

NETHERLANDS 2005 - BURGERFORUM KIESSTELSEL

PHASE 1: INITIATION PROCESS

As Minister for Democratic Innovation (bestuurlijke vernieuwing) in the 2003-2006 Kabinet-Balkenende II, Alexander Pechtold (D66) promoted the idea of a national Citizens Assembly to deliberate about a reformation of the national election system. At that time, D66 had three major projects to democratise the Dutch political system: establishment of referenda, direct election of the Premier and majors, and the reformation of the election system, preferably modelled against the UK “first-past-the-post” model [5].

The set-up of the Citizens Assembly was inspired by the Citizens Assembly on electoral reform held in British Columbia, Canada, in 2004. [7] The design of the CA process was developed by Pechtold and his ministry.

PHASE 2: RUNNING THE CA

Coordination of the process

Jacobine Geel was selected as the coordinator of the CA.

Selection of members [6]

- A random sample of 50.400 individuals was taken from the Gemeentelijke Basis Administratie (GBA)
- Each of these individuals received a letter with an invitation to participate in one of in total 9 information events that took place in different places in the Netherlands.
- 3121 people signed up for one of these events, and 2042 actually participated.
- During the events, 1732 people indicated that they want to take part in the process (3.4% of the total 50400).
- A random sample of 140 people was taken, ensuring proportional representation of the provinces and equal representation of men and women (stratification according to place of residence and gender). **No** stratification took place for the characteristics age, class, and level of education.

Consultation phase

In total, the CA convened 10 times to get informed, deliberate, and make decisions. The CA received information during the first weekend. Members of the CA also participated in 12 regional consultation summits and a number of independently organised events.

Decision making and output of the CA

The CA produced a 12 pages document that includes a recommendation for a reform of the current electoral system; justifications for the decisions that they made; as well as 5 further recommendations for how to recreate trust by citizens in the political system.[2] The CA recommended an electoral reform in which citizens can vote for a political party or for an individual person.

The CA also made the following 5 recommendations:

1. Members of Parliament who leave their political party should be obliged to also hand over their mandate as political representatives, since Citizens elect politicians for the programmes of the parties they are part of.
2. *“lijstduwers als stemmentrekkers moeten alleen op de lijst gaan staan als zij daadwerkelijk van plan zijn eventueel Tweede Kamerlid te worden.”*
3. Learning about the political system of the Netherlands should be an integral part of basic education for all Dutch citizens.
4. *“Stemmen makkelijker maken door de kiezer in de gelegenheid te stellen een stem uit te brengen in een stemlokaal naar voorkeur.”*
5. Creation of more Citizens Assemblies on other issues to involve citizens more frequently in political decision making.

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

The Cabinet decided to not implement the recommendations of the Citizens Assembly or to put them to a vote in Parliament. At that time, Atzo Nicolaï had taken over the position of Minister for “bestuurlijke vernieuwing” from Alexander Pechtold.

FURTHER RESOURCES

[1] Wikipedia: https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgerforum_Kiesstelsel

[2] Output from the Burgerforum: <https://www.parlement.com/9291000/d/advbrgk.pdf>

[3] process of the Burgerforum https://www.parlement.com/id/vhnnmt7ltkw7/burgerforum_kiesstelsel

[4] Commentary by political scientist David Farrell: <https://sites.google.com/site/pieterverbeek/erbestaatgeenperfectkiesstelsel>

[5] Volkskrant opinion article: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/burgerforum-wijst-vernieuwing-af~b7ce389a/?referer=https%3A%2F%2Fduckduckgo.com%2F>

[6] Master Thesis on the Burgerforum <https://essay.utwente.nl/58030/>

[7] www.citizensassembly.bc.ca