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The U-Turn in Government Facilitation: How Dutch Water Authorities Facilitate Nongovernmental Initiatives

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Abstract

Public authorities in infrastructure, aiming to facilitate societal initiatives, explore new forms of collaboration with nongovernmental actors. A comparative case study of two Dutch initiatives is conducted: energy generation at a public dam and the realization of a nature reserve. It is analyzed how and why the authorities' strategy regarding their nongovernmental partners changes over time. Authorities' strategy change is modeled on two axes: governmental investments and governmental influence, and a differentiation is made between limited facilitation, invitational facilitation, partnering, and Design, Build, Finance, Maintain, and Operate. A U-turn-shaped pattern in authorities' strategy is found: Authorities move from partnering to limited facilitation and subsequently revert to invitational facilitation. Institutional factors, process factors, and initiative characteristics are identified that explain the strategy changes. It is concluded that government facilitation is a dynamic, interactive process and that authorities adapt their strategy to the initiative at hand and are pragmatic in their approach.

Keywords

public–private cooperation, government facilitation, governance, nongovernmental initiative, participation

Introduction

Driven by both external and internal factors, today's authorities explore new forms of collaboration with nongovernmental actors. Consequent to, among other things, shrinking budgets, a societal call to reform democratic practices, and the idea that they

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can no longer solve today's "wicked" problems on their own, public authorities try to adjust their ways of working (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). The shift from government to governance is extensively described in the public administration literature (Osborne, 2010; Pierre & Peters, 2000). Recently, various authorities seem to have taken the sharing of responsibility and discretion with nongovernmental actors another step forward (Kisby, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2005). They encourage external actors to "embrace partial responsibility" for the delivery of what traditionally have been considered public services (Edelenbos, Van Meerkerk, & Schenk, 2018; Mees et al., 2016, p. 1). Instead of taking the lead themselves, governments aim to facilitate initiatives taken by nongovernmental actors (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2018).

In the fields of infrastructure and nature development, authorities have also been exploring alternative forms of collaboration with their civic and private partners (Donahue & Zeckhauser, 2006; Leavitt & Morris, 2007). Traditional public procurement gave way to Design, Build, Finance, Maintain, and Operate (DBFMO) contracts in public-private partnerships (PPPs; Brown, 2007; Van Hurk, 2018). Now, some authorities are attempting to go beyond the PPPs in which they act as principal and commission private actors to work on their behalf. Instead, they aim to stimulate and facilitate the self-organization of nongovernmental actors in the field (Francesch-Huidobro, 2015; Roodbol-Mekkes & Van den Brink, 2015).

The facilitation of nongovernmental initiatives differs from PPPs in the sense that the initiating leadership of a project lies with nongovernmental actors, which can be civic or private (Westerink et al., 2017). There is no public procurement; the nongovernmental actors initiate a project on the basis of their own motivation and interest (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). Project ownership stays in the hands of the initiators (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2018). They do not work on behalf of the government, and although they might receive financial support, for example, in the form of subsidies, they are not paid by the government, as would be the case in a PPP or unsolicited proposal (Verweij, Teisman, & Gerrits, 2017).

The Dutch authority responsible for waterways and road networks, Rijkswaterstaat (RWS), has been exploring the facilitation of nongovernmental initiative (Hueskes, Koppenjan, & Verweij, 2016; A. Van Buuren, Eshuis, & Bressers, 2015). RWS awaits civic or private sector initiatives that it can subsequently facilitate (Frantzeskaki, Jhagroe, & Howlett, 2016). RWS opts for government facilitation regarding renewable energy generation and the multifunctional use of assets. Instead of procuring a piece of infrastructure, such as, for example, an energy-neutral dam, RWS requires nongovernmental actors to take the lead in the initiation, realization, and exploitation of that infrastructure (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2018).

Government facilitation exists in different forms and intensities (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). The amount and form of governmental support can differ: authorities might change rules and regulations in favor of the external initiative, they might contribute financially, or they might solely provide a platform for nongovernmental actors to meet and further develop their plans (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2018). There is great variety in the support received by different nongovernmental initiatives from public authorities, and little is known about the reasons behind these differences.

Besides the variation in governmental support between different external initiatives, there is variation in authorities' strategy regarding the same initiative over time. A known dynamic is that, despite the aim of solely facilitating, projects end with heavy government involvement (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Brownill & Carpenter, 2009). It is not uncommon that authorities find themselves back at the steering wheel when they had the intention to work collaboratively on a project with nongovernmental actors (Klijn & Teisman, 2003). From research into community initiatives, another form of nongovernmental initiatives, it is also known that authorities have difficulty sustaining new strategies (Edelenbos, Van Meerkerk, & Koppenjan, 2017). They change their initial strategy of facilitation and, for example, incorporate the external initiative into their own organization (Grotenbreg & Altamirano, 2017).

Despite the growing scholarly attention for new forms of governance in which authorities facilitate nongovernmental initiatives (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Edelenbos et al., 2017; Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2016), there is not much research yet into the actions of public authorities that opt for facilitation. Relatively little is known about the strategies they deploy and how these strategies change over time and shape the relation with external initiatives (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016). More insight into these topics could ease a shift to government facilitation and contribute to the understanding between the government and its nongovernmental partners. Ultimately, this could enhance project realization, as previous research shows that, despite their intentions, authorities are now struggling to sustain a facilitating strategy (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Edelenbos et al., 2017). More indirectly, this is also relevant for society as a whole that has a stake in the successful realization of projects that in the past would have been executed by the government but are now entrusted to nongovernmental actors.

Hence, the research question in this study is as follows: *How does public authorities' strategy regarding nongovernmental initiatives change over time and how can these changes be explained?* Dutch authorities' strategy changes regarding different nongovernmental initiatives are analyzed. The aim is to find out how authorities decide on the amount of support an initiative receives. Furthermore, the dynamics of the relation between government and nongovernmental initiatives are explored, examining when "old" administrative behavior comes back into play.

A comparative case study of two Dutch projects is conducted: energy generation at the Afsluitdijk dam and the realization of a nature reserve called Marker Wadden in a freshwater lake. In both projects, the authorities changed their strategy regarding their nongovernmental partners multiple times. The study has a government-oriented perspective that originates in the public administration discipline (Warbroek & Hoppe, 2017). This means that the cases are analyzed from the perspective of the government; the focus is public authorities' strategy change regarding nongovernmental initiatives. The aim, besides gaining insight into the explanations for strategy change, is to formulate some recommendations for the management of public projects. The term *external initiative* is used to refer to these initiatives initiated outside the governmental organization; they are external from the government's perspective.

To gain more insight into the changing strategies of public authorities, the potential reasons for a shift to government facilitation are first discussed in the “Theory” section. Then, potential barriers to strategy change are elaborated: institutional stability and traditional administrative values. Because the facilitation of nongovernmental initiative is a new strategy for the authorities in this study, the theoretical knowledge on barriers might help to understand their struggles. Third, to learn when and how a new strategy can be sustained, the theorized enablers of strategy change are discussed. After the theory, the research design of this study is elaborated, after which a description of the cases is given. In the analysis section, a model of strategy change is first presented, and then the authorities’ strategy changes in the cases are described and subsequently analyzed. The article ends with conclusions and discussion.

Theory

In this study, the shifting strategies of public authorities regarding nongovernmental initiatives are analyzed. Strategy is defined as the “patterns or consistencies” in “streams of behaviour” (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985, p. 257). There is a difference between leadership plans and intentions, called intended strategy, and what an organization actually does, the realized strategy. Sometimes, the realized strategy mirrors the intended strategy, that is the strategy is deliberate. In other cases, strategy emerges despite, or in the absence of, intentions. These are emergent strategies (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Through strategic learning, organizations change their intentions on the basis of emergent strategies. They “respond to an evolving reality rather than having to focus on a stable fantasy” (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985, p. 271). These theoretical insights are useful for the study of government facilitation because public authorities struggle to sustain a facilitating strategy although they intend to; their intended strategy does not mirror the realized strategy (Brownill & Carpenter, 2009; Klijn & Teisman, 2003).

Reasons to Opt for Government Facilitation

There are various reasons why public authorities might choose a strategy in which they facilitate nongovernmental initiatives in the first place (Grotenbreg & Altamirano, 2017). Facilitation can enhance so-called sigma values. These are efficiency-related administrative values, in contrast to democratic theta values and quality lambda values, as distinguished by Hood (1991). Facilitation enlarges the available pool of knowledge and financial and organizational resources to solve public problems (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). There can be efficiency gains (Donahue & Zeckhauser, 2006), and facilitation can increase productivity and public value creation (Zhang, Crawley, & Kane, 2015). Things can be accomplished that the government could not have done on its own. Embracing external initiatives can further generate public support and lead to more innovative solutions (A. Van Buuren et al., 2015; Wegerich, Warner, & Tortajada, 2014). The facilitated project can function at arm’s length from centers of political authority, thereby potentially offering greater flexibility in decision-making, resource

acquisition, management, and accountability arrangements (Skelcher, Mathur, & Smith, 2005). Finally, depending on the democracy model adopted, government facilitation can also enhance democratic legitimacy (Edelenbos et al., 2017).

Institutional Stability, Administrative Values, and Government Facilitation

Despite the benefits, public authorities often do not sustain their facilitating strategy (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Brownill & Carpenter, 2009). An important reason why innovative, facilitating strategies are hard for authorities to sustain is the stability of institutions (A. Van Buuren et al., 2015; Warbroek & Hoppe, 2017). Institutions are “the rules of the game in a society” (North, 1990, p. 3), and the way in which authorities collaborate with nongovernmental actors can be considered an institution (Genschel, 1997). Although their stability is the prime reason for their effectiveness, over time, misfits emerge between institutions and the environment in which they function, because the latter changes whereas the former is stable (Genschel, 1997). This is the case in this study: The environment of today’s public authorities (literally and figuratively) requires new ways of collaborating, and consequently the authorities’ way of collaborating with nongovernmental actors has to change (Nutt & Backoff, 1995).

In general, there are three overarching reasons why institutions such as the way collaborations take shape are hard to change: sunk costs, uncertainty, and political conflict (Genschel, 1997). Institutions have large set-up costs, meaning that it takes time, money, and effort to become established. Public managers have to get used to the rules and conventions associated with institutions, and organizations develop specific competencies and set up a physical infrastructure (e.g., software systems) in line with their institutions (Genschel, 1997). This generates sunk costs, which preserve an institution (Lanzara, 1998). Shifting to another way of working means that established structures lose value and new investments have to be made (Pierson, 2000). Second, strategy change implies uncertainty: The costs and effects of new ways of working are hard to predict (Genschel, 1997). Returns on the investments that have to be made to effect change are uncertain and often delayed in time; there is a “slow feedback” (Lanzara, 1998, p. 6). Risk aversion therefore is an important hindrance to change in public organizations. Third, strategy change by public organizations can lead to political conflict. The status quo has beneficiaries; established institutions often have a distributive bias, meaning that certain actors benefit from the way things are organized (Genschel, 1997), and these actors will probably try to prevent change. These three factors are expected to also be important in the cases in this study: Sunk costs, uncertainty, and political conflict are potential barriers for a facilitating strategy and might lead authorities back to more traditional ways of working.

A fourth reason why a facilitating strategy is hard for authorities to sustain is that it can conflict with traditional administrative values, such as representation, equality, impartiality, and the primacy of politics (Grotenbreg & Altamirano, 2017). In a traditional view on representative democracy, politicians govern on behalf of the electorate, they uphold the primacy of politics, and are the first to decide on issues that impact

society (Edelenbos et al., 2017; Held, 2006). This can be threatened if nongovernmental actors enter the administrative arena (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Adherents of this traditional view argue that government facilitation of societal initiatives clashes with the public imperatives of democracy (Skelcher et al., 2005) and this forms another barrier for change.

A way in which facilitation can conflict with traditional administrative values is that when the government chooses to facilitate an external initiative, it no longer exclusively decides on how public money is spent and what solution is chosen for a public problem; the government loses some discretion to nongovernmental actors (Donahue & Zeckhauser, 2006). Government facilitation might furthermore harm the governments impartially because it favors the societal actors that have the capacity to initiate a project and reach out for support (Westerink et al., 2017). In addition, to facilitate, authorities have to be flexible and find tailor-made solutions to the initiative at hand, and this can conflict with values such as transparency, legal certainty, and decisiveness (Brownill & Carpenter, 2009; A. Van Buuren, Driessen, Teisman, & Van Rijswijk, 2014). Other values that could be at stake include, for example, professionalism and government accountability (Skelcher et al., 2005). In this study, traditional administrative values are therefore also expected to form a barrier to a facilitating strategy.

Enablers of Strategy Change

It is difficult, but not impossible, to change an organization's strategy and sustain an innovative, facilitating strategy. Scholars have identified four countervailing mechanisms that enable change: focal points, increasing returns, institutional bricolage, and patching up (Genschel, 1997; Lanzara, 1998). First, focal points are "seeds" for institutional change, signals toward a certain direction provided by, for example, political leaders, social movements, or shared beliefs (Lanzara, 1998, p. 22). Second, increasing returns provide positive feedback: If the first investment in the new way of working generates small returns, it paves the path for further change (Baumgartner & Jones, 2001; Lanzara, 1998). Third, institutional bricolage is "the recombination and reshuffling of pre-existing available components" (Lanzara, 1998, p. 27) meaning that a new organizational strategy might be comprised of components of established strategies. This reduces uncertainty and the loss of sunk costs and generally increases the willingness to accept the new strategy (Genschel, 1997; Lanzara, 1998). Relatedly, patching up means replacing only parts of the established way of working. Only certain components of a strategy are changed, leading to fewer costs, fewer risks, and less political conflict. Patching up often happens in specific parts of a public organization; there is no central coordination and this makes it less threatening to the (beneficiaries of) the status quo (Genschel, 1997).

Previous research into the facilitation of nongovernmental initiatives by public authorities shows the value of these mechanisms. Regarding local energy initiatives for example, local authorities use a patched up strategy that is incidental and limited to ad hoc and episodic adaptations, thereby avoiding explicit struggles with the status quo (Warbroek & Hoppe, 2017). In the water sector, pilots, which are a form of patching up, are frequently used to introduce governance innovations (Van Popering-Verkerk & Van

Buuren, 2017). In addition, institutional bricolage is used in this sector to safeguard traditional administrative values when new ways of working are introduced. Through so-called auxiliary arrangements, it is assured that a new strategy fits into existing organizational rules and practices (A. Van Buuren et al., 2015). The countervailing mechanisms that enable the introduction and sustainment of facilitating strategies are expected to also be present in the cases under study. Now that the reasons for, barriers to, and enablers of strategy change that can be found in the literature are discussed; in the next section, the research design of this study is presented.

Data and Method

The way in which public authorities change their strategy when facilitating societal initiatives, the object of this study, is a complex phenomenon. A comparative case study design was chosen to analyze this phenomenon. This method suits the topic and the research question best; case studies allow in-depth knowledge to be gained of complex situations (Stake, 1998; Yin, 2018). As a consequence of the research design, this study will not lead to findings that are easy to generalize or to readymade solutions to public problems (Hufen & Koppenjan, 2015). The aim is to enhance the available knowledge on the dynamics of government facilitation, with a focus on the water sector.

Case Selection

Through strategic sampling, two cases were deliberately selected in which Dutch national and local authorities were exploring new forms of collaboration with nongovernmental actors: renewable energy generation at the Afsluitdijk dam and realization of the Marker Wadden nature reserve. In the first case, RWS aimed to facilitate private actors' initiatives to generate renewable energy at a public dam. In the second case, two national ministries chose to facilitate a nature organization's plan to create marsh islands in an inland lake. In the past, these authorities would probably have designed and financed the projects themselves, putting the projects out to tender and commissioning a private actor for the construction work. The fact that this approach was new for the authorities makes the cases interesting for this study. The cases fulfill another prerequisite for answering the research question: The authorities changed their strategy regarding their nongovernmental partners multiple times. Finally, this selection suits a comparative case study because the cases are comparable but different. The sector, actors involved, and time path are alike, but the characteristics of the societal initiative and the outcomes are different. One of the differences is the type of good that will be realized: At the Afsluitdijk, the main good is renewable energy; at Marker Wadden, it is a natural amenity.

Data Collection

The study of the Afsluitdijk case started in October 2013 with a document analysis of policy documents, news articles, and market consultation reports. Use was also made of research conducted before on the case by Lenferink, Leendertse, Arts, and Tillema

(2012) and by Janssen, Mol, Van Tatenhove, and Otter (2014). Between February and December 2014, 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the national and local authorities involved and private project initiators. See the appendix for an overview. The Marker Wadden case was followed from October 2015. This study also started with an extensive document analysis. Among other things, a large number of documents, disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act, containing the communications between the government and the initiator Natuurmonumenten and between different government departments were analyzed. Between January and May 2016, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of all the national and local authorities involved and Natuurmonumenten.

To gain insight into the strategies and strategy changes deployed by the authorities regarding their nongovernmental partners, the respondents were asked to reflect on the decisions that were made, the alternatives considered, the pros and cons of the available options, and how they evaluated the outcome. Furthermore, the respondents were asked about the dilemmas and difficulties encountered in terms of facilitation of, and collaboration with, the nongovernmental actors. Case-specific situations and government facilitation in general were discussed, and the respondents were asked to elaborate on the potentials and pitfalls of facilitation strategies, in their opinion. The interviews, combined with the information gathered in the document study, led to the analysis and conclusions in the remainder of the article. All the presented statements are the result of the author's analysis; no literal quotes are used in the text.

Case Descriptions

Renewable Energy at the Afsluitdijk Dam

The location of the first case of this study, the Afsluitdijk (literally Enclosure dam), is a 32-km-long dam in the north of the Netherlands. The dam was constructed over the period 1927 to 1932 to enclose a saltwater inlet of the North Sea to protect the land from flooding and create new farmland. With the enclosure, the Netherlands acquired a freshwater lake in the heart of the country, called IJsselmeer. Figure 1 shows the location of the Afsluitdijk and Marker Wadden.

Since 2006, the Afsluitdijk no longer meets the safety criteria. The Ministry of Transport and Water Management conducted a market consultation for a redesign of the dam. This resulted in various comprehensive plans from private consortia combining the necessary renovation of the dam with ideas for recreation, nature development, and energy generation. The ministry, however, decided to procure solely a simple renovation for flood protection. Ideas and initiatives to upgrade the dam with, among other things, renewable energy generation were left to nongovernmental actors. The three municipalities and the two provinces in which the dam is located took the stance that initiating, financing, and realizing energy projects were primarily the responsibility of nongovernmental actors.

Two local private firms, located at the Afsluitdijk, both took the initiative to expand their pilot installations to generate renewable energy. A private turbine construction



Figure 1. Location of Afsluitdijk and nature island Marker Wadden in the north of the Netherlands.

Source. dutchwatersector.com.

company that operates an installation for the generation of tidal energy wanted to expand this installation. In addition, it wanted to realize a second installation at another location on the dam. Another firm had the ambition to generate blue energy, using the difference in salinity between fresh and salt water, at the Afsluitdijk.

RWS, as the executive organization of the ministry, and the local authorities gave some more support to these initiatives than they initially envisioned. For the local authorities, the energy projects were important because it was believed that they would give a much-needed boost to the local economy. RWS had a more ambiguous attitude toward the projects. It was not willing to take responsibility for them, but the minister was enthusiastic about the Afsluitdijk becoming a so-called energy dam. Therefore, RWS felt unofficially obliged to support the local energy projects and agreed to help the firms and the local authorities to implement their plans. It facilitated the energy projects by engaging in discussions with the private initiators about the possibilities and about easing the permit procedure.

The blue energy firm received subsidies from both national government and the local authorities and realized its pilot installation on the dam in 2014. In 2015, the turbine construction company expanded its installation, also partly financed by public subsidies. To date, however (November 2018), it has not managed to realize the aspired second installation. Requests from the firm for more help and support, for example, for RWS to buy the generated tidal energy or to adjust the planning of the construction work in favor of the tidal energy installation have gone unanswered.

The Marker Wadden Nature Reserve

The location of the second case of this study is the freshwater lake, enclosed by the Afsluitdijk in 1932, from which from 1936 onward, parts were reclaimed to create new land. In 1976, a dam was built to enclose the southern part of the lake, called the Markermeer, but the planned reclamation of this water never happened. What remained was a “bathtub,” a relatively shallow lake with barely natural shores. An accumulation of sediments in the Markermeer makes the water very turbid, and the flora and fauna in the area have declined severely.

Over the years, there have been numerous programs, research projects, and policy plans to deal with the problems in the Markermeer. Most of them foundered because the national and local authorities involved were not willing or able to finance the necessary interventions. In 2012, the national government in collaboration with the two provinces located around the lake set up a market consultation, comparable with the one in the Afsluitdijk case, searching for cost-effective measures to restore the flora and fauna in the Markermeer area. This resulted in three comprehensive and costly designs from private consortia, ranging from €282 million to €1,194 million. The national government, however, decided not to procure one of these plans. Instead, the two ministries responsible for the Markermeer area entered a collaboration with the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Natuurmonumenten, which took the initiative to realize an archipelago of marsh islands in the lake.

In 2011, Natuurmonumenten was granted a €15 million subsidy for the Marker Wadden project from one of the Netherlands’ largest lotteries. Natuurmonumenten asked for an additional €30 million financial contribution from the national government. The prevailing situation at the responsible ministries provided fertile ground for Natuurmonumenten’s proposal. There were pressing environmental issues at the Markermeer, but the ministries did not have the resources for an all-encompassing plan. Natuurmonumenten brought a well-developed, manageable plan and €15 million of its own resources to the table. Stimulating nongovernmental actors to take the lead in solving public problems was an important goal of the government, and this project fitted this vision. After internal discussions, the two ministries involved decided to contribute €15 million each.

The ministries’ initial idea was to facilitate Natuurmonumenten’s project from a distance. Over time, however, they became more and more involved. So, whereas in the Afsluitdijk case, the national government distanced itself from the nongovernmental initiatives, in the Marker Wadden case the opposite happened. Because of concerns about the NGO’s capacity to manage such a large project, it was decided that RWS would join Natuurmonumenten in a collaborative organization and would execute the tendering process. In 2014, the work was commissioned to a private consortium; in 2016, the construction work started. Because Natuurmonumenten did not manage to raise the money needed to complete this first phase of the project, the ministries involved and two provinces decided to contribute another €15 million approximately. Figure 2 shows the location of Marker Wadden in the Markermeer.



Figure 2. Location of marker Wadden in the Markermeer.
Source. NOS/Lars Boogaard.

Ranges of Public Authorities' Strategy Change

The first step of the case analysis is an inventarisation of the ranges of change of the public authorities' strategies. The strategies varied in the amount of influence claimed by the authorities in the projects and in the resources that they invested. To enhance the analysis, a model is constructed in which these variables are visualized as two axes (see Figure 3). Four ideal types of public–private arrangements are consequently distinguished. First, in the case of a Design, Build, Finance, and (potentially) Maintain, and Operate contract, the government has to make few investments and has a large amount of influence. The government procures public work, leaves the initial investments to the private contractor, and pays availability fees when the work is delivered. This resembles contracts in the UK Private Finance Initiative (Klijn, Edelenbos, & Hughes, 2007; Van Hurk, 2018). This arrangement never prevailed in the cases; although both cases started with a market consultation, the authorities did not aim for a DBF(MO) contract.

Second, if the amount of governmental influence and level of investments are high, it is called partnering. The authority works together with nongovernmental actors as partner. They share the ownership of a project and both make significant investments. Such a collaborative project can be initiated by both public and private actors. The third type is called limited facilitation, as governmental influence and investments are low (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2017). In the case of limited facilitation, authorities accommodate societal initiatives to create public value, but the support received by the external initiators is restricted. The authority might, for example, support the initiative by adjusting rules or regulations that form an obstruction (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2018). The initiating leadership of the project lies with nongovernmental actors (Westerink et al., 2017), and they are subsequently the ones responsible for realization and exploitation (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2017).

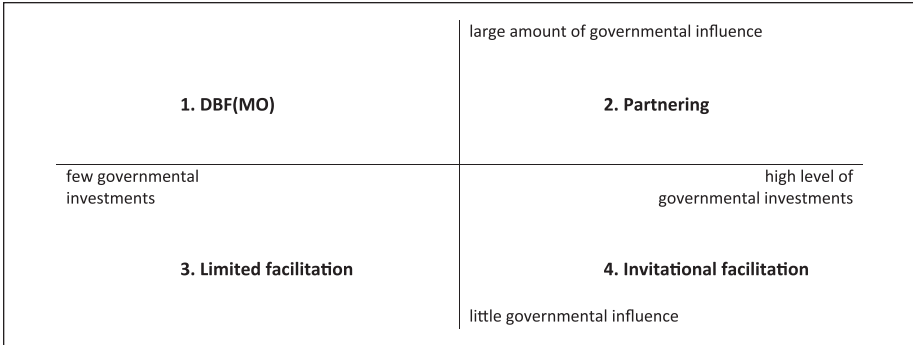


Figure 3. Ranges of public authorities’ strategy change in public–private arrangements.
 Note. DBF(MO) = Design, Build, Finance, Maintain, and Operate.

Fourth, invitational facilitation is distinguished if the government claims little influence and makes substantive investments in a societal initiative. In the case of invitational facilitation, supporting nongovernmental initiatives is a policy intention of a public authority; a public authority actively invites nongovernmental actors to initiate a project (M. W. Van Buuren, 2017). With a discourse that emphasizes the opportunities and benefits for nongovernmental actors, the authority tries to entice them to take action (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2017). Initiators can count on a significant amount of different forms of support from the government. Besides regulatory support in the form of adjusted rules and regulations, the initiative might receive analytical support in the form of information and advice, coordination support in the form of access to networks and fora, and financial support, for example, in the form of subsidies (Grotenbreg & Van Buuren, 2018).

Public Authorities’ Strategy Change in the Afsluitdijk Case

The constructed model is first used to analyze the strategy changes of the public authorities in the Afsluitdijk case. In 2008, the national Ministry of Transport and Water Management conducted a market consultation in preparation for a public procurement to renovate the Afsluitdijk. At that time, the ministry’s strategy was to procure a full renovation of the dam, including various side projects to generate renewable energy. It aimed to collaborate with a wide range of societal actors on this. The economic crisis hit however, and driven by austerity measures and government reform, all side projects were left to nongovernmental actors. The ministry decided to finance solely a simple renovation for flood protection. Nongovernmental actors that wanted to add functions to the dam could count on minimal support; the government’s strategy shifted from partnering to limited facilitation. Over time, however, for different reasons, the provinces and RWS decided to give more support to the nongovernmental project initiators; the strategy of these authorities shifted from limited facilitation toward invitational facilitation. These strategy changes are visualized in Figure 4.

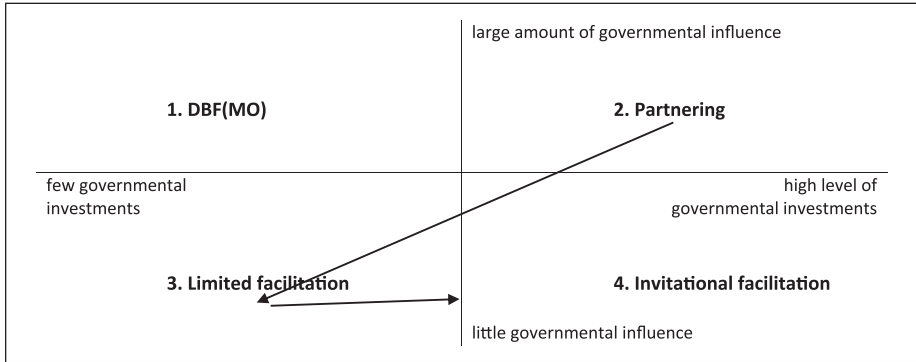


Figure 4. Public authorities’ strategy change in the Afsluitdijk case.
 Note. DBF(MO) = Design, Build, Finance, Maintain, and Operate.

Public Authorities’ Strategy Change in the Marker Wadden Case

In the Marker Wadden case, a collaboration between the national and the local government conducted a market consultation in preparation for a public procurement for restorative measures for flora and fauna in the Markermeer area. Similar to the Afsluitdijk case, the responsible ministries then changed their strategy and decided not to procure any work. Instead, they decided to facilitate the initiative of an NGO to realize a nature reserve in the area; the government in this case too shifted from partnering to limited facilitation. Despite the initial plan to leave the ownership of the project with the NGO and invest few governmental resources, RWS ended up as a full project partner contributing substantial resources to the project; the strategy shifted from limited facilitation back in the direction of partnering, as visualized in Figure 5.

In the two cases, a similar U-turn shape can be seen in the change of strategy regarding facilitation. The authorities involved started off enthusiastically, with extensive plans for all-encompassing projects and collaborations with a wide range of societal actors, and then they seemed to revert to known, traditional ways of working in which they focused on their own core tasks, after which they returned to a more moderate form of facilitation in which they worked with societal actors on their terms adapted to the situation at hand. In the next section, these two moves in the authorities’ change of strategy are analyzed more elaborately.

Explanations for Public Authorities’ Strategy Change

Explanations for a Shift From Partnering to Limited Facilitation

The starting point of the analysis in both cases was a market consultation conducted by the national government. In both cases, the government had the intention to realize an integrative project combining flood protection with additional functions such as energy generation, recreation, and nature development. The intended strategy was to

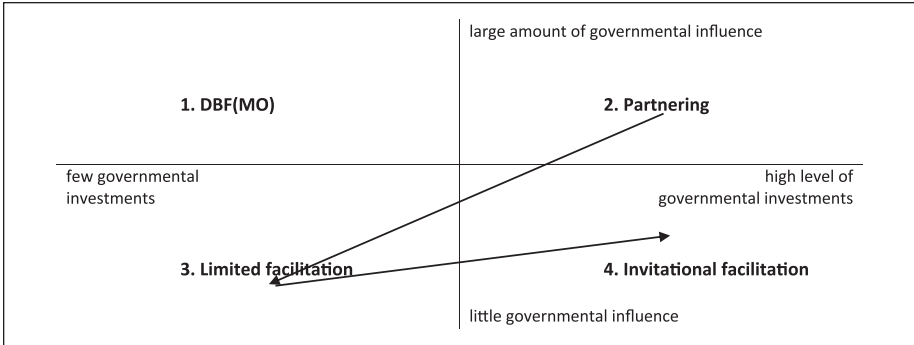


Figure 5. Public authorities' strategy change in the Marker Wadden case.

Note. DBF(MO) = Design, Build, Finance, Maintain, and Operate.

collaborate with a wide range of civic, public, and private actors in this. It was planned to put part of the work out to tender and to commission a private consortium. Governmental influence and investments were going to be large in the sense that the government intended to initiate, finance, and determine the content. In both cases, however, the government changed its strategy to limited facilitation. In the Afsluitdijk case, RWS decided to focus solely on flood protection and leave any additional functions to local authorities and nongovernmental actors. In the Marker Wadden case, the two ministries involved chose to facilitate a relatively small initiative by an NGO, instead of procuring one of the more encompassing plans that resulted from the market consultation.

An important explanation for this strategy change is a reshuffling and compartmentalization of administrative responsibilities. The national government made substantial cuts in the budgets for nature development and innovation and partly transferred these policy domains to local governments. This, in combination with austerity measures, affected RWS's strategy. The energy initiatives in the Afsluitdijk case, for example, besides generating energy, contributed to innovation and economic development. In the new situation, these were no longer the responsibility of the water authority. The nongovernmental initiatives no longer enhanced the authority's policy goals. RWS also had to strictly safeguard its own renovation work at the dam, not allowing any interference from the energy projects. The authority thus opted for limited facilitation, because the external projects' goals did not match its own and even interfered at some points.

A more positive policy change proved to be an incentive for a shift to limited facilitation: In the Marker Wadden case, one of the ministries decided to explore new public–private arrangements and be more open to nongovernmental initiatives, which it believed would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization and add to its legitimacy. Facilitation of the NGO's initiative fitted this policy intention nicely. In this situation, the realized strategy is the intended strategy; the government deliberately chose to change its approach, adjusted its policy, and acted accordingly.

Another reason for the change to limited facilitation is simply the existence of a competent external initiative. In the Marker Wadden case, the NGO Natuurmonumenten approached the government with its initiative. The NGO was known as a reliable partner, and it presented a well thought through project plan. This, in combination with the policy changes, made it easy for the responsible ministries to choose a strategy of facilitating a nongovernmental initiative instead of taking the lead itself.

The authorities in both cases initially chose a strategy in which they claimed little influence in the facilitated projects and made relatively few investments. A reason for choosing limited rather than invitational facilitation is a fear of jeopardizing traditional administrative values such as legality, impartiality, and legitimacy. Concerned about accusations of unwarranted state aid, the authorities in both cases hesitated to support the nongovernmental projects financially. Traditional, administrative values and, relatedly, uncertainty about the outcomes of a new approach and sunk costs of established ways of working are known barriers to strategy change (Genschel, 1997; A. Van Buuren et al., 2015).

In the Marker Wadden case, this was dealt with by an open call for other societal actors to join the project. In the Afsluitdijk case, RWS set strict conditions to its support for the energy projects. A solid business case and fully developed project plan were preconditions for the inclusion of the project in the authority's procurement of the renovation. A financial contribution could be obtained only if all the other (nongovernmental) financiers had confirmed their contribution to the project. This can be seen as a type of institutional bricolage; by facilitating external initiatives, RWS tried something new, but it built in provisos to reduce uncertainty (Lanzara, 1998).

Explanations for a Shift From Limited Facilitation to Invitational Facilitation

As discussed, after the decision not to enter a public–private collaboration to realize a large, multifunctional project, the authorities retreated to a strategy of limited facilitation. Over time, however, they started making more investments and claimed more influence in the facilitated projects than initially planned. This U-turn is seen in both cases, but in the Marker Wadden case, it is more extreme. RWS in this case eventually became a project partner and the ministries involved invested significant amounts of money; in the Afsluitdijk case, the authorities' support was more limited.

There are various explanations for the U-turn toward invitational facilitation. In both cases, policy was changed to be more open toward multifunctional use of public water works and new forms of collaboration with nongovernmental actors, for reasons of efficiency and legitimacy. In addition, in the Marker Wadden case, the external project helped the ministries involved to fulfill their own policy goals. The initiative contributed to nature development in the area, for which the ministries were responsible. This also partly explains the difference between Afsluitdijk and Marker Wadden. In the Afsluitdijk case, RWS, by supporting the energy projects, hoped to secure local support for its own work: the renovation of the dam. The facilitation thus served an indirect goal, but generating renewable energy, the main purpose of the initiatives, was

not on the to-do list of the water authority. One could say that the ministries had more responsibility in the Marker Wadden case because nature is a public good in the sense that nature is nonrival and nonexcludable in consumption (although Natuurmonumenten could close off the island; Webster, Wai-Chung, & Lai, 2003).

A second explanation for the difference between the cases is the resources of the external initiator. In the Marker Wadden case, the ministries decided to support Natuurmonumenten, which was willing to invest €15 million of its own resources (in contrast to the three other private consortia that participated in the market consultation and expected full cost recovery). In the Afsluitdijk case, RWS was not fully convinced of the business case for the energy projects and the capacity of the initiators to realize these projects successfully. Natuurmonumenten, in contrast, presented a well-organized project and was considered a competent and reliable partner.

Doubts about the competence of the nongovernmental initiator to live up to the authorities' standards, however, also proved to be a reason to invest more and gain more influence. In the Marker Wadden case, several RWS departments pleaded for a full takeover of the project from the NGO; the organization had difficulty adapting to the new role of partner instead of principal. RWS eventually decided to lead the tendering process and procurement of the construction work and subsequently became the project's legal contract manager. This decision was driven by the view that leaving it to the NGO would harm the continuation of the project and the authority's relation with the private market. RWS also opted to acquire more influence to ensure that public money was well spent and that the investments advanced the government's policy goals. RWS thus chose invitational facilitation to safeguard traditional administrative values such as professionalism and government accountability.

A related explanation for the increase in governmental investments and influence, especially in the Marker Wadden case, was lock-in. The two ministries invested significantly in Marker Wadden, and when a lack of resources threatened the project's future, the ministries decided to contribute even more.

A last explanation for why facilitation in the Marker Wadden case was less limited than in the Afsluitdijk case is the way in which it could be organized within the governmental organization. In neither case did facilitation fit with the prevailing regulations, working methods, and organizational culture. For that reason, the external initiatives were isolated in the Afsluitdijk case to safeguard the RWS's priority: the renovation of the dam. In the Marker Wadden case, the mismatch between the external initiative and the bureaucratic organization was bypassed by explicitly setting up the project as a pilot, in relative isolation from the rest of the organization. Consequently, the people working on the project had greater discretion to deviate from the organization's standards, resulting in a more invitational form of facilitation (Van Popering-Verkerk & Van Buuren, 2017). This is an example of patching up: only part of the bureaucratic organization changed its strategy, and this made it less threatening to the status quo (Genschel, 1997).

The change from limited to invitational facilitation is explained mostly by process factors and the characteristics of the external initiative at hand. Consequently, the realized strategy was mostly emergent: It emerged in response to current events rather

Table 1. Main Explanations for Strategy Change Regarding the Facilitation of Nongovernmental Initiatives.

	Toward limited facilitation	Toward invitational facilitation
Institutional factors	Compartmentalization, austerity, administrative values	Governance policy, administrative values
Process factors	Presence of societal initiative	Lock-in, positive feedback, increasing returns
Characteristics external initiative		Initiator’s capacity, contribution to policy goals

than policy. The theorized enablers of strategy change, such as increasing returns and patching up, eased the shift to invitational facilitation (Baumgartner & Jones, 2001; Lanzara, 1998).

Overview: Institutions, Process Factors, and the Initiative’s Characteristics as Explanations for Strategy Change

Table 1 gives an overview of the identified explanations for strategy change by public authorities that aim to facilitate nongovernmental initiative. The literature on public strategy (Genschel, 1997; Lanzara, 1998) and on government facilitation (e.g., Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Whitehead, 2003) focuses mostly on institutional barriers to strategy change. In this study, process factors and the characteristics of the nongovernmental initiatives also proved to be important. In the table, a distinction is made between these three explanations for strategy change.

The table shows that the shift to limited facilitation can be largely explained by institutional factors: Compartmentalization, austerity measures, and traditional administrative values led the government to revert to a strategy of limited facilitation. The nongovernmental initiatives had broad objectives, such as innovation and regional development. Consequent to the reshuffling and compartmentalization of policy responsibilities and budget cuts, it was unclear which governmental organization was in charge. The strictly defined responsibilities and the government’s inability to work in an integrative way thus formed a barrier to supporting the nongovernmental initiators. This finding is in line with literature that stresses the difficulty for bureaucracies to facilitate societal initiatives (Edelenbos et al., 2017; Warbroek & Hoppe, 2017). Other research (e.g., Skelcher et al., 2005; Westerink et al., 2017) also mentions that bureaucratic values, such as legality and impartiality, make public authorities hesitant to invest in external initiatives. The sunk costs of standardized working methods and procedures are also important here (Lanzara, 1998).

Besides the institutional factors, a process factor that explains the shift to limited facilitation is simply the presence of a viable nongovernmental initiative. Natuurmonumenten’s proposal gave the responsible ministries the opportunity to pull back, transfer responsibility to the NGO, and refrain from investing in a resource-intensive PPP.

Table 1 further shows that, for the shift to invitational facilitation, institutional factors proved to be of less importance. The characteristics of the external initiatives are the main explanation for this strategy change. The authorities in the cases were willing to give more support to an initiative that enhanced their own policy goals. This corresponds with findings of, among others, Boonstra and Boelens (2011) and A. Van Buuren et al. (2014). Furthermore, the authorities decided to give more support to the Marker Wadden initiative because it had a high chance of success but at the same time could not succeed without government support. An initiator's incapacity could thus also be an incentive to gain more influence in a project; the water authority took over part of the project because the project goals were important for the ministries involved and there were doubts about the NGO's capacity to successfully realize the project on its own. The government was pragmatic in its choice of strategy here.

A related explanation is lock-in; at a certain point, the continuation of the Marker Wadden project was endangered by a lack of resources. Because the ministries had made significant investments already, they decided to invest even more. Other research has also found that such process factors can be an explanation for authorities' strategy regarding societal initiatives (Edelenbos et al., 2018; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012).

The theorized enablers of strategy change were also present in the Marker Wadden case as process factors: The successful collaboration with Natuurmonumenten gave positive feedback, leading to a willingness to make more investments, bringing increasing returns (Baumgartner & Jones, 2001). The facilitation of this eye-catching initiative thus served as a focal point that further enhanced the facilitating strategy (Lanzara, 1998).

Governance policy, or the wish to introduce new forms of collaboration with non-governmental actors and be more facilitative because it would enhance the efficiency and legitimacy of the organization, was an institutional explanation for a shift to invitational facilitation. Remarkably, traditional administrative values such as accountability and professionalism drove both less and more governmental involvement in the external initiatives. The authorities in the cases chose limited facilitation because they feared facilitation might harm these values but, when they became involved anyway, the authorities invested more resources to safeguard these values.

Our analysis shows that government facilitation is context dependent and results from the interaction between government and societal actors; they react and adapt to each other's characteristics and wishes. The fact that government facilitation is a dynamic process and that the government's behavior can be largely explained by the process and the initiative's characteristics is neglected in most of the existing literature (e.g., Brownill & Carpenter, 2009; Warbroek & Hoppe, 2017). This literature focuses mostly on static, institutional factors, such as the political system, bureaucracy, and administrative values that hinder government facilitation of societal initiatives (e.g., Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Edelenbos et al., 2017).

Conclusion and Discussion

Public authorities are exploring new forms of collaboration with nongovernmental actors (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). In the fields of infrastructure and nature

development also, authorities are searching for alternative ways to collaborate with their civic and private partners (Francesch-Huidobro, 2015). They aim to be more open to societal initiatives and facilitate the work of nongovernmental actors (Roodbol-Mekkes & Van den Brink, 2015). Relatively little is known yet about the strategies and actions of public authorities that aim to facilitate nongovernmental initiatives (Edelenbos et al., 2018). To enhance our understanding about the barriers and enablers of government facilitation, this study follows two initiatives over time and analyzes how and why the authorities changed their strategy regarding these initiatives.

Most of the literature on government facilitation focuses on static factors that hinder facilitation (e.g., Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Edelenbos et al., 2017; see for exceptions Edelenbos et al., 2018; A. Van Buuren et al., 2015; Westerink et al., 2017). This study shows that process factors and the characteristics of the facilitated initiative are also important explanations for the behavior of facilitating authorities, indicating that government facilitation is an interactive process. The government is pragmatic, and the strategy that it deploys is context dependent; authorities change their strategy in reaction to the (also changing) characteristics of the initiative at hand. This process of facilitation is neglected in a lot of the literature (e.g., Brownill & Carpenter, 2009; Skelcher et al., 2005).

Another finding is that traditional administrative values, in the literature identified mainly as barriers to innovative collaborations (e.g., Skelcher et al., 2005; Westerink et al., 2017), also prove to be a driver of invitational facilitation. As other research shows, authorities are hesitant to facilitate nongovernmental initiatives because they fear that they will jeopardize values such as government accountability and professionalism (Brownill & Carpenter, 2009; A. Van Buuren et al., 2014). This study shows that when authorities, for other reasons, start facilitating anyway, they opt to obtain significant influence in the initiative to safeguard these values.

Based on the findings, the conclusion is that, to attract government support, a nongovernmental initiative should enhance government's policy goals or at least not interfere with them. This also applies to traditional administrative values; facilitation of the initiative should not jeopardize these values (too much). In addition, the public authority involved should be willing and able to facilitate. This is not a matter of course, because facilitation requires different skills than traditional governing, and as authorities do not operate in a vacuum, political and managerial support from the top of the organization for this way of working is another precondition. Last but not least, the nongovernmental initiators should be both competent and in need of government support. To be eligible for facilitation, an initiative should thus have a high chance of success, but at the same require some government support to achieve that success.

The two Dutch cases on which these conclusions are based can be considered extreme cases (Yin, 2018) in the sense that, in The Netherlands, the water sector has traditionally been in the hands of the government, with a strong prediction and control regime focused on risk avoidance (A. Van Buuren et al., 2015). Even more than in other countries, facilitating nongovernmental initiatives is innovative for Dutch water authorities compared with their traditional ways of working (Grotenbreg & Altamirano, 2017). Although other countries are generally more progressive in terms of granting

nongovernmental actors an active role in the provision of public services, they are also searching for new forms of public–private collaboration and a more facilitative role for the government (Buser, 2013; Mees et al., 2016; Taylor, 2003). The expectation is that the theory-based mechanisms found in this explorative, qualitative study will also be present in other sectors and other countries, but more research is needed to further corroborate the conclusions.

In terms of recommendations for practitioners, this study shows the value of the enablers of strategy change for authorities that aim to explore new forms of collaboration with their civic and private partners (Genschel, 1997; Lanzara, 1998). By retaining parts of the established working method, patching up, and institutional bricolage, the uncertainty that accompanies facilitation of external initiatives can be reduced. This can help a bureaucratic organization to grow into a new strategy. A facilitating strategy that fits with the existing organizational structure and values is an emergent strategy: It takes shape over time and is hard to spell out in policy beforehand (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; A. Van Buuren et al., 2015). Government facilitation is trial and error, and when some first steps are taken, for example in a pilot, positive feedback and increasing returns can pave the way for more facilitation (Baumgartner & Jones, 2001; Van Popering-Verkerk & Van Buuren, 2017).

Appendix

Interviewed Respondents

Case: Renewable Energy at the Afsluitdijk Dam.

	Respondent function	Organization	Interview	Location
1	Project manager, Energy The New Afsluitdijk	Energy Valley	February 2014	Erasmus University, Rotterdam
2	CEO, Blue Energy	REDstack	February 2014	REDstack, Sneek
3	Project manager, Afsluitdijk	Rijkswaterstaat	March 2014	Rijkswaterstaat, Utrecht
4	CEO	Tocado Tidal Turbines	March 2014	Tocado, Den Oever
5	Project manager, The New Afsluitdijk	Province Friesland	March 2014	Province Hall, Leeuwarden
6	Advisor, The New Afsluitdijk	Province North-Holland	April 2014	Province Hall, Haarlem
7	Stakeholder manager project, Afsluitdijk	Rijkswaterstaat	April 2014	Rijkswaterstaat, Utrecht
8	Project manager, Sustainable Energy	Strukton	May 2014	Strukton, Utrecht
9	Project manager, Tidal Energy Afsluitdijk	Tocado	June 2014	Tocado, Den Oever
10	Project manager, The New Afsluitdijk	Province Friesland	December 2014	Province Hall, Leeuwarden

Case: Nature Reserve The Marker Wadden.

	Respondent function	Organization	Interview	Location
1	Project manager, Marker Wadden	Rijkswaterstaat	January 2016	Rijkswaterstaat, The Hague
2	Research manager, Marker Wadden	Top Sector Water	February 2016	Rijkswaterstaat, The Hague
3	Former policy advisor	Ministry of Economic Affairs	February 2016	Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority, Utrecht
4	Policy advisor	Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment	February 2016	Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, The Hague
5	Project director, Marker Wadden	Natuurmonumenten	February 2016	Province Hall, Lelystad
6	Policy advisor, Marker Wadden	Province of Flevoland	April 2016	Province Hall, Lelystad
7	Project control manager, Marker Wadden	Rijkswaterstaat	May 2016	Rijkswaterstaat, Utrecht
8	Advisor on public-private partnerships	Taskforce Delta Technology	May 2016	Private address, Hagestein

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