VNG
**Association of
Netherlands Municipalities**

Local Government
in the Netherlands

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Foreword

In the Netherlands, citizens' first point of contact with the authorities is at the municipal level of government. This is where they go to register as citizens, request official documents like passports and birth certificates and gain access to services like waste collection and public transport. This is also where they can influence decision-making that has an impact on their direct living environment.

At both national and international level, municipalities are increasingly seen as the key level of government for developing practical and innovative solutions to global challenges. In the Netherlands, this is even more the case since the major decentralisation process in 2015. Even though municipalities have to deal with these challenges, they are not expected to be the key designers of solutions: it is the entire community of business, academia and civil society that needs to find the right approach to the challenges faced by municipalities.

Municipalities need to adapt continuously to the changes in society. They cannot look at challenges or opportunities from just one sectoral angle, but need to look at all policy areas together to ensure that approaches are effective. Integrated policy development is therefore a key feature of the way forward. Municipalities must also ensure that citizens feel they are genuinely represented by municipal councils. Providing sufficient space for citizens to participate in local decision-making and implementation must be a high priority on the municipal agenda, to avoid a decline in the democratic legitimacy of the local government.

This of course does not apply only to the Netherlands. Municipalities worldwide therefore reach out to each other to learn from and work with each other. Dutch municipalities and their representative organisation, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), have many international contacts and partnerships with other local authorities.

Dutch municipalities regularly receive requests for information on their mandate, responsibilities and operations. This booklet explains how they work.

1 Introduction to the history of the Netherlands

1.1 History and culture of the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a relatively small but densely populated country. To the West and North, it is bordered by the North Sea, to the East by its major industrial neighbour Germany and to the South by Belgium, which is slightly smaller than the Netherlands. The fertile delta of three great rivers is a major feature of the country's physical geography: the Maas and Schelde rivers flow into the country from the South and the Rhine from the East. The delta forms a busy network of inland shipping routes, a feature that, together with its remarkable access to the sea, allowed the city of Rotterdam in the West to develop into one of the world's largest ports.

This is a large and complex river delta area and almost half the country lies below sea level. Had there been no dykes or coastal dunes, as was the case in prehistoric times, then half of the country would be under water. This long-term relationship with the ever-threatening sea clearly determined the way democracy took root and gained shape in the Netherlands. The flood threat meant that early residents had to unite and work together to defend their land, which brought the concepts of rights and duties to the fore. Everyone had to cooperate in protecting the land. There is nowadays even a special Dutch word for this cooperative method of making policy: 'polderen'. As early as the 13th century, some of the oldest Dutch institutions were created to maintain the dykes and the dry land below sea level. In the 19th century, they were replaced by water authorities, which exist to this day.

The Netherlands has a population of about 17 million and an area of approximately 42,000 square kilometres (including 1,600 square kilometres of water) and is one of the smaller countries in the world. However, size is relative - much larger countries such as Australia and Chile have a similar number of inhabitants. But anyone travelling through the North, East and parts of the South of the Netherlands would

not realise how densely populated the country is. The eye and heart enjoy the strange beauty of the flat countryside, with its church spires in the background, trees, peacefully grazing cows and old farmhouses. The Dutch landscape of rivers and meadows, protected by large banks of clouds, has proved a popular theme for many a poet and painter throughout the centuries.

1.2 A diverse population thanks to our history

The Dutch population has always been a melting pot. For example, during the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) against the occupying power of Spain, many people from all over Western Europe sought refuge in the relatively safe North, which was later to become known as the Netherlands. The Dutch today originate from all over Europe and farther afield. In the 17th century the Netherlands developed into a world economic power primarily because of its physical location, the seafaring, boatbuilding and trading traditions of a coastal nation and the outward-looking nature of its people. That period is now known as a golden age. The Netherlands used to have colonies in Asia, such as Indonesia and Papua New Guinea and in North and South America. Even New York used to be New

Amsterdam; Brooklyn (Breukelen), Wall Street (Walstraat) and Harlem (Haarlem) were Dutch settlements. New Amsterdam was traded with the British for several Caribbean islands. After decolonisation, many inhabitants of these islands moved to the Netherlands hoping for a more prosperous life.

The establishment in 1957 of the European Economic Community, as it was then known, led to new migration flows between the six member states. More followed when other European countries joined. Many migrant workers from Spain, Greece and Portugal looking to improve their lives settled in the Netherlands. With Europe's economic power continuing to grow, the 1960s saw many non-European migrants searching for a new future. Today, of its 17 million inhabitants, some 397,000 come from Turkey, 385,000 from Morocco, and many more from former Dutch colonies: over 348,000 from Surinam and 151,000 from the Dutch Antilles. Since their countries joined the European Union (EU), many Poles, Romanians and Bulgarians have settled in the Netherlands, permanently and temporarily. The country has also witnessed an influx of refugees from the wars in Africa and the Middle East in recent years. All contribute to the national economy. Such migrations have made the Dutch population multicultural. The Netherlands has always been a Christian country (mainly Protestant,

and Catholic in the Southern provinces) with significant Jewish and humanistic influences. Less than half of the population are practising Christians or formal members of a church community. Mainly through migration, some 840,000 Muslims currently live in the Netherlands, as a result of which the mosque has become a familiar feature of the urban landscape. Some large cities today count more than 170 different nationalities. In some cities, the desired integration of minorities is not taking place to everybody's satisfaction. This sometimes results in friction or conflict. At the national level, new extreme right and left-wing political parties have emerged, each with their own ideas as to how to deal with this issue.

Another demographic development is the growing number of senior citizens. In 2025, more than 21% of the population will be above the age of sixty-five. This ageing population has a number of consequences: senior citizens usually require more care and support services, some of which need to be provided by the local authorities. In addition, municipalities have to ensure that their provision of sporting, recreational and cultural activities meets the needs of this growing group in the local population.

2 Administrative Structure of the Netherlands

Introduction

The Netherlands in its current form has been a constitutional monarchy, since the adoption of the constitution in 1815. The monarchy fell into the hands of the Oranje-Nassau dynasty in the 16th century, during the Eighty Years' War, when the Netherlands as we know it today came into being. Before then, and in between, it was a republic, though in different forms.

The governmental structure of the Netherlands displays a rather interesting paradox. The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a constitution; a centralized state. It is at the same time a decentralized democratic and unitary entity, in which the EU, central, 12 provincial and 380 municipal governments and 22 regional water authorities cooperate to 'organize' society. The Caribbean Dutch territories Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba are special public bodies and, in terms of administration, these islands operate in a similar way to municipalities. Each of these spheres of government has its own responsibilities, with central government providing unity through legislation and supervision. We call this a decentralized unitary state.

The relationship between the Dutch central government and the three decentralised tiers shows some influences from centralist unitary governments, such as France, and systems where subsidiarity prevails, including federal states like Belgium and Germany.

Dutch democracy is based on the separation of powers. This means that the government has executive power, the parliament has legislative power and the judiciary is independent. Conflicts of interest are avoided as much as possible; so for instance, a government minister can never simultaneously be a member of parliament. Similar rulings apply at provincial and local levels.

Directly after World War II, The Netherlands played an active role in founding what

today is the European Union. Starting with six members in 1951, this grouping of 28 sovereign states is unique in the world. The wish to create stability and peace in Europe was a driving force behind this cooperation. The EU collaborate intensively in the social and economic fields, and has developed into what is today considered to be one of the world's economic superpowers. Within the EU, the Netherlands is a powerful economic player because of its sizeable agricultural exports and knowledge-based economy and its major investments across the world, representing continuity with long-held trading traditions.

2.1 Parliamentary constitutional monarchy

Parliamentary representative democracy

Legislative power at the national level is entrusted to the States-General, the national parliament. It consists of two houses: the upper house (the Senate, "Eerste Kamer") and lower house (the House of Representatives, "Tweede Kamer"). The lower house has 150 members, while the upper house has 75 members. The lower house is entitled to dismiss a minister when the response is not satisfactory and is tasked with introducing, amending and voting on bills. The upper

house mainly focuses on the quality of legislation and can only pass or reject a bill, or delay it until the lower house passes an acceptable amendment.

The lower house is directly elected by Dutch voters every four years, or earlier if the government resigns prior to the end of the mandate. The Netherlands has a multi-party system and the lower house consists of representatives of around fifteen parties. Political parties present a ranked list of candidates on election day. Voters may cast a single vote for a candidate on one of the party lists. All party votes are added up, and seats are proportionally divided among the parties according to the vote totals. The seats are allocated to the members highest on the party lists. Any candidate with over 1/600th of the total votes gets a seat allocated to his or her party, regardless of his or her position on the party list. This single-district, proportional system ensures that multiple parties have seats in the parliament, and none holds a majority of the seats; the Dutch government is therefore always a coalition of two or more parties. If coalitions break up, this usually means the government can no longer command enough support and new elections to the lower house are necessary.

The upper house is indirectly elected every four years; the roughly 570 members of the provincial councils vote for members of the upper house. This is mostly a formal process, as there is no election campaign and voting is generally along party lines.

The government: the king and the ministers

Executive power is entrusted to the government, consisting of the king (head of state) and all ministers and secretaries of state. The government has both administrative and legislative tasks. The cabinet consists of ministers and secretaries of state and is led by the prime minister. According to the constitution, the parliament controls the government and is co-legislator. Each minister has their own policy area and manages their ministry on a day-to-day basis and drafts new laws to present to parliament. Ministers may be assisted by one or more secretaries of state. After general elections, the process of cabinet formation starts. The head of state appoints a politician, usually the leader of the largest political party, to lead the formation of a coalition government. The prime minister and the other coalition partners select the
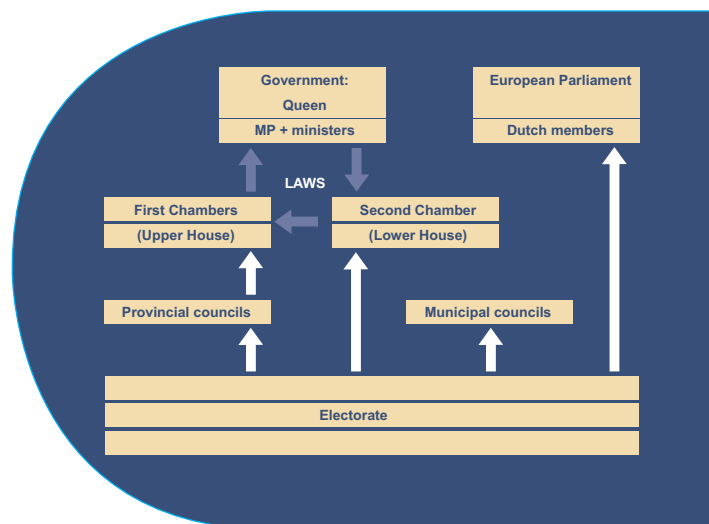
ministers and secretaries of state that can count on the support of the entire coalition.

The role of the king and the wider royal family is defined and limited by the constitution of the Netherlands. It states that the oldest child of the current ruler shall be successor to the throne, regardless of gender. As head of state, the monarch has almost no political power. Most of the king's tasks are ceremonial in nature and include receiving other heads of state and foreign ambassadors and conducting state visits. But the king also has a few formal tasks and powers. The king is part of the government and signs laws and royal decrees, although the ministers and secretaries of state are politically responsible for them. The king is inviolable and cannot be asked to resign. He could theoretically refuse to sign a law, but this would cause a constitutional crisis. He is officially the chair of the Council of State, which advises the government and parliament on legislation and governance and monitors the coherence and continuity of the government and the quality of public administration.[1]

The constitution and the rule of law

The Netherlands is a state where the rule of law applies. This means that the government's power is constrained by law. This is to protect citizens from injustice or wrongdoing by the government. Citizens enjoy legally based civil liberties and have recourse to the judiciary. The existence of a constitution and the segregation of powers are important elements of the Dutch rule of law.

1   However, in practice the vice-chair acts as chair.

The constitution of the Netherlands contains rules for the structure of the governmental system. Until the 19th century, the main function of the constitution was to maintain the power of the king. In 1848, the constitution was reformed and the powers of the king were limited and defined by the constitution. Today the constitution also enshrines important basic rights for all citizens. Examples of Dutch basic rights are equality before the law and prohibition of discrimination (Article 1), the right to vote (Article 4), freedom of religion (Article 6) and freedom of speech (article 7).

It is very difficult to amend the constitution. Proposals to reform the constitution must pass through two readings: they must first be approved by a majority of the lower and upper houses and after general elections, proposed amendments to the constitution must be approved by both houses with at least a two-thirds majority.

Right to Vote
The Netherlands has enjoyed universal suffrage since 1918. Every Dutch citizen above 18 years of age has the right to vote for the lower house of parliament, the provincial council, the municipal council, the water authorities and the European Parliament.

Voting is not mandatory. The elected representatives in the lower house (the Chamber of Representatives), the provincial councils and municipal councils respectively, hold the government at national, provincial and local level to account and monitor the account-

ability of the different levels of government to citizens. Most citizens exercise their right to vote for the lower house and municipal councils, but turnout is lower for provincial councils, the European Parliament and water authority elections.

Capital and governing city
The capital of the Netherlands is Amsterdam, a city that for centuries welcomed the oppressed with open arms and was always at the heart of Dutch trade, creativity and innovation. Today it is a major North Sea port, EU financial centre and a centre for the arts and creative and innovative (digital) industries.

However, the seat of government and parliament is The Hague, some 40 km to the South of Amsterdam - a result of turbulent events in Dutch history. The Hague has always been the residence of the head of state. In the 11th and 12th centuries, ruling knights, who at the time governed the 'low lands by the sea', used to gather in the so-called Ridderzaal or Knights' Hall in the heart of The Hague. Government and parliament buildings were later built around the Knights' Hall, offering the city of The Hague a unique and characteristic appearance.

2.2 Governance

Decentralized co-governance
In previous centuries, the Netherlands consisted of a number of smaller states, or provinces as they are now officially called. Representatives of these provinces would regularly meet in The Hague to report to

the States-General and contribute to policy development.

In the decentralized unitary state which the Netherlands is today, different tasks are carried out at different levels, although most tasks are also carried out together. Daily practice involves all government levels. Municipal and provincial authorities derive their autonomous tasks and powers from the constitution and the Municipalities Act (Gemeentewet) and the Provinces Act (Provinciewet) respectively; co-governance tasks are based on special legislation in specific policy areas. Co-governance means that the government assigns the implementation of a particular task to a municipal or provincial authority by means of an act; these tasks are called "medebewindstaken". Regional Water Authorities (RWAs) are government bodies and their autonomous tasks are defined in the Regional Water Authorities Act (Waterschapswet).

In decentralised government, co-governance tasks take on a much bigger significance than the autonomous tasks; Dutch municipalities are autonomous and pass their own legislation and regulations within the limits set by the central government for 10% of their tasks. The remaining 90% is implemented jointly with other levels of government.

Due to their unique position close to the population, municipalities have increasingly taken on a central role in creating and implementing policy. This is a direct consequence and prominent feature of the operation of a decentralized unitary state: local government must listen and react to popular opinion, including on national issues, from the construction of a new railway line to care for the elderly.

In total, municipal government has about 155,000 employees, provincial government has 11,000 and central government has 116,000.

The division of powers and responsibilities of the different government levels, can be broadly described as follows:

Table 1 Principal functions and responsibilities of government tiers in the Dutch political-administrative system

Central government	• foreign and European policies • military defence • police services, courts and prisons • education and research (polytechnics and universities; policies on primary and secondary education) • labour market and economy • national social security (unemployment, disability and old age pensions) • health and care, hospitals • national roads and railways (railways are partly privatised) • culture and mass media (radio and television) • integration and migration policies • youth and family • national physical, environmental and agricultural issues • taxation (mainly income taxes and VAT)
Provinces	• physical, environmental and agricultural issues • nature conservation • provincial roads and public transport (outside metropolitan areas) • regional development • quality of local government and water authorities • taxation (part of vehicle taxation)
Water authorities	• water safety, polder maintenance (dikes, canals) • waste water collection and treatment • some minor roads • taxation (water quality and quantity)

Municipalities	• public order and safety (including fire protection) • spatial planning and urban development (municipal plans are the only ones that are legally binding) • housing policies • environmental issues and sewage services • waste collection and disposal • local economy, permits and accessibility • local public transport, municipal roads and harbours • primary and secondary education (mainly school buildings) • local health and social care • social security provision, and reintegration of unemployed • culture, sports and leisure, tourism • youth care • registry • local taxation (mainly property tax)

Source: Schaap, L (2011), Decentralised autonomy?, Tilburg: Universiteit van Tilburg.

However, it is important to note that in practice the separation of tasks is not always that clear and in fact increasingly these tasks are increasingly a joint effort between the various layers of government.

Central Government

There are eleven ministries in the Netherlands and each has its own policy area. There are ministries for financial and economic affairs, interior and kingdom relations, infrastructure and environment, social affairs and foreign relations. Ministers manage the day to day operations of their ministries and draft new laws to present to parliament. Secretaries of state generally head an important section of a ministry and have similar tasks to those of ministers, although the latter office is considered to be senior. Ministers are only able to operate effectively when a majority of the parliament is willing to work with them.

Provinces

There are 12 provinces, of varying size, population and number of municipalities. Provincial legislative authority is set out in the Provinces Act (which came into force in 1994) and implemented by the Provincial Council. The Provinces Act provides the

sub-national authority with the autonomous tasks 'of regulation and administration'., i.e. to introduce bye-laws and carry out the administrative actions that the provincial authority deems necessary or useful for the provincial community and that do not stem from higher law.

The Provincial Council regulates the division of power. The members are directly elected every four years. The council's size depends on the population. The most densely populated province, South Holland, has 55 council members, while the province with the least inhabitants, Flevoland, has 41. The Provincial Executives, in number ranging from 4 to 8, are responsible for preparing and implementing the decisions and orders of the Provincial Councils. They are also responsible for implementing central government decisions, insofar as these fall within the powers and responsibilities of the province. The central government appoints a King's Commissioner for each province who chairs the Provincial Council and Provincial Executive. Commissioners play a role in overseeing the selection process of mayors in their province. The provincial councils elect the members of the upper house.

Provinces implement central government policies at the provincial level, typically on traffic and (public) transport, environment and public sector housing. The provinces are also responsible for supervising the performance and budgets of municipalities and water authorities. The budget for provincial government itself is only one-tenth of the budget that municipalities have at their disposal.

Regional Water Authorities

Because most of the country is below sea and river level, water is a constant threat. Responsibility for managing this threat is decentralised to 22 Regional Water Authorities (RWAs). Their powers cut across provincial and municipal borders. The responsibilities of the RWAs are regulated by law and include flood defence, water quantity and quality management, waste water treatment and pest control. A few RWAs also manage rural roads. RWAs manage approximately 18,000 km of dikes, 225,000 km of waterways, 3,700 pumping stations and 360 waste water treatment plants. Because of the taxes they raise (revenue in 2016: € 2.6 billion) the RWAs are almost completely self-financing

and independent. The provinces supervise the RWAs.

Residents elect representatives to the RWAs. The umbrella organizations of farmers, companies and nature conservation bodies also appoint representatives. RWAs have an elected administrative body, and an executive board. The administrative body is elected once every four years, usually at the same time as provincial elections. The head of the RWA is called a dike warden and is appointed by the king. The RWAs are members of the Association of Dutch Regional Water Authorities (UVW).

Municipalities

As of 1 January 2018, the Netherlands has 380 municipal authorities. Municipal authorities perform many different tasks. For example, registering residents, building roads and footpaths, providing social services and maintaining law and order. See chapter 3 for more about how municipalities govern and operate.

Europe: another dimension

The EU is the fourth tier of government. European and international cooperation is becoming increasingly important for addressing major cross-border challenges, such as economic development, environmental protection and refugee policy. Since its creation, the EU has become increasingly influential in devising solutions and legislation for these cross-border challenges.

The EU works according to the principle of subsidiarity: it aims to ensure that it only performs those tasks that cannot be performed at a more local level and, therefore, that action at EU level is justified in the light of the scope for national, regional and local action. European legislation is only introduced if it is necessary to address cross-boundary issues.

Much "European" legislation inevitably affects the way municipalities work and sometimes requires them to operate in a particular way. For example, with regard to tendering procedures, state assistance, free trade, environment, employment policy, social inclusion, information technology, culture, public health, youth policy and tourism. For instance, European legislation on air quality has a major influence on urban planning, an important municipal responsibility.

In these cases, European law takes precedence over national, regional and local rules. Municipalities must therefore operate within the framework established by European law.

In order to find solutions to cross-border issues, the European Commission funds municipal projects in many different fields. Member states allocate most European subsidies themselves, but the European Commission also has a number of supranational grant bodies.

Most grants to municipalities come from the so-called structural funds. In the period 2014-2020, grants totalling 1.4 billion euros were made to the Netherlands. This may not be much in proportion to the total municipal budget, but in absolute figures it is still significant and allows the implementation of initiatives and projects that otherwise may not have been possible.

One of the European Commission's main instruments for shaping European integration at municipal level is to facilitate the exchange of experiences. It makes grants to enable municipalities from different member states and beyond to share experiences. This encourages contact and helps municipalities find solutions to common challenges across borders.

Because of the impact of EU legislation on municipal operations, municipalities are becoming increasingly involved in influencing decision-making in the European arena. Municipalities have the opportunity to give advice on European proposals through the Committee of the Regions. This committee consists of representatives from European local and regional governments. The European Commission must consult in a number of areas. The European Parliament and the Council of Ministers can also ask the committee for advice.

In addition, European local government associations have a European umbrella association, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, which lobbies the European Parliament and Council and can take a more proactive approach in decision-making.

Finally, perhaps the most effective lobbying

instrument is to influence the policy positions taken by the national government towards the EU. In the Netherlands, a structured and agreed mechanism exists through which the VNG always has the opportunity to provide input in the government's process to develop its policy positions regarding EU legislation and policies.

Intergovernmental relations

Being a decentralized unitary state, for centuries there has been tension between central, and regional or local government. In addition, there is also tension between the rich western province of Holland (where central government is based and which for long has been the heart of the national economy) and the more rural areas of the north, east and south.

The inter-governmental relationships in the Netherlands are the result of organic legislation (the Constitution, Provinces Act and Municipalities Act, the Law on Financial Relations), special legislation (for example, on urban planning, care, education), and the way in which the different tiers of government exercise their powers.

In broad terms, the constitution of 1848 established the administrative system that the Netherlands still possesses. It incorporated the national, provincial and municipal tiers of government and made provision for the regional water authorities. Municipal and provincial autonomy is anchored in the constitution. However, the degree of autonomy is not fixed. Public bodies operate basically as

equals, although the laws and regulations of central government take precedence over municipal regulations. This means that local government activities must not conflict with rules and requirements set by higher levels of government.

In 2004, the central government and the representatives of the sub-national governments drew up an 'Inter-Governmental Relationships Code' (BZK, 2005). This code put forward the principle of 'local if possible, central if necessary', meaning that policies would be organized at the level of government closest to the citizen, according to the principle of subsidiarity.

The code is an informal agreement between the central government and the decentralised governments to organise or streamline the intergovernmental relations. The code describes administrative supervision, as well as the process of consultation of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) and its members on new legislation and policies by central government. The ministry of the interior is the primary responsible department for enforcing the code at central level. The Council of State periodically draws up a report on the intergovernmental relations, assessing to what extent the code and other intergovernmental agreements have been respected. It provides an objective basis for the continuous debate about the intergovernmental relations.

In 2014, the code was reconfirmed and a chapter on the European sphere of government and its effect on inter-governmental relations was included.

3 Local Government: Democracy and Administration

The Netherlands is divided into 380 municipalities. This number used to be higher, but neighbouring municipalities joined forces over the course of time in order to improve policy making and service delivery. This is an ongoing process. The largest municipality is Amsterdam with around 800,000 inhabitants.

municipality: the minimum number of seats is 9 (municipalities with less than 3,000 inhabitants) and the maximum is 45 (municipalities with over 200,000 inhabitants).

Municipal councils are elected every four years. Local branches of national political

Development number of municipalities
1900–2017
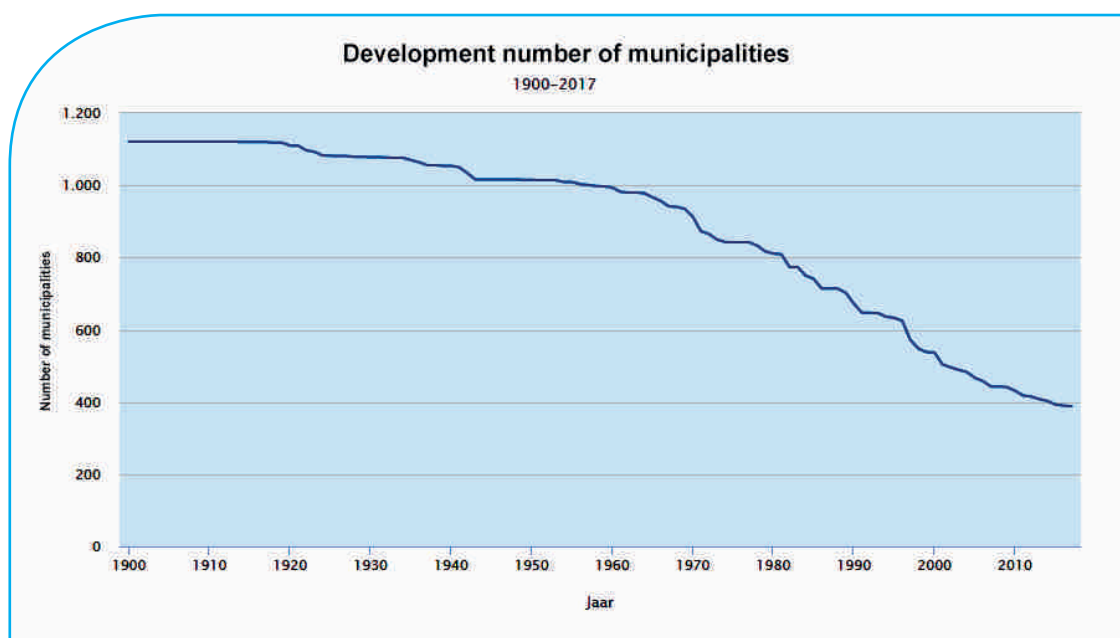
Schiermonnikoog, one of the islands along the north coast of the Netherlands, is the smallest with barely 900 inhabitants. In principle, all municipalities have the same tasks, though due to their size, the large municipalities require a different approach. Amsterdam, for example, has 16,000 employees, while Schiermonnikoog only has 25.

3.1 The municipal council
The municipal council is an elected body and wields legislative power. The municipal council has representative, administrative, policy making and budgetary powers. The chair of the council is the mayor, although he or she is not a member of the council and cannot vote (see also 3.2). The size of the municipal council depends on the size of the

parties or independent local political parties may present candidates. Independent individuals can also stand for election. Political parties conduct an election campaign with a programme and a list of candidates; issues are mainly of local interest, but local candidates also depend on the national success of their party. On election day, citizens are allowed to cast a single vote for a candidate, with the total votes cast for a party determining its share of the council seats.

Municipal councils consist of groups of elected representatives. After the municipal council elections, negotiations for creating a coalition and forming a majority begin. This coalition reaches agreement on a programme for the coming four years and the number of

aldermen that each party appoints. Due to the proportional representation system, it is rare for a single party to win a majority. The largest party usually takes the initiative in forming a coalition but smaller parties may be successful in forming a majority, without the participation of the largest party.

Coalition parties often allow input from opposition parties when formulating policy strategy for the coming years, because of the strong political consensus in the Netherlands. Opposition parties can also propose amendments or regulations. Opposition groups also challenge the municipal executive, usually during council sessions.

While being a council member is an important function in the Dutch political system, it is never a full-time job. Council members, on average, spend 16 hours per week on council business, although this varies between municipalities and also depends on whether council members hold posts. These differences of workload are also reflected in the payments they receive for their work.

Municipal councils pass local regulations and oversee the municipal executive. They carry out this latter task by critically assessing performance, questioning the executive and guiding it by passing resolutions. As at national level, the executive cannot function without the support and trust of the legislature. If the majority of the council loses faith in the executive, it can dismiss individual members or the whole executive. Legally, the mayor is an exception, as he or she is appointed by the king (see 3.2 mayor). In practice, the position of the mayor is untenable when the council has lost confidence in the executive and mayors tend to resign when this occurs.

There is a separation of powers between municipal councils and their mayors and aldermen. The municipal council is responsible for controlling the mayor and aldermen. Therefore, aldermen are not allowed to be members of the municipal council.

Municipal councils have to make decisions on a wide range of policy areas. There are too many to be discussed in depth during plenary council meetings so councils create internal committees for specific policy areas. Aldermen responsible for particular policy areas are accountable to the relevant commit-

tee, which decides whether to refer matters to a plenary session. Full council meetings and committee meetings are open to the public. In order to encourage participation in local politics, municipalities offer citizens the opportunity to speak at committee meetings. Sometimes, this is possible during the plenary sessions as well.

Council clerks
Council clerks are the most important advisors to municipal councils and play a vital and supporting role for council members, political parties and council committees. In large municipalities, clerks act as directors of the council's support staff. In smaller municipalities, clerks operate alone. Council clerks are employed by the legislature and are therefore appointed and dismissed, if necessary, by a vote of the municipal council. Although the clerks' allegiance lies with the council, they work alongside members of the executive, especially with the chair of the council, the mayor. Council clerks also frequently communicate with their counterparts in the executive, the city managers.

3.2 The Executive: colleges of mayors and aldermen
Executive power is wielded by colleges of mayor and aldermen (in Dutch: college van burgemeester en wethouders). Colleges are responsible for governing municipalities and leading the public administration. They are accountable to the council. The internal distribution of tasks differs according to the local circumstances in each municipality.

Mayors

Mayors chair municipal councils and executive colleges, of which they are also a member. Mayors have to be impartial to be able to chair the meetings of the council and the executive. They act as intermediaries between the parties and ensure continuity. Therefore, they do not usually propose regulations or policies.

Mayors are generally responsible for maintaining law and order, crisis management, representing their council at the national and international levels. Mayors decide how to deploy police forces to ensure public security. For example, mayors have powers to close coffee shops and illegal cannabis plantations, evict people from their homes if they are responsible for domestic violence and take emergency action to counter threats to public security and order. In the event of emergencies, the mayor leads the crisis team.

Appointment of mayors is a complicated process. The procedure starts with preparing a profile, which is approved by the council. The council subsequently appoints a confidential committee to manage the selection process. Mayoral candidates apply to the King's Commissioner in the province of the municipality concerned. In consultation with the council, the King's Commissioner selects candidates for interviews by the confidential committee. This committee recommends two candidates to the municipal council. The council makes a public recommendation and submits this for approval to the internal affairs minister for a final decision. Finally, the king appoints the proposed mayor. Council recommendations have always been adopted since 2001.

The mayoral term of office is six years. This term may be renewed on the recommendation of the municipal council. Mayors can be reappointed, although it is rare for mayors to serve for more than two terms and exceptional to serve for more than three. The King may dismiss a mayor on recommendation by the council, if relations between that mayor and council have broken down.

Aldermen

Along with mayors, aldermen are the other administrators of local government. The number of aldermen depends on the size of the municipality. The minimum is two fulltime aldermen and the maximum is nine for the largest cities. Aldermen are responsible for day-to-day administration. They introduce and implement legislation. Like ministers at the national level, they are each responsible for a particular area of policy. During the formation of the municipal executive by the municipal council, the coalition parties agree on how to divide the portfolios between the aldermen. Aldermen have a more political profile than the mayor, because they are politically bound to the coalition programme.

3.3 The Civil service

City managers

City managers are members of the executive. They are employed by the college of mayor and aldermen and are not therefore elected officials. City managers have a dual responsibility: they are the senior advisors to the colleges of mayor and aldermen and are also responsible for the implementation of policies and decisions. City managers always attend the weekly closed meetings of the college of mayor and aldermen. As the senior official, they act as director of the municipal civil service. Their position is less dependent on council politics, which is also the case for mayors.

Civil servants

The 380 municipalities in the Netherlands employ a total of approximately 155,000 civil servants. They provide continuity as executives and councils come and go. They are not political appointments and thus not replaced by appointees of the incoming executive. Their job is to serve and support, although their skills and knowledge are certainly crucial to decision-making. Most contact between citizens and municipalities are contacts between citizens and civil servants. For instance, a request for information about waste policy, an application for a building permit or passport.

Dutch municipal civil servants must remain politically impartial and are primarily accountable to the executive (college of mayor and aldermen). The executive is responsible for the civil service. This sometimes leads to conflicts of interest. Civil servants have to assist council members from opposition parties with the development of policy proposals that might conflict with the execu-

tive's policy priorities.

Dutch civil servants have always held a special legal status. They are subject to civil service law and not to the employment law that applies to the private sector. Not all employees of public institutions are officially civil servants. The legal status of the civil service is defined in the Civil Servants Act of 1929, which sets out valid reasons for dismissing civil servants. They cannot be dismissed on political grounds.

3.4 Citizen participation and service provision

The way in which people and organizations deal with each other has changed significantly as a result of developments in information technology. Information is easily accessible everywhere. Municipalities need to relate to their inhabitants in a different way than they used to: citizens have different expectations. Formulating and enforcing regulations, designing and maintaining public services, providing housing and education and ensuring the welfare of all citizens and the corresponding service delivery remain the core functions of local government. Municipalities aim to provide standardized services where possible and tailored services at local level where needed.

Municipalities are increasingly looking for ways to involve citizens in decision-making, governance, policy development and implementation. Municipalities are conducting far-reaching experiments in how to engage citizens; how they might independently organize services and products in their own neighbourhood; how they could participate in defining longer-term municipal policies; and how they might be able to take responsibility for the development and maintenance of sustainable neighbourhoods.

Municipalities aim to work in a transparent and efficient way and wish to innovate in order to adapt to social change. They also work together where possible. This demands better use of information, new technologies and improved digital infrastructure. Many municipalities are increasingly providing services online, which facilitates access to data requests for official documents, applications for permits etc.

3.5 Local finances

The total annual budget of all Dutch municipalities combined amounts to roughly 57 billion Euros, a vast sum to cover local services and implement decisions taken at the national level. Municipal revenues can be divided into the following three types: the general grant (gemeentefonds), ear-marked funds (specifieke uitkeringen) and taxes.

The first two are meant to cover most of the costs of implementing tasks deriving from the decentralization of national policies. Ear-marked funds cannot be reallocated and represent around 12% of the municipal income. They cover such costs as mitigating traffic noise and providing a fair education system. Municipal councils can decide themselves on the precise allocation of the general grant, which on average represents 47% of municipal income. Municipalities use this income, for example, to implement their safety and security policies, maintain municipal infrastructure and deliver social services. The general grant is supposed to enable all councils to provide an equal level of service delivery and allow municipal revenues to be held at a uniform level. The government uses a weighted allocation system based largely on the number of inhabitants, the number of houses, whether a municipality fulfils a service role for the region or not, and the area of the municipality. In addition, there is a refined set of around 90 allocation criteria that ensures that each municipality receives what it deserves and needs. Sometimes this system alone is insufficient, because municipalities might have to bear additional costs due to factors beyond their control.

Municipalities also have a number of ways of raising revenue. They levy taxes on property, dog ownership, tourists and land ownership and receive administrative fees and charges. Together, these cover on average 16% of municipal income. Taxes can be allocated for any purpose. Administrative fees and charges can only be used to cover the costs of providing the associated service. Municipalities are not allowed to make a profit on these services. Dutch municipalities have relatively small tax revenues compared to municipalities in other countries, especially when the extent of their responsibilities are taken into account.

The final 25% of municipal income comes from various sources, mainly income from

municipal property, but also from European grants.

The annual municipal council budget debate is one of the political highlights of the year. This is when decisions are made about how to spend non-ear-marked funds. If there is a risk of a deficit, the council has to decide what cuts to make. If there is likely to be a surplus, the municipal council may decide to increase its reserves to make sure it has money for hard times ahead, invest in the future, spend on short-term projects or simply lower taxes.

3.6   Cooperation and Amalgamation

Local administration is often called 'the most flexible sphere of government'. Since the establishment of the administrative system by the national constitution of 1848, the number of municipalities has gradually decreased from around 1,200 in the 19th century to 700 in 1989 and 380 in 2018. The reasons for this are related to developments in technology, economies of scale and the decentralization of tasks to the municipal level, which required a robust administrative body to do all the work. In addition to the increase in scale resulting from amalgamations, municipalities cooperate when implementing policies. A separate legal instrument exists for this in the form of the Joint Regulations Act, which dates back to World War II.

Municipalities work together to further their own interests. There is an increasing cooperation between various categories of municipalities. The law also provides for cooperation between municipalities and other government bodies, such as water authorities and taxes are levied by a joint body specifically for this purpose.

Because the huge amount of tasks at local level it is clear that municipalities cannot organize it all by themselves. This is one reason why over recent years municipalities have entered into all kinds of co-operative ventures with neighbouring municipalities. Cooperation has demonstrated that it can lead to major improvements in the quality of facilities and services and keep costs relatively low. Another important reason is that public issues are not geographically bound: crime, environmental issues and the such demand a shared responsibility across the municipal borders.

Practical examples of cooperation between municipalities can be found in the areas of public health and waste processing. But social services can also be organized in a cooperative way. In recent years, there has been a trend towards sharing services such as joint administration, information technology and procurement.

The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) provides a platform for exchange and cooperation between all municipalities (see section 5). In addition, there are various networks that gather municipalities of equal size, the "Big 4", the four largest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht run an informal cooperation network that organises joint approaches to central government and sometimes also towards parliament on specific urban problems. Municipalities with over 100,000 inhabitants, the G32, also cooperate with each other, as do the P10, the 10 largest rural municipalities. An example of a joint organization of municipalities with specific characteristics is the Association of Dutch River municipalities, which all face the challenge posed by regular and extreme river flooding.

Cooperation and coordination does not stop at the country borders. There has been a growth in cross-border cooperation initiatives, such as Euregions, and other international networks, which exchange information about effective approaches in tackling local issues.

4 Local Government: Policies and Services

As has been described in the previous sections, municipalities have broad responsibilities. Municipal civil servants try to deliver a great service. The better their policies and services, the better adapted they are to the needs of citizens and the more citizens will trust their government. However, some of the work done by local authorities makes them unpopular with citizens, for example, collecting taxes and enforcing planning regulations for opening shops and building houses. It is important to have well trained, professional civil servants working to meet the needs of citizens, especially on unpopular issues. It is essential to provide good quality services as efficiently as possible and at the lowest possible cost.

4.1 Land use

4.1.1 Spatial planning

Municipalities play a major role in spatial planning, often in cooperation with other levels of government. As the Netherlands is so densely populated, each square metre of land is important and tends to be used for a specific purpose. Central government decides on land use in general terms (main roads and railway lines, conservation areas, etc.). Provincial governments transpose national guidelines into a regional context. Municipalities subsequently transpose these into local policy by reserving land for these purposes. Municipalities produce zonal plans, with guidelines on small construction projects, such as shops, and major projects such as the construction of new industrial premises or the extension of a main road.

Municipalities create zonal plans for the whole area under their control and update these regularly. Municipalities sometimes have to impose compulsory purchase orders on private landowners in the general interest. Landowners receive compensation in the form of a reasonable financial settlement or new land elsewhere. Decisions on the acquisition of private land requires careful consideration

and may sometimes be referred to elected representatives: the national parliament, the provincial council or the municipal council. Establishing a consensus on large-scale projects, such as a railway line, can take years. However, that is a price worth paying if it means all parties are satisfied with the outcome. If any party feels it has been unfairly treated, it may take its case to the courts. If the courts rule in their favour, the plans must be adjusted.

There are dozens of laws and hundreds of regulations on land use, residential areas, infrastructure, the environment, nature conservation and water: each with their own view, procedures and requirements. This makes the legislation too complex for citizens and companies.

The Dutch government aims to combine and simplify regulations for the development and management of the environment by passing

an Environment & Planning Act, which is due to come into force in 2019. The aim is to make it easier to start projects, for instance, the construction of housing on former business parks, or the building of wind farms. This Act will replace 24 existing laws, including the Water Act, the Crisis & Recovery Act and the

Special Planning Act.

Some municipalities have over 100 land-use plans. A single plan for the entire area will replace all of these. This means fewer regulations and greater consistency. If citizens or companies want to implement a project, they will be able to apply for one (digital) permit at a 'one-stop-shop' for the entire project.

4.1.2 Public sector housing

Another major field of operations for Dutch municipalities is public sector housing. Many local governments experience changing demographics; immigration, ageing and other population changes may give rise to socio-economic pressures. National and municipal governments are responsible for adapting to these changes. They aim to create new and better living and working conditions, by upgrading and renewing disadvantaged neighbourhoods, avoiding segregation and ensuring that vulnerable groups are able to live independently and take part in society wherever possible.

Dutch housing policy is based on the concept of universal access to affordable housing and the prevention of segregation. In 2012, 43% of the 7.2 million properties in the Netherlands were rented and 56% were owner-occupied. Large cities generally contain a larger share of rented properties. In 2012, the percentage of rented properties was highest in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, with 72% and 66% respectively, while the number was as low as 14-25% in some of smaller municipalities.

A large number of these properties are low cost social rented housing. Social housing is usually built by housing corporations. These homes are intended for people on relatively low incomes and are allocated in accordance with carefully monitored regulations.

Municipalities themselves also build social housing, financed by a combination of national, provincial and local funds, carefully reviewed by the legislative powers.

As explained in section 4.1, municipalities are responsible for issuing permits for all construction projects. Construction permits issued by municipalities ensure that projects comply with zonal plans, meet strict safety and fire standards and avoid noise pollution.

4.1.3 Transport

A third important task for municipalities is to ensure that the network of local roads allows an effective flow of traffic and is safe for road users. Much attention is given to the most vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians and the many cyclists. Municipalities have a mobility policy, which is strongly influenced by environmental and public health considerations. Mobility policies cover public transport and sustainability and must meet European standards on air quality, etc.

Local governments also ensure appropriate local parking is available for anything from trucks and cars to wheelchairs and bicycles. Most Dutch municipalities have built Park & Ride facilities at the edge of the city centre to encourage drivers to use public transport into the centres. Large bicycle parking areas are a feature of almost all train stations and encourage commuters to use public transport. The largest bicycle storage facility, with room for 5,200 bicycles, is in Utrecht and an even larger one is under construction in Rotterdam, with room for 12,500 bicycles.

An increasing number of people are using public transport because of traffic congestion in major cities. Municipalities are generally well connected by public transport. There are many public transport options, such as buses, metros, trams and ferries. Contractors must meet the high standards expected by Dutch citizens.

4.1.4 Environment and waste

Quality of life depends a lot on the cleanliness of the air, water and soil. This presents a major challenge in many urban areas. The EU has a strong influence in this field: national legislation must comply with European legislation in order to deal adequately with cross-border environmental issues.

Dutch municipalities have an important role to play in the implementation of these policies. As the living environment is so vulnerable, the systems for building and environmental permits are inter-dependent. The one cannot exist without the other. Municipalities and provinces ensure compliance with the terms of environmental and building permits. Parties that violate agreements can receive heavy fines and in extreme cases a company can be shut down.

Municipalities check applications for environmental permits to ensure they do not harm nature. If they do, municipalities must ask the provinces for guidance on what conditions need to be met before a project can proceed. For example, demolishing a building and replacing it with a new one requires attention to codes, noise, environment and nature; an endangered species might be present in the building.

But the 'keep our country clean' policy goes further. Municipalities are responsible for waste collection and processing. Municipalities can outsource the tasks of waste collection and processing, but they remain responsible for it.

Since 2014, a national programme called "from waste to raw material" has pursued the following main goals:
1 to go from 250 kilo residual waste per inhabitant per year to 100 kilo in 2020
2 to separate 75% of waste in 2020

The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) has signed up to these objectives on behalf of the municipalities. These are ambitious targets. Almost all municipal waste disposal systems separate household and business waste collection: glass, paper, organic waste, demolition waste, and metal scrap are all collected separately. This 'separation at source' reduces handling costs and promotes recycling.

4.1.6 Water management
A large part of our country is kept dry (or wet) by artificial means. This involves extensive infrastructure. Not just roads and railways, but also – and especially – investments in water management. Governments have a clear responsibility for managing water resources and protecting the population from flooding. The Netherlands has an excellent track record on water management. In the form of the regional water authorities, the country has a special system of water governance that is democratic and that involves the central, provincial and local authorities.

RWAs are responsible for managing water defences, water quantity and quality and navigable waterways. The national government transposes European directives into national law and policies. Provinces are responsible for transposing national water

policy to regional water policy. Provinces, RWAs and municipalities cooperate in regional water management.

Municipalities and RWAs are jointly responsible for establishing municipal water policy. Water policies must meet central and provincial government requirements. They cover water safety, water quantity and water quality. Municipal water management involves the prevention of (ground) water damage, the disposal of sewage and storm water from the sewer system, licensing, formulating water plans and developing an integrated water planning policy.

Municipalities and RWAs face important decisions on management, maintenance and replacement of infrastructure, also because of climate change and land subsidence.

4.2 Social services
Perhaps the largest and most time-consuming task for municipalities is providing social services. The Dutch government has constructed a welfare safety net to provide relief and care, although strict conditions must be met to qualify for these services and there is an increasing expectation of self-care before people can apply. Municipalities are responsible for many social services, including youth care, care for people with disabilities, access to work and integration for the unemployed, education, housing, culture and sport. Particularly since 2015, as a result of massive decentralization and changes to the Dutch care system, municipalities are now required to provide extra services to people with disabilities, youth care services and guidance on employment and income. The main reason for decentralization was to bring government closer to citizens. It was also felt that local government was in a better position to deliver services that respond to individual needs. In addition, instead of having to deal with many agencies, municipalities are able to address one family with one policy and one coordinator, to ensure an integrated approach for multi problem-families. Decentralization was combined with large budget cuts, because it was assumed that municipalities would be able to provide the services more cost-effectively; this is a challenge for municipalities.

Services for people with a disability
The Social Support Act (WMO) places a duty

on municipalities to provide services to the elderly, disabled people and people with psychological problems, to help them participate in society and live as independently as possible. Support may include assistance with housework, adaptations to property (stair lift, elevated toilet seat, etc.), social cultural work, shelter for the homeless and longer-term care for people.

Municipalities organise access to support in their own way and formulate their own policy. Many municipalities provide services jointly. Some municipalities have a one-stop shop for people with disabilities. Many municipalities have district social service teams to provide easy access to services. Municipalities are allowed to ask for a financial contribution in exchange for the services they provide.

Youth care

The decentralization of the youth care system means that most tasks have been transferred to local governments. They are responsible for the whole continuum of universal, preventive and specialized care for children, young people and families, including those with multiple problems. The aim of the new Child and Youth Act is to decrease the number of children in specialized care and increase preventive and early intervention support, and to promote the use of social networks within the direct environment of the children.

Each municipality is free to formulate its own policy for youth care. However, the 380 municipalities work together in 42 regions. This area of work involves providing universal and preventive youth services. Universal services include youth work, child care and schools. Preventive services include child health care, general social work and parenting support. The preventive services are funded by a variety of agencies, while the municipalities are responsible for providing adequate facilities and coordinating the cooperation between youth care agencies.

Employment

Municipalities work with social partners and the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV) to provide social assistance to people able to work and partly disabled persons without an employment history, within their labour market region. There are 35 labour market regions, which all have a regional work company. The UWV registers jobseekers, who are helped to

find a job by job coaches who have regular contact with employers. People can apply for a monthly allowance.

The Participation Act, 2014, stipulates that municipalities should support all people that are able to work but who need some kind of support in order to do so. The UWV and municipalities have a duty to help people

with a disability to find a regular job. In the next ten years, more than 100,000 jobs need to be created for these target groups. The municipalities face the challenge of finding jobs for the people in these target groups.

Education

The Netherlands has a highly decentralised education system. Government sets broad parameters within which schools must operate and provides a lump sum to cover costs. School boards have a high degree of autonomy and there is no national curriculum. The decentralized school system is balanced by a solid accountability system. There are national examinations and a strong inspectorate, which publishes its findings on school and teacher performance. Municipalities are responsible for ensuring schools are run properly and comply with national standards. Municipalities must build schools when necessary and provide accommodation for educational centers.

Municipalities must ensure adequate buildings for primary, special and secondary education. This task was decentralized to local authorities in 1997. Schools cost a lot of money; municipalities spend about 1.3 billion Euros annually.

Municipalities are required by law to adopt regulations specifying their responsibility for providing school buildings and cooperating with schools.

Since 1 August 2014, schools have a duty of care. This means that schools must provide appropriate facilities and support to meet the needs of children. Children attend ordinary schools if possible and special schools if this is impossible. For example, a child with severe autism has special educational needs. Schools must provide at least basic support, such as support for children with dyslexia and provide training in social skills. They must cooperate with other schools in the region. Primary and secondary schools have therefore formed alliances. Since Dutch municipalities are by law responsible for almost all youth care services, schools and the municipalities in which they are located must reach agreement about how to ensure that children receive appropriate care, in accordance with the law.

Culture

Municipalities are an important contributor to the financing (for example through subsidies) of theatres, art exhibitions, festivals, music venues, cinemas, cultural education and museums both for their own citizens and to attract tourism. Local cultural life is strongly dependent on national, provincial and local government support. One example is local libraries. There are about 1,010 libraries (excluding mobile libraries for remote villages and smaller municipalities), lending about 78 million books each year. The number of libraries is decreasing due to competition from e-books and other forms of entertainment. Libraries must innovate to attract enough customers and need the support of municipalities. Libraries provide a lot of courses, such as information technology courses and Dutch language courses for foreigners.

Sport

Municipalities are responsible for sport policies, which are closely related to policies on education, welfare, recreation, youth and health. Municipalities are also responsible for sport facilities like sports parks, swimming pools and sports halls; they usually own these facilities or partly fund them. Without municipal financial support, many sports clubs would not exist. Sports clubs can hire facilities at a fair price and, in return, are generally responsible for maintenance.

4.3 Regional economy

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the strength of the Dutch economy lies within a contiguous network of conurbations of one or more medium-sized cities and their surroundings. National economic policies focus on innovative sectors with strong export performances. However, most innovation does not come from larger companies, but from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The clustering of economic activity offers economies of scale and promotes innovation. Dutch cities are well connected with each other, because of the good infrastructure and fibre optics. Cooperation among municipalities in the region, SMEs and large companies, knowledge institutions, educational institutions, and of course civil society, is essential for local economic development.

Municipalities are implementing a far-reaching programme to deliver better services to the business world. There are many inter-municipal-corporations that work together to improve the business climate, (regional) infrastructure, mobility, labour market policy and education policy. Examples of activities of municipalities to support regional economic development are: development of business parks, creating the conditions for a successful hospitality industry (for example, by upgrading the city centre to attract customers), promoting the development of recreation facilities to attract tourism and organizing activities in the municipality with local businesses.

In line with the European Smart Specialisation Strategy, municipalities facilitate the analysis of the local and regional economy in order to define their local and regional strengths and opportunities. They seek contact with regions that can complement their own comparative advantages. They cooperate closely with entrepreneurs, educational establishments and knowledge institutions and other stakeholders. The economic agenda is a priority for regional activities.

Another challenge facing municipalities is what to do about vacant offices and shops. People are increasingly buying products and services online. Municipalities work with local entrepreneurs to try and identify new uses for empty buildings.

4.4 Local security policy

Municipalities must have a local security policy. This needs to be a cross-cutting theme throughout all sectoral policies. Security is an important aspect of social services, but is also closely related to physical space considerations and planning. An effective security approach generally combines punitive and preventive instruments. Health care can be an effective instrument in ensuring that social problems do not get out of hand, for instance, for mentally unstable citizens.

As explained in section 3.2, mayors are almost always responsible for the security and public order portfolio and have specific public policy responsibilities. Municipalities need to cooperate with many external organisations on the local security policy, such as educational organisations, housing corporations and youth workers. Municipalities are dependent on other state services, such as the police force and the public prosecution service. Mayors are in direct contact with the public prosecutor and the police about security matters.

Each municipality belongs to a security region. Security regions support municipalities on security issues. Mayors are represented on the executive boards of the security regions. If a disaster involves several municipalities, the mayor of the largest municipality usually leads the crisis team.

New technology has a big impact on local security. The use of drones is rapidly growing. Social media makes new forms of crime possible, but also provides opportunities to involve citizens in security matters. Municipalities increasingly rely on citizens, businesses and civil society to take responsibility for local security.

5 The Association of Netherlands Municipalities

The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) was founded in The Hague more than a century ago, in 1912. All Dutch municipalities (380) and the special municipalities of the Caribbean Netherlands, Curaçao and Aruba, are members of the association on a voluntary basis. The VNG is an important stakeholder and closely monitors the impact of national politics on its members. It is no coincidence that VNG's office is located within a short distance of the ministries and the national parliament.

VNG's vision and core tasks
The VNG and all municipalities promote strong, high quality local government. VNG is at the forefront of good local governance and achieves visible results for city councils, mayors, municipal executive boards and civil servants.

VNG's work consists of three core tasks:
- Advocacy: An important task of the VNG is advocacy and consultation with a variety of institutions. In the first place, VNG speaks on behalf of the local governments to the national government and the national parliament. Secondly, it maintains contact with civil society organisations, institutions and companies. Thirdly, VNG deals with employers and trade unions about terms of employment. Finally, VNG has European and international partners. As European and international policy affects the work of municipalities, the VNG is involved in umbrella organisations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and advisory organizations of the EU, the Committee of the Regions and of the Council of Europe, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.
- Services: VNG offers a range of services to members and provides advice and support to them on, for example, the law, the content of ministry reports or implementation of policies and legislation. The VNG website provides lots of information on developments relevant for municipalities.
- Forum: VNG also facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices. The online VNG forum, social media pages, the VNG website, the VNG best practice database and regional and national VNG conferences contribute to the exchange of knowledge and best practices.

Given that VNG represents 380 different municipalities, it is important to have a structure of governance that allows all municipalities to participate. The VNG Board consists of the Chair, a Vice-Chair, the chairs of the VNG policy committees and eleven other members. The board is responsible for the governance of the association. The VNG policy committees prepare the positions of the VNG on specific subjects. Each committee covers a particular policy area, for example, Employment & Income, European & International Affairs, and Education, Culture & Sports. Each committee is composed of mayors, aldermen, councillors, city managers and council clerks from different Dutch municipalities and that have been selected by an advisory board. Both big and small municipalities from all over the country are represented on these committees.

'Municipality 2020'
In November 2014, the members of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities adopted the Municipality 2020 strategy and collective agenda. Municipality 2020 gives an overview of the most important themes that VNG and the Dutch municipalities work on:
- A transforming society and new relations
  Society has fundamentally changed: there is more need for horizontal cooperation, networks and information sharing. This has an impact on the relations between government and society and therefore affects local democracy and local administration. Municipalities need to promote societal initiatives and deal with new forms of participation.
- Innovation, doing things differently and new tasks and roles
  Many policies are being shaped bottom-

up, as shown by both the number and impact of local initiatives. Policies related to energy and economic development may therefore vary over the different regions. Citizens, entrepreneurs and other local organisations and stakeholders cooperate to define their content. The municipalities usually coordinate those forms of cooperation. This requires new forms of accountable municipal governance.

- Optimal cooperation
Municipalities, citizens, entrepreneurs, educational institutions and employers must make clear agreements on the division of public and private sector tasks. Local democratic values must be the basis for those agreements. New local cooperative governance is required.
- The right enabling conditions
In order to deal with the new local governmental tasks and structures, municipalities need enough financial resources and must enjoy sufficient freedom to shape their policies. This requires a renewal of the municipal finance system and the removal of national and international legal constraints on the municipal autonomy.

VNG International

VNG International, the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, was founded to support the professional capacity building of local governments and their associations, as well as local government training institutes and decentralisation taskforces, both in developing countries and in countries in transition.

Working with a large group of Dutch local governments and local government experts with broad international experience, VNG International supports decentralisation

processes and facilitates decentralised cooperation.

Since the early 1990s, VNG International has managed programmes supporting international municipal cooperation funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other programmes are funded by the European Commission, the World Bank, USAID and other donors.

VNG International has project offices in various countries and three subsidiary companies: MEPCO in Czech Republic, CMRA in South Africa and CILG in Tunisia.

Furthermore, VNG International supports Dutch local governments in developing their international policies and provides them with access to information on international trends and developments. VNG International also implements the Global Goals Municipalities Campaign, in which about half of Dutch

municipalities participate and in which the VNG and municipalities also work together on implementing the United Nations Global Goals for Sustainable Development.