

## The Netherlands are Building the Municipality Council of the Future A Symposium Perspective

By Jeroen van Urk, Initiator Council of the Future Board member of Vereniging van Griffiers Clerk of Oude IJsselstreek, The Netherlands

In a letter addressed to the King, The Dutch Council of the Future has called for a substantial programme of innovation within and strengthening of local democracy. The letter was presented on March 13th by Michael Sijbom to Under Secretary Van Delden who, on behalf of the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations Plasterk, responded positively. Sijbom presented the letter in his role of 'Mayor of the Future'; his regular function is Mayor of the town of Losser.

The Council of the Future was a 'spontaneous state committee' that developed a different perspective on Municipality Councils during the year prior to the Dutch local elections. In a society more and more supported by civil networks, the challenge for councilors is to determine the role they play within it.

In the week prior to the elections, the Council of the Future presented the following statement after a year of research: Municipality Councils should change the way they work in order to develop towards a *network democracy* in which municipalities do not regulate communities, but form part of it. In the Netherlands, the time of representation of segregated (based on religion and social class) communities is over: local politicians must move forward by connecting common interest with special interest within communal networks.

Network democracy requires a different interpretation of the work Councils do. Municipality Councils should become successful as 'process organizers', especially with regards to the new health- and social care related tasks that will become decentralized in the Netherlands in 2015. Within the civil domain, which is close to citizens and businesses, a *society of participation* will rise. In local and regional networks of businesses, associations and institutions, political participation is key to complete social duties better and more efficiently.

In an effort towards achieving this, The Council of the Future sought to discover in six seminars in which way Municipality Councils can have the following six forms of agency within a network democracy: 'Change Agency', 'Connection Agency', 'Communication Agency', 'Controlling Agency', 'Steering Agency', and 'Conclusion Agency'. They discovered that space to experiment is needed by Councils in order to connect representative democracy with participative democracy. The Minister of Interior and Kingdom Relations has committed to providing this space.