

Self-governance and community participation: burden or blessing?

In many Western-European countries governments are calling for increased community participation and self-governance in the provision of public services, such as health care and the maintenance of public green. At the same time, citizens also demand and take more control over their own living environment and everyday life. They organize themselves in various ways, often in the form of citizen's initiatives or cooperatives. For governments and other public organisations these groups of organized citizens form interesting partners in their aim to transfer tasks and responsibilities towards citizens. This, however, requires a redefinition and redistribution of the roles and rules guiding the relationship between governments, public organisations *and* citizens.

Since the pressure to transfer tasks and responsibilities towards citizens is increasing (amongst others through developments such as the economic crisis, decline of the welfare state and demographic change), the pressure on these citizen groups is also increasing. Governments and public organisations often have high expectations in the negotiation process and try to divert ever more tasks towards these citizen groups.

These citizen groups, how well-organized they may be, depend heavily on the input and effort of volunteers. The volunteers are faced with ever more demands and an increasing burden in terms of time, education, responsibility, liability, etc. At the same time, these citizen groups are struggling to find new volunteers. It seems people don't want to commit themselves to volunteer work for a long time or don't want to be involved at all.

The [Science Shop of Wageningen University](#) has been approached by a supporting organisation for citizen groups in small villages and towns ([DKK Gelderland](#)) to study volunteers organisations and the role of volunteers. Key questions in the research project are: 1) *How can volunteer organisations negotiate the role of volunteers with public organisations in the transfer of tasks and responsibilities?* and 2) *How can volunteer organisations find and bind volunteers to take on the new tasks and responsibilities?*

Are you interested in the topic above? Please contact the project manager, Albert Aalvanger (albert.aalvanger@wur.nl) from the chair group Strategic Communication (COM). Together we can discuss the possibilities for a Bachelor or Master Thesis. Your work will contribute to the broader research project from the Science Shop and to individual volunteer organisations. We can provide you with interesting contacts and case material. Of course, there is plenty of room for your own ideas or approach to this topic!