and thus fit in less well with the organisation’s traditional performance agreements and ‘deliverables’. Governance based on social energy not only calls for a different form of governance, but also a different structure for the underlying organisation and administrative procedures. Civil servants focusing on social energy must be stimulated and valued, rather than simply assume personal risk in the organisation.

#### *Unwritten rules, habits and work practices*

A fourth obstacle is the unwritten rules, habits and work practices within a government organisation. These ‘informal’ institutions are sometimes more likely a barrier than formal institutions like laws and regulations. Work practices and habits are often deeply entrenched and therefore difficult to change. This essentially requires a long-term process of cultural change (see also PBL and Urhahn, 2012). Working according to the principles of the energetic society is “different” than what is now often common in organisations, as we have already explained in the case of previous obstacles. The case studies show that this doesn’t involve the formal and structural arrangements within the organisation. Working methods are rooted in all sorts of habits, unwritten rules and ingrained routines that prescribe what is ‘normal’ within an organisation. This rigidity can be remedied by first changing structures and formal procedures, both of which are key for change, but such changes are certainly just the first of many required for real change. Attention is also required for the underlying informal organisation and the types of practices it promotes. Cultural change is not therefore about wanting a different type of employee, but instead about direct intervention into the ingrained patterns of the organisation. These are complicated processes of change, as unwritten rules are clearly unavailable for formal review. At the same time, this also offers

opportunity for change. Informal rules and routines are established in behaviour and arise from workers repeatedly following examples set by prominent figures in an organisation. Fostering a new approach means encouraging frequent departures from the behavioural norm. By actively taking the lead on new procedures, managers can have an immediate impact on culture and, in effect, the informal organisation. Their leading by example has the potential to establish a foothold for change in the organization, simply by acting differently in their daily activities. This type of change makes a difference, and does so without the significant effort or organizational capital required to enact major programmes for change.

### *Normative criticism*

The fifth obstacle for working in and with the energetic society does not relate much to tensions between the worlds within and outside the public sector, but is instead much more general. The energetic society is not always welcomed with open arms. Although it is based on harnessing social energy, not everyone in society supports it, and not everyone consistently benefits from it; when things are done differently, in a new way, there are always losers. Energetic initiatives can generate strong public opposition in powerful counter-movements that are sceptical about proposed changes and measures. This protest can relate to the nature of proposals, with resistance against something like higher energy prices in support of efforts to increase sustainability. It can also be about the principle itself; the devolution of public tasks to civil society is not necessarily supported by everyone. In such instances, what evidence exists to prove that government isn't simply abdicating its responsibilities? Is the 'energetic society' merely a synonym for the government dumping responsibilities that rightfully belong under its purview onto civil society? And, on top of that, dumping those responsibilities without proportionately cutting the tax burden and the volume of legislation? Regardless of whether or not any of these questions are indeed the case, they're important because the perceptions and expectations of energetic society's interaction with government matter and influence how civil society responds to government. Even if the government's intentions are good, and there are also real opportunities for something to work in practice, all sorts of normative criticism are still possible (Van Twist et al., 2013). Is the movement as large as it appears? Is it not just a small group of well-educated citizens using 'social initiative' to get their own way? Couldn't it just be a fad with hype that is too unreliable to take care of truly important tasks? How do you deal with people that struggle with this new approach, and cannot get

along by themselves? To what extent is this actually democratic? These are normative concerns, which cannot be convincingly addressed based on evidence or decisive objections, and which to a certain extent are also justified, but the value of which is difficult to weigh and determine. Perhaps the best solution is not to debate the merits of the energetic society, but to experiment with specific practices of varying scales in order to see whether and how questions arise, and what responses there are in practice. That is a paradoxical aspect of most normative criticism; there is little resilience and problem-solving ability attributed to society itself, while it could very well be the case that civil society itself addresses the truly important issues, even before the government. Many criticisms point out the danger that the government will soon be at the mercy of society and should therefore take a cautious approach towards mobilising social energy. It may very well be the case that civil society arrives at answers for itself, and that the government is not the first designated party for this. Our proposal is not to ignore the criticism, but to propose correctly formulated questions in a learning process based on concrete practices. The approach is therefore one of learning by doing, instead of postponing action because the right questions have not yet been answered.

#### *Working with limitations*

The abovementioned limitations were, to varying degrees, apparent in each of the cases. In this respect, they show issues that are inherent to working with social energy. These limitations are not the outgrowths of a poorly constructed process, but instead represent the tensions inherent to confrontation between the internal and external system. What is normal in the outside world is difficult to achieve within the internal organisation of government, not because it is staffed by 'difficult' people, or because the wrong procedures are applied, but because there are other interests at stake. While a tailored approach may be followed outside the organisation, on the inside the fundamental underlying principles are legality and equal treatment. Outside, the rule is that there is sufficient space, but inside, the expenditure of public funds must be properly justified. Outside, we think in terms of what's possible, while inside, the emphasis is on the limitations; if only due to the fact that resources were already limited, there are legal frameworks conceived on the basis of good reason, and the government is required to act according to the principle of good governance. What applies to one party, must also apply to another equal party. These principles compromise civil servants' capacity to properly interact with the outside world.

By definition, governance based on social energy means working with limitations. Although this approach offers numerous new opportunities, they must be reaped from within an organisational context where barriers are erected for good reason, and civil servants are required to observe them. Sometimes it is a question of unnecessary rules, or legislation that literally dates from a different era that can be easily scrapped. Or maybe it is about colleagues' attitudes, which are less focussed on social value and more focussed on the position of their area of the organisation. However, it is far more often the case that basic principles of good governance create obstacles, and that limitations that are conceived for a reason hinder what is considered necessary from the perspective of social energy.

The underlying intention is to not frustrate social energy while also guaranteeing other basic values of public administration. Using social energy as the basis for work is a balancing act that requires addressing highly pragmatic issues in a fundamentally new way, while also wrestling with the fundamental principles of good governance. How do we structure accountability in a way that suits this approach? How do we create room for individual cases, while also being able to provide justification for dealing with comparable cases? How do we guarantee legal equality, while striving to approach cases based on what the situation entails? The trick here is not to evade the questions ('we'll just press ahead'), or allow them to become inflexible ('it's not possible'), but to always base an approach on the logic of circumstance and the practice to look beyond and into the possibilities for doing it anyway and doing it well. Civil servants engaged in building energetic arrangements must consider these questions.

# 4

## Designing energetic arrangements

### 4.1 Normalising the special

In this essay we have described several successful examples where government was able to productively engage with the energetic society. Many of these examples show a high level of stakeholder flexibility and enthusiasm, allowing tension between competing logics, agendas and procedures to turn into productive cooperation. Even though we are familiar with many of these examples and their number continues to grow, we have to consider exceptions to the rule: special cases with no structure or pattern. The challenge is to move forward from these isolated cases to a broader approach without losing the foundation for initial success. The energetic society stands to make a transition from occasional success to a widely supported situation we consider 'normal' in organisational terms. This means working towards making the current non-standard procedure into a broadly applied standard, through steps both big and small.

Engaging with social energy should in a certain sense become the new routine – something considered normal within the organisation, which offers another equally valid alternative for realising policies. This requires organised efforts and a certain level of perseverance. After all, the principles and logic of the social initiative differ from the principles and logic of the government system. The energetic society is resistant to control; it wants to stay away from the uniformity the government would prefer, and the result is that it is diverse and unpredictable. The dynamics, tempo and language vary and the approach is clearly different from government bureaucracy. Still, we need to take this as a point of departure for creating common procedures and a new language, with connections between the logic of the internal system and the logic of the external network. Or, in the words of sociologist Van den Brink (2002), the connection between the systems and everyday life – not just occasionally but systematically and structurally. This is a substantial challenge, but the potential results will also be substantial. The societal potential is so great that it is worthwhile for the government to focus on a broader use of the energetic society, even

if this is difficult and requires a new and unfamiliar approach. With the right tools and the right attitude, the energetic society can become *mainstream* and as such also provides a solution to major societal issues. In this section we will further discuss the options for action that can contribute to the connection between government and the energetic society. In doing so we distinguish several points of departure for designing *energetic arrangements*, in which governance focuses on harnessing social energy.

## 4.2 Governance and harnessing energy in society

Governance based on the energy in society is something completely different than opting for non-involvement, maintaining a passive attitude or abandoning government objectives and ambitions. It does not mean that government washes its hands of society and seeks no further involvement. On the contrary, it implies that a government demonstrates ambition and provides guidance, that a government promotes initiatives and facilitates innovation. We consider governance in the energetic society as requiring a combination of four elements, which we will briefly discuss below:

1. Ambition & vision
2. System interventions by changing the defaults
3. Attracting external parties through a focus on choice architecture
4. Stimulating dynamics through continuously adjusting policies

### 1. Ambition & vision

The various practical studies into government's role in specific areas (PBL, 2012, 2013 and 2014) emphasise the importance of the government having a vision for what it wants to achieve, and that this vision is clear and inspiring. This is not about offering grand plans for the government to realise by itself, but rather about creating a point of reference for parties wishing to contribute to the network. Expressing ambition makes clear to other parties in the network which direction the policy is headed, and where there is room for creativity, energy and initiative. All efforts can then be focussed around this point of reference.

The government does not present its ambition with the aim of fully realising everything itself. The objective of expressing a clear and 'ambitious' motive is intended to channel the efforts of other stakeholders in the form

of coordination, as opposed to as an order. The external parties are then aware of opportunities, so they can focus their efforts and investment decisions accordingly.

Presenting a clear ambition is of course more convincing when it reflects your own behaviour, by putting your words into practice. A coherent and consistent story is therefore not enough; this story should also be reflected in your actions. In this respect, presenting your ambition is not the same thing as telling the other parties what they should do, or announcing what the government itself is going to do. It is all about setting your ultimate goal to release energy in other parties and generate innovative solutions as an indication of the direction the government wants to head, and where contributions are welcome to support initiatives. Once this is clear, it is up to society to decide how the goal can be achieved. In this manner, formulating a long-term objective provides a framework that social initiatives can focus on.

One such objective might, for example, be to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 40% by 2030. Such a goal provides guidance and inspiration. The government wants to achieve its goals but will need the support of other stakeholders to do so. This way it sets up a playing field for all parties that want to contribute. Thanks to the clear objectives, civil society parties know that there is, in principle, room for their efforts if they can provide solutions that contribute to those objectives, as long as they have profitable and promising ideas that work towards these goals. Accordingly, the government provides guidance for social efforts without being required to talk to all parties involved, to sign an agreement or to engage in any other direct negotiations. The government itself is ambitious and clearly states its goals in order to harness social energy. In striving to achieve its ambitions, it is also important that government convey its intent on being a reliable partner committed to staying its course. Though nothing is set in stone and the political landscape is always subject to change, it is important for external stakeholders to know and have assurances that the government is committed to its goals over the long term. A government objective can only provide guidance if initiators realize that their contribution to its success would earn them their due recognition. At the same time, the government objective will also only work if it is not directly linked to specific government intervention. The objective should be challenging and generate new initiatives; it should not provide fixed rules that in turn leave little room for new initiative. The idea is not to simply create a government programme

that other parties can sign up for, but to establish a playing field where others bring initiatives forward on their own. This is yet another example of the balance between active governance and permitting civil society to take the reins for itself. Leaving the final outline open to interpretation by stakeholders leaves room for creative interpretations and innovation within the framework; the more ambitious a government program, the more necessary it becomes that government harness society's social energy. In order to do so, government must make its objectives as clear as possible, and then set a high, practical bar for reaching them. Its goals and the resulting program's direction should not be subject to continuous change, even if its ambition is never exact or entirely concrete. Small adjustments can always be made, but consistency in terms of progress and direction are crucial; outlines must be naturally clear. For example, in order for government to successfully limit CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, it must indicate its goals without strict prescriptions for actors to do so. It can indicate its ambitions without also dictating the exact energy sources and mixes permissible. Likewise, it shouldn't prescribe responsibilities for aspects of its proposal or predetermine which subsidies are available to support its framework. The realization of its objectives depends on allowing other players to seize the opportunity it is offering and subsequently heed its call for change.

Another important aspect must be taken into account: ambition is consistently prejudicial beyond the confines of government. It is therefore essential that the government provides a full explanation for its motives and reasoning when it announces an initiative. Far-reaching ambitions regarding sustainability of the mobility system, the food and energy supply, and the greening of the economy will come at a price for government, for businesses and for the public, and this will definitely require sacrifices in terms of behavioural changes. Costs and benefits will be shared differently across any given spectrum of interests, and some deferred expenses resulting from behavioural issues will necessarily be addressed through rises in cost. For example, efforts to increase system-wide sustainability might have the effect of causing energy costs to rise, in order to pay for establishing the new sustainability initiatives. However, in spite of the short-term increase, these sorts of costs prevent the risk of even heavier costs at a later stage resulting from climate change, the effects of which may not yet be evident, though they are certain to become increasingly so. Their inevitability is an inconvenient truth, but it also makes clear that ambition carries a visible and tangible price. At the same time, any attempt to diminish the impact of a given program in the short term by painting too rosy a

picture is more likely to generate resistance than attract external parties to join an initiative. The public possesses the wherewithal to see through a series of small plans being presented as an ambition, and is just as likely to realize that an ambitious plan masquerading as pain-free also suffers from a lack of credibility; the public realizes that attaining an ambitious goal always comes at a price.

## 2. *Changing the defaults*

Taking all of the above into account, it's clear that initiatives have to be 'ambitious' without also including a litany of predetermined steps and stakeholders. An ambition should serve as a beacon for other parties by setting a direction for their efforts. Here, we encounter the second element of governance: adjusting default options in the system. Studies have repeatedly shown that the default option and standard practice are more often than not determinative of people's behaviour and actions (PBL, 2013; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Often, people do not make conscious choices in weighing between pros and cons. Rather, they choose to do whatever they determine is most logical, which is often what others also choose and perceive as the norm and standard. In so doing, they follow the formal or informal rule established by the public at large and avoid deviations by choosing the default option; their choice reflects the status quo and established strategy, and is indicative of the serious potential effort and social pressure caused by deviation. The most cited example in this respect is the public's preference when it comes to being an organ donor. In countries where the standard practice is for all citizens to volunteer as donors, where doing the opposite requires putting in effort to have yourself removed from the donor list, 80% of the population volunteers. However, in countries where citizens are not automatically assumed donors and instead have to register in order to become one, only 20% join the program on average. The only difference between the two scenarios is the default: if you are a donor, you do not make the effort to deregister, whereas if you are not a donor, you don't make an effort to register. The statistics don't reflect deeply rooted cultural traditions or personal preferences; it is simply the case that deviation requires serious effort that people are apparently uninterested in making.

Such defaults are characterized by a subconscious predetermination that offers the illusion of having made a choice. Registering as an organ donor, for example, is a real dilemma for most people, and requires significant

consideration; it is an extremely personal decision. Still, the prescribed preference proves to be the only truly explanatory factor. There are many similar examples where government policy plays a major role, consciously or subconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally. For instance, cycling is standard practice in the Netherlands, and part of the Dutch DNA. Whenever possible, we choose the bicycle as our primary and preferred means of transport; it is part of our national character. But while our preferences are clearly significant in the popularity of the bicycle in The Netherlands, it is likely more important that major spatial interventions were undertaken to make cycling as normal an activity as driving and walking. In fact, a lot of spatial planning in the Netherlands is designed in such a way as to make cycling more attractive, easier and more typical than driving. Other countries show a different picture, with the car being the standard option. People do not make a conscious choice about how fast they want to drive through a certain area; they adapt their behaviour to the standard option for that region or country. If they notice and believe that an area belongs to cyclists and pedestrians and that they are the non-standard road users, they will drive carefully and slowly. If, however, they consider the car the standard means of transport in the respective area, they will perceive themselves as part of the prevailing norm and act as though others should adapt; the result is faster driving in spite of traffic lights and speed bumps. Average driving speed does not necessarily depend on obstacles, but instead on whatever they consider the proper default for a given area. Users of public space designed for transit will consider whether they believe it is intended as an area for cyclists, for pedestrians or for cars. If drivers consider someplace a pedestrian area, they typically average a speed of 20 km per hour, even in areas without speed bumps or other mechanisms to purposely slow them. But they will drive as fast as possible between obstacles in order to maintain speed on roads intended for cars, even if they include speed bumps. Places where cycling paths exist change the norm and reinforce cycling as the standard option; likewise, labelling places as pedestrian areas guarantees that people on foot become predominant users. Once people consider an area as being intended for cars though, they will drive by car and act as primary users.

Defaults are an important factor in releasing and channelling social energy. However, they are not typically considered of prominent concern in the context of existing structures; there often exists tension between wanting to focus on social energy and existing institutional frameworks. An oft-voiced criticism is that government advocates for transition towards a

sustainable economy, but that current legislation prevents the public from taking action to support such a notion; the systems default pulls in a direction opposite from government objectives. Ambition requires social initiative, but the rules and frameworks are such that social commitment is the exception rather than the rule. The policy focuses on major players that have to adopt a more sustainable stance, and also identifies bottom-up initiatives. An energetic approach would be to turn these initiatives into standard practice. One such example of an attempt to do so is the Dutch taxed commuter allowance, which was introduced as part of an effort to discourage driving to work and, in doing so, combat a growing problem of daily traffic congestion, especially during rush hour. Decreasing the number of cars on the road turned out to be more difficult, and the causes of the traffic much deeper rooted, than the framers of the initiative had realized, however. The cause of the issue itself was revealed as being the direct result of another, prior government program: for many years people had been encouraged to live far from work through financial incentives offered by the government to do so. Long commutes eventually became the cultural default as a result. The taxed commuter allowance proved insufficient for changing this behavior because it just changed peoples' impression of the cost associated with engaging in standard practice, as opposed to actually changing their perception of standard practice itself. The government wasn't able to alter standard practice or change the default option by offering simple financial incentives to do so. Only by 'changing the course', as PBL (2012) calls it, does government possess the capacity to point out a proper direction forward. By changing standard practice in areas such as spatial planning, and by making proximity of home and work the standard, the social benefits of lower commuting costs would eventually grow evident.

This may involve different levels of interventions. The solution for alleviating workers' difficult commutes, for example, is partly about spatial interventions, but also about bringing peoples' spaces for living and work within closer proximity of one another. It's important to note that so far the default in spatial planning has always been to separate these two functions. Just as it is still far from standard practice to live close to public transport hubs or construct business premises close to public transport. Many commuters complain with good reason that it is impossible or very difficult to travel to and from work by public transport. Though it is often the case, conclusions for why can be very different. When the current default is commonly understood as the starting point, one must conclude that

public transport is insufficient for everyday mobility; it does not serve any commuter who wishes to arrive at work within an hour of departure from home without much hassle. Some might argue that such is impossible as a result of standard tendency to build residential areas at a substantial physical and temporal distance from business areas. If the standard in spatial planning were to change and combine residential and work issues, based on an understanding that the two aspects belong together, it would produce markedly different solutions. Housing and work will increasingly merge as the market recognises the added value created by the combination, which in turn will likely have an effect on changing the public's choice patterns and perceptions, making living closer to work a more popular option. Then, once this option becomes standard practice, it will be considered strange for the government to introduce compensation or special policy for commuters. The paradox of changing the default here is that it will be considered less of an issue. Compensation or other government support for commuters through special policy in terms of congestion issues is not an inherent preference people have, but results from what they understand as standard practice for commuting. As soon as this standard situation changes, the public will no longer require compensation or government support. However, alongside these results, we will also see societal pressure in the opposite direction, with more and more people calling for government to focus on initiatives bringing living and working closer together.

When engaging the default option, the leverage points and actors are different for each domain. Take for example the issue of mobility: measures for creating an infrastructure that stimulates the use of alternative sustainable transportation are very different in nature than incentives intended to improve the efficiency of vehicles or change consumer behavioural patterns. There are also major differences in the extent to which new, more sustainable means of mobility run counter to prevailing trends. The bicycle is not just a sustainable option; it is also low cost and a flexible mode of transportation, making it attractive for a majority of Dutch people on most journeys. Stimulating or tapping into the energy in society in order to encourage greater use of the bicycle calls for a completely different approach from the government than increasing, for example, the role and presence of electric cars (which, in spite of being sustainable, are a much less attractive option for many people) or discouraging the use of conventional cars (which are an attractive means of transport but not environmentally-friendly means of transport). Cycling is for many people

in many areas already the norm, while this is anything but the case for electric vehicles. This is why we commonly refer to these vehicles as 'electric cars' relative to other, 'normal cars'. Petrol stations are 'normal'; nobody bats an eyelid at them. Is there anyone who regards a combustion engine as dangerous? Charging points for electric vehicles are, on the other hand, considered strange interventions in public space. What are those things doing there? Aren't they an eyesore? Is a battery-powered car dangerous? It is not as if people consider a tank full of flammable petrol the safer option compared to an electric motor and a battery; the inherent issue that compels them to question the electric vehicle is that the notion of an electric battery powering a car is strange to them. While no questions are asked about the standard option, plenty of questions are asked about the option that deviates from the norm, which in this case is the electric car. It is easier to build more cycling paths, since it is already more consistent with prevailing preferences. Changing the standard for motoring and closing off areas of the city centre to internal combustion-powered vehicles changes the standard, but at present still seems like a step too far. The example of the electric car shows how altering the positioning of the *deviant option* flies in the face of prevailing societal preferences, which in turn calls for the government to play an active and stimulating role. It could, for example, take action by making major interventions into public spaces and through efforts to increase the visibility of electric vehicles; it could also provide incentives and tax breaks to make ownership electric vehicles more enticing. The underlying idea in this respect is that government support can lead to greater numbers of electric cars, which will increasingly normalize what is now an unfamiliar alternative. As electric motoring becomes more common, it will become more attractive as a consumer option, with the momentum it gains in the process hopefully developing into a self-sustaining dynamic.

The practices of spatial planning and sustainable energy generation are different from that of the electric vehicle though; there are common obstacles posed by existing laws and regulations that prevent organic market growth, even through simple incentives. But through measures like the City and Environment (Interim) Act and the Crisis and Recovery Act, the central government has authorised municipalities to temporarily (as applies in the case of the former act) and permanently deviate from legal environmental standards. This has proved to be a successful approach for reviving spatial planning programmes that have grown entangled in environmental standards, and to improve quality of life in the areas concerned

(PBL, 2012; PBL and Urhahn, 2012). This approach works in practice like a fulcrum that stimulates parties to action by making creative solutions possible. Unintentionally, these laws demonstrate that by creating room for initiatives, it is possible to provide incentive and develop cause for action in a way that was previously impossible. Rethinking existing laws and regulations can therefore constitute an important government role. When actors encounter laws and regulations that impinge upon their initiative and innovative tendencies, government can help by removing them. In this manner, government makes sure not to determine the results of a social initiative, and instead opens up a new channel for social movement. Without obstacles, the primary focus turns to projects' results, which is characteristic of governance based on societal energy. By paving the way for entrepreneurs on innovative projects, government enjoys the possibility of progress without having to undertake such initiatives by itself (and subsequently face strategic resistance by external stakeholders), nor does it put entrepreneurs in the unfortunate position of likely failure as a result of prolonged struggle with regulations, which would effectively kill the very societal initiatives in which government also shares interest. Such a result would be overwhelmingly negative and would not generate any value. Making innovation easier by eliminating obstacles for entrepreneurs yields value, and does so without predetermining results. It instead trusts entrepreneurs to take advantage of opportunities presented to them, leading to creative, innovative progress.

Examples of this mechanism can be found in regulations that concern such varied subjects as spatial planning, the environment and nature, tax facilities (including exemptions), and existing levies and subsidies. How are the defaults set in this respect? If a case is anything like that of the electric vehicle, characterized by a clear distinction between “normal” vehicles and new “alternatives,” it is easy to ascertain current defaults, simply by observation of the language and terms that distinguish them. ‘That’s how it is, there are just more normal cars’ is an obvious observation. While this may be a true statement, the other point it makes is that people do not necessarily drive petrol cars out of conviction, but simply because of the current default framework. By making policy in which electric motor-ing increasingly becomes the default, you have the ability to change how people make their choices, and the opportunity to create new social energy. The effect of doing so would mean challenging vested interests, prevailing defaults and the ingrained patterns that support them. For example, energy savings are subsidised, but the present default is for homes not to be

more energy efficient than is prescribed by building regulations. The current default in this regard emphasizes prevailing building standards, which do not necessarily promote sustainable development. Current government initiatives provide little widespread support for increasing energy efficiency, which is *subsidised* through minimal, supporting policy; even this, however, has created a niche market for smaller, specialised businesses. If *energy-neutral construction* becomes the standard, then a very different playing field and dynamic will replace current market practices. The market as a whole would be forced to innovate and to refocus its energy; the space created by the reorganization would create opportunities for new parties, ideas and – not unimportantly – increase the likelihood of significant returns from energy savings. The importance of defaults as a policy instrument cannot be overstated; its benefits include mobilising the energy required to realise ambitions, create room for new initiatives, and to release and channel unharnessed societal energy. Probably the most important effect of the government’s capacity to exert influence over defaults in policy pertains to the fact that through its interventions, it also affects citizens’ defaults for how they think and feel about choices.

### 3. *Governance through choice architecture*

The government has a third mechanism at its disposal for establishing energetic arrangements: it can consider how to best approach topics through a systematic review of choice architecture of citizens and businesses. By doing so, it can establish and determine the incentives and ‘nudges’ involved in given topics areas, and whether those encourage maximum returns on efforts. Policy contains all sorts of stimuli to influence peoples’ behaviours; taking those stimuli into consideration and featuring them in policy can help determine how to best give people ‘a push in the right direction.’ Sometimes such consideration means that government changes an aspect of its regulatory approach. One such example was the establishment of a temporary reward for driving at times besides rush hour in The Netherlands, which then led to positive, sustainable changes in motorist behaviour. This project, in the Utrecht-Amersfoort-Hilversum triangle, found that 80% of participants continued avoiding rush hour long after the period in which they were rewarded for doing so. The temporary financial incentive resulted in a sustainable change in behaviour that resulted in the formation of new habits. The behaviour took root because participants experienced the advantages of avoiding rush hour; they saved time and experienced less stress in their commute as a result (BNV Mobility et al.,

2014). In essence, a simple financial incentive led to new habits not just because of the money saved, but because the change it encouraged was ultimately advantageous. The measures *seemed* like a financial incentive, but were actually intended to change participant behaviours. This success serves as a good example for using financial incentives in a focussed way to determine whether there is social energy *behind* a financial stimulus, and whether it will continue after a financial incentive ends. In terms of policy design, if such momentum is determined as present, it makes sense to introduce relatively strong financial stimuli for a longer period of time. If the underlying energy is not present, then financial incentives are of little use; the behavioural effects will ebb and fade as soon as the incentive comes to an end.

Another way of encouraging new behaviour is by making stimulating measures more *explicit*. The nature of the measure has the opportunity to become change effecting by its very nature, based on the idea that the public is not merely stimulated by the ‘incentive amount,’ but by its very design. Take, for example, tax breaks on electric cars: if they are provided in cash at the car dealership, the outcome is sure to be significantly different than incentivizing through income deductions six months after purchase. More often than not, incentives are completely invisible to the customer, and are embedded in the price that he or she pays. The resulting effect is about more than the price; it is also about the visibility of that hidden amount, and whether it is tangible and recognisable to the recipient. This conclusion is also implied by the very word ‘stimulus’; an incentive can only be rightfully labelled as such if consumers perceive it as such. Accordingly, it is not strange to devote explicit attention to the way in which incentives are perceived and ultimately affect their intended audience.

Providing immediate behavioural feedback is another key element of choice architecture. For example, one experiment responded to drivers breaking the law on the A12 motorway between Bunnik and Driebergen. There, motorists were notified of their transgressions by matrix signs above the highway immediately after it was noted that they were driving above the speed limit. Driving speeds were measured with the help of electronic cameras and registration plate recognition, and motorists who exceeded the speed limit had their vehicle registration and speed displayed on the matrix sign they passed next. The result was an immediate and enduring change in behaviour. Literature on choice architecture suggests that establishing a connection between behaviour and consequence as

immediately as possible increases public engagement. By incorporating immediate feedback, which is punitive yet playful ('gamification') people can be 'helped' into doing what they want to do. Most people do not make a conscious or reasoned consideration compelling them to drive too fast through a residential area; small interventions intended to influence behaviour can focus attention on that consideration or lack thereof.

Finally, choice architecture can also be modified through a flexible interpretation of regulations. One example of this is property tax rate variance: owners of energy-efficient homes are offered the opportunity to pay lower property taxes, without the government determining exact measurements for determining efficiency. The tax regime is therefore variable, depending on citizens' actions. The choices remain the same – every citizen can decide how energy-efficient they want their home to be – but investments in this respect are made more attractive. This is not just about the amount of money involved or the financial incentive; it is primarily regards the principle that good behaviour is visible, tangible and should be rewarded as directly as possible with a lower tax rate. Societal energy is best mobilised by rewarding specific actions, which thereby prompts creativity.

At the heart of this category of interventions is not just the content of the measures (a bonus–malus system being the norm), but the *shape* they take. This shape is more than just packaging, and can have a stronger effect than the content. That is why it is important to consider the choice architecture of policy. How are choices presented? What is obstructive? What are the unwanted side effects? All of these are concerns that shape government measures. Moreover, devoting attention to choice architecture sometimes also means that government does not solve issues or make an ultimate decision itself, but instead creates room for society to develop its own ideas around a certain question, area or object. One pertinent example of this, from area development, is government's tolerance of abandoned urban sites; specifically, its decision *not* to re-designate or redevelop certain objects or sites. At present, a derelict factory might be quickly demolished or permanently assigned another use, but it would be just as easy and perhaps effective to leave it untouched and open it to the public for other temporary uses. This offers experimental room for taking initiatives, without tying them down to major investments. There have been an increasing number of examples of this in recent years, including 'pop-up' cafés, shops and restaurants. By valuing temporary solutions, the government allows permanent societal initiatives to develop in the background. Often,

after a number of temporary uses, it turns out that these sites no longer require redevelopment at all, or that an object acquires a completely different use than originally conceived. Such an outcome is not the result of interactive planning and consultation, but of consciously leaving spaces open, letting initiatives run their course, and seeing what develops.

#### 4. *Continual adjustment of policy*

The key to harnessing societal energy is to stimulate and then maintain movement. In this section we have addressed the issue of designing energetic arrangements and emphasized how important it is to consider ‘smart design.’ However, design is only valuable if accompanied by adequate attention to *dynamics*. Design must of course be thoughtful and excellent, but a key prerequisite is that it is also sufficiently versatile. The government does not have to singlehandedly create a dynamic, but it can structure arrangements in such a way that societal movements take place in a certain manner, are allowed more room in certain domains, or receive added inputs. Focussing on the dynamics and movement also means re-considering continuity and consistency of policy; changeability and movement also have a place, even within the government itself. Modifying policy and adjusting norms and standards to reflect events and trends in society is not a sign of ‘flip-flopping policy,’ it is precisely the means for stimulating energy and creativity. In this view of governance, adjustments are a way of strengthening initiatives, increasing development, and catalysing progress. *Adjustment* is a policy strategy and a crucial building block for governance and the harnessing of societal energy.

It is of course essential that this adjusting occur in a way that contributes to dynamism, and that it is announced in advance by the government. It is important that the government approaches the issue as a matter of managing expectations, even in terms of announcements of the program. The nature of the adjustment is also, of course, of paramount importance, but regardless of subject matter, it needs to be presented in such a way as to remind the public that this is not a case of needlessly changing tack, but instead one raising the bar to stimulate new innovations. Such an announcement serves to remind the public that the change is intended to continue pursuing the blueprint of the *ambitious ambition* that was announced. Dynamic regulations can be a solution for the dilemma that arises between wishing to act as a reliable government and wishing to respond to and stimulate continued innovations. This dilemma can be avoided by being

clear from the outset about the manner in which rules will change, and how they will yield either technological or financial benefit for the public. Good policy does not have to be classifiably consistent or versatile; instead, lawmakers should strive to create policy that is consistently versatile. Dynamic regulations can offer new prospects, even if vested interests stand in the way of progressive initiatives. This type of policy not only challenges existing frontrunners, but also new ones. The power of dynamic regulations is that they provide a constant stimulus for technological development, and excel as blueprints for improving efficiency, renewal and spreading innovations.

A good example of dynamic regulations is the Energy Investment Allowance (*Energie-investeringsaftrek*, EIA). Under this plan, investments made by businesses in energy-efficient technologies included in the annual energy and environmental investment list can be offset against the personal or corporate income tax liability. The scheme therefore reduces the costs of investing in energy-efficient technologies and technologies to generate sustainable energy. The list is comprised of select new technologies with higher energy-saving potential than conventional technologies. Each year, the list is updated with new, up and coming companies and industries, which replace technologies listed in prior years that have already experienced sufficient market penetration. By arranging the scheme in this way, the EIA constantly stimulates the adoption and diffusion of new and efficient technologies.

A key part of dynamic design is determining the form of subsidies and other financial instruments. Civil society is bubbling with mostly small-scale initiatives and innovations<sup>2</sup>: the challenge is to scale them to a grander size. For example, the government can provide support for citizens and small entrepreneurs like self-employed professionals by providing communications about specific initiatives and their potential effects, and about past experiences and results. This can provide significant help in the discovery phase of an innovation, during which enterprises often struggle to make it through the ‘valley of death,’ when they must scale up operations in order to achieve viability. Financing requirements are often great, but the opportunities for attracting funds are slim. One-off start-up subsidies, or loan guarantees from banks or other external financiers, can often offer prospects in such instances. Government financing in this regard is not

<sup>2</sup> See for example [www.nudge.nl](http://www.nudge.nl), [www.krachtinnl.nl](http://www.krachtinnl.nl) and [www.innovatie-estafette.nl](http://www.innovatie-estafette.nl)

equivalent to providing momentum for a social initiative. The basic quandaries for government are then always whether funding should be provided, whether a social dynamic is assisted by a business proposal and government financing, whether providing financial support is helpful, or whether it in fact hinders the development of other mechanisms.

### 4.3 *What does this ask of the civil servant and the internal organisation?*

It is interesting to consider what the energetic society requires of an individual civil servant and their organisation. What is needed in terms of structure, powers and competencies to make it possible to work in an 'energetic manner' with the outside world? What can a civil servant do to channel and productively utilize the energy and creativity of citizens and enterprises, and what does that require of the civil servant? What type of organisation does the type of required work best and most efficiently? These questions are not easily or simply answered (Van Gerwen and Kruitwagen, 2013). There is no template for civil servants to engage the energetic society. In order to successfully do so, workers must consistently seek out 'the best way to act in each situation.' This search is best conducted by focussing as specifically as possible on certain domains; focussing as precisely as possible clarifies wants and demands. At the request of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, PBL and NSOB have gone in search of the answers to this question in the area of sustainable mobility, local climate initiatives, compliance agreements with the Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate, and organic area development. Meetings with policymakers (central and municipal government), 'practitioners' and researchers revealed a wide diversity of obstacles experienced by civil servants, which in turn led to their wishing for a wide variety of practical options they could have at their disposal for response. In the final section of this essay we look at the options that have been presented and what they mean for the organisation (see also: Van Leenders, 2009; Andringa et al., 2012; Beunderman et al., 2013). We do not intend to offer a blueprint, but instead to present a number of rules of practice. How these are shaped and interpreted time and again vary depending on the specific dossier, but they can help individual civil servants or teams determine their role and approach.

Entering into experiments, new alliances and partnerships, and organic processes where outcomes are unclear, calls for a bold and decisive ap-

proach. Working with societal energy in many cases requires you to step out of your comfort zone (Borsje, 2013). This is not only the case for a civil servant, but can also easily apply to a local administrator or politician. Short-term successes that earn quick publicity are not the objective in this respect. Instead, the goal is to make progress resolving complex societal issues by extending trust without doing so naively. This can be achieved through contextual awareness and timely actions that establish commitment to management, in order to soundly handle expectations and adequately communicate a project's progress, both in negative and positive terms. Maintaining real interest and personal contact are essential in this respect. Civil servants should not encourage expectations that cannot be realised. Working with societal parties entails that civil servants behave less according to the procedures of their own organisation and more in line with prevailing societal norms.

#### *Governance arrangements: experimenting and scaling up*

Precisely because there is no blueprint for civil servants to interact with the energetic society, the government must identify general regulations and prospects for its civil servants to follow, via small-scale targeted experiments in specific domains. The government can initiate experiments of this kind itself, but can also allow others to conduct experiments (Kruitwagen and Van Gerwen, 2013) that take into account the do's & don'ts in specific situations: what works and what doesn't under what circumstances, and what factors determine success and failure including time, location and situational context. What are the circumstances where successful government action is most likely? Small and local initiatives are potentially subject to a number of prospects that determine their success, which should be celebrated, and followed in turn by further experimentation. It is better to have variety in potential solutions than to just choose one solution in advance. It is precisely these small experiments that must be cherished and valued, in order to learn from failures and determine how successful initiatives can be scaled up.

Setting political objectives is important as it provides direction and a mandate for accomplishing public objectives. Experimentation calls for room to be created for uncertain outcomes and a certain degree of protection against performance requirements. At the same time, this is often hampered by a focus on delivering results in the short term. Experiments require time, which is at odds with a political system that wants certainty, control over governance and wishes to see *quick and demonstrable results*.

This creates a tension between the speed with which targets are achieved and the demonstrability of the results. It is important to accept that by their very nature, experiments can potentially go wrong. The fact of the matter though, is that you can often learn more from failed experiments than you can from successes (Uitermark, 2014). By carefully and abundantly communicating experiences and the results of experiments – verbally and in writing – others can learn from them and use this to their benefit in subsequent experiments. It's important to avoid a situation in which every department, municipality, province or water board has to reinvent the wheel in terms of developing knowledge and competencies (PBL, 2013b).

#### *New forms of organisation and competencies*

The energetic society requires a government that thinks and acts on the basis of ideas in the network society: horizontally rather than vertically, in a manner that facilitates progress instead of insisting on doubts, keeping in mind such questions as 'how can we cooperate' and 'what can I do to help' instead of 'that isn't possible'. Being receptive to new forms of organisation and governance arrangements is a key characteristic of the energetic government. This requires special competencies from civil servants: taking initiatives, an entrepreneurial attitude, getting up from the desk and engaging with society, being inviting, and unifying and connecting (see also PBL, 2013a; Platform31, 2014). Or, in the words of the Director General for Housing and Building at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations: "You don't make policy behind a drawing board in The Hague" (Frequin, 2013).

A PBL study on the energetic countryside (Farjon and Arnouts, 2013) showed how, on the basis of a wide range of examples, coalitions – with or without government – develop initiatives for progress in the countryside. The PBL signalled the obstacles these coalitions face and how they could improve, focussing primarily on three areas: cooperation, regulation and financing. Likewise, PBL's findings indicated the government could help these coalitions by establishing and maintaining a clear vision with regard to the coalitions' efforts, by putting a different focus on laws and regulations, by taking a smarter approach to charges and fees, and by acting in a proactive and facilitating manner. The study dealt with both successful and less successful coalitions that were started to improve the quality of life in the countryside, from care farms to local energy cooperatives and landscape funds. One of the study's conclusions was that the government can bolster and stimulate these coalitions by acting in a more proactive

and facilitating way, and by ensuring that laws, regulations and financing of the rural environment better reflect the needs of initiators in those areas (Wageningen UR, 2014; Schulz et al., 2013; Van Twist et al., 2013).

### *Dynamic laws and regulations*

Rules determine the playing field for actors in civil society, both for government bodies and for citizens and entrepreneurs. The correct application of rules fuels energy and keeps stakeholders informed. For example, by having clear rules on car exhaust emissions, the motoring industry is encouraged to produce cleaner cars. The enactment and application of rules creates situations of stability and predictability. On the other hand, rules that are consistently subject to unpredictable changes have the opposite effect of nullifying energy, and are therefore counterproductive.

Regulation becomes dynamic if it is consistently updated on the basis of societal indications, not just in terms of the *creation* of laws and regulations, but also in terms of *rethinking* existing laws and regulations. Successfully implemented, such rethinking can play an especially important role for the civil servant, enabling them to implement changes where stakeholders experience them as constrictive. When working on policy, laws and regulations, the focus shifts from translating political objectives into the realization of a wish or problem in civil society.

### *Monitoring and feedback*

By organising monitoring and feedback, the government can provide information to various stakeholders (including parties within government) on their performance. It can be safely said that measuring, in this respect, is valuable knowledge. Take, for example, developments monitoring in spatial planning and the opportunities these developments offer to the government, developers, citizens and businesses to make more sustainable choices. Information on the performances of various modes of transport and technologies can serve as a resource for manufacturers and consumers to determine how they score in terms of sustainability and serve as a basis for strategic choices. Monitoring and feedback can also ensure progress in making specific policy areas more sustainable. By sharing successes and increasing the visibility of such instances, in areas like mobility and energy for example, actors who perform well (forerunners) can receive recognition, along with the field they represent. It also means the government can learn, and check 'en route' how actual developments are being realised, along with whether there are grounds for adjusting relevant policy.

One such example of government monitoring is in the area of sustainable energy, where energy cooperatives have identified potential stumbling blocks in applying the postcode radius scheme (*postcoderoosregeling*) (PBL, 2014). The government could assess whether these shortcomings are actually insurmountable obstacles for energy cooperatives. On the basis of such an analysis, the government could then consider widening the scheme's financial basis and/or making it more complex. Municipalities and provinces can also provide extra stimulus. Municipalities can, for example, offer cooperatives the use of their properties' roofs for solar energy installations, and provincial funds can set less stringent requirements for the 'quality of the organisation' that's applying, as well as lower the minimum loan amounts in comparison to those offered by commercial banks.

Monitoring can occur through government's own the initiative, but it can also be ascertained from other sources of information available or harnessed elsewhere. One such example would be information monitoring achieved through the crowd-sourcing opportunities offered by social media.

# 5 Conclusion

The government's role is changing. There are many who think we are at a crossroads, but this is a misperception. Changes in society, and in the interactions between government and society are actually ongoing processes characterized by mutual adjustments. The concept of 'the energetic society' plays a key role in this search for a new form of effective government. It is important to keep this concept alive through ongoing reflection.

The energetic society appeals to stakeholders for various reasons. Sometimes, it appears as though the concept of 'the energetic society' is used to simply legitimise policy cutbacks, but these cutbacks are also indicative of a government perception that society can and wants to do something alone. Along similar lines, there are those who see it as a term that reflects an ideological conviction for a small government. However, in the essay 'The energetic society' the PBL regards the energetic society as a promising new theory of governance with the aim of improving the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy. That was based on a political-sociological analysis of the changing relationship between government and citizen. The newly empowered citizen was presented in the essay as the product of a successful, decades-long education policy. But rather than celebrate this success, the educated citizen is increasingly considered a problem.

This essay is intended as a follow-up to that analysis, to provide a more in-depth analysis from a public administration perspective, as a step on the longer road to practical application. There is one especially persistent question posed in regard to society's objectives for the future: which policy instruments, and what means, will help pave the way forward? As this essay demonstrates, there are often no ready-made answers to this.

There is, however, one crystal clear message: the government must reconsider the organization and relationships between knowledge, policy and implementation. These three areas must be connected with one other in new and creative ways, which was a point that was illustrated in the workshops organised within the framework of this study. Increasingly often, this discipline is fuelled by the experiences of 'practitioners', including public-spirited citizens, enterprises and individuals that are active in implementation or enforcement.

The *energetic society* calls for an *energetic government*. The government can only be truly deserving of such a title if it invests strongly in improving its own capacity for learning. The energetic society lights the way in this regard: the energetic government is one that engages with society and involves it in seeking out solutions, that is bold enough to experiment, and gives rise to new initiatives along the way. It is also a government that holds its course and at the same time is prepared to fine-tune policy if implementation results in unintended frictions or undesirable effects. It is not therefore a question of creating policy in favour of low-emission vehicles if this proves too expensive, but instead an issue of ensuring that adjustments effect the desired changes without excessively draining government resources.

The new energetic government believes in the innovative capacity of society, rewards the forerunners, has the courage to experiment, corrects undesirable side effects and stimulates learning by constantly showing what works elsewhere and why. In light of the tasks it faces, the government must also be bold enough to express which practices or techniques are no longer compatible with society because of negative societal consequences. Or, in the words of the late Ad Geelhoed, policy also means occasionally inflicting suffering. When the government actively helps to find affordable alternatives, then larger transitions will also gain public support.

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## About PBL

### **PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency**

PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency is the national institute for strategic policy analysis in the fields of the environment, nature and spatial planning. It contributes to improving the quality of political and administrative decision-making by conducting outlook studies, analyses and evaluations in which an integrated approach is considered paramount. Policy relevance is the prime concern in all its studies. It conducts solicited and unsolicited research that is always independent and scientifically sound.

PBL is an autonomous research institute in the fields of the environment, nature and spatial planning. It is part of the Dutch Government; more specifically, the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment. Other government departments – in particular the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (Housing and Government Services) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – may also ask PBL to conduct research into issues related to the environment, nature and spatial planning. The independence of PBL and its partner agencies CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) is safeguarded in the Protocol for the Policy Assessment Agencies (*Aanwijzingen voor de Planbureaus*), *Staatscourant* (government gazette) 3200, 21 February 2012.

The core tasks of PBL are:

1. to investigate and document current environmental, ecological and spatial quality and to evaluate policy;
2. to explore future social trends that influence environmental, ecological and spatial quality and to evaluate possible policy options;
3. to identify social issues of importance to environmental, ecological and spatial quality and raise them for discussion;
4. to identify possible strategic options for achieving government objectives in the fields of the environment, nature and spatial planning.

PBL was established in May 2008 when the Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research (RPI) merged with the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP). The merger came about as part of the Government Reform (*Vernieuwing van de Rijksdienst*) programme, which resulted in the activities of RPI and MNP being transferred to PBL.

## About the NSOB

### **The Netherlands School of Public Administration**

The Netherlands School of Public Administration (*Nederlandse School voor Openbaar Bestuur* - NSOB) has developed state-of-the-art post-academic educational programmes since 1989, the year in which it was founded by Leiden University and the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Utrecht University, the University of Amsterdam, Delft University of Technology and Tilburg University have participated in the NSOB since 1995.

From the outset, the NSOB has striven to contribute to high-quality public administration through sophisticated and challenging educational programmes for top segment of management in public administration and public sector organisations. The educational programmes of the NSOB are distinguished by advanced didactic concepts, an excellent corps of lecturers of both top scientists and leading practitioners, and intensive and small-scale didactic forms and methods. The educational programmes are a combination of cognitive intensification, theoretical and professional reflection, training in professional and personal skills, application of knowledge and insights in complex advisory and research trajectories. The educational programmes seek boundaries in knowledge and skills, and challenge the participants to do the same.

Since 2006, the NSOB has not only operated as a high-quality educational institute, but also a think-tank. In this function, the NSOB aims to contribute to the knowledge-development of public administration and the public sector. Key themes include strategic questions about policy content and governing relations, shifting liaisons between private, public and political domains and the design of changes and policy tools in those domains. The NSOB addresses questions and dilemmas from initiators in public administration and public sector, but also themes that arise from autonomous scientific and professional reflection.

The NSOB offers facilities and inspiration to scientists and guests from public organisations, during and after their career. The NSOB also organises public debates and develops scientific and professional publications.

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