

Evaluation Burgerberaad Afvalvrij 2030 organised by the Gemeente Groningen

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Focus on active participants, the general population and the
civil servants involved in waste management

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Management samenvatting

Het Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030, georganiseerd door de gemeente Groningen tussen maart en juli 2025, is door de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen onafhankelijk geëvalueerd. Deze evaluatie richtte zich op de impact van het burgerberaad op (1) de **deelnemers** (2) op **inwoners van de gemeente Groningen** in het algemeen (via inwonerspanel Groningen Gehoord) en (3) op de houding van **ambtenaren** ten opzichte van burgerparticipatie.

Deel 1 – Focus op de deelnemers aan het burgerberaad

Vraag: Hoe hebben deelnemers het burgerberaad ervaren en hoe heeft deelname hun perceptie van publieke participatie, de doelstelling afvalvrij 2030 en hun relatie met de gemeente Groningen beïnvloed?

Methode: Actieve deelnemers en een controlegroep hebben voor en na het burgerberaad vragenlijsten ingevuld om veranderingen in de loop van de tijd te beoordelen.

- **Ervaringen van deelnemers aan het burgerberaad**

Over het algemeen hebben deelnemers het burgerberaad als zeer positief ervaren. Het proces kreeg een hoge gemiddelde eindbeoordeling (8,3 op een schaal van 10) en deelnemers gaven aan zeer tevreden te zijn over zowel het proces als de daaruit voortgekomen adviezen. Een meerderheid van de deelnemers geeft aan te verwachten dat de gemeente de adviezen volledig overneemt.

Deelnemers waren positief over het groepsdiscussieproces. Zij hebben de gespreksbegeleiders als competent in het begeleiden van de discussies ervaren. De deelnemers geven aan dat de opzet voldoende ruimte bood voor alle deelnemers om bij te dragen en voor mensen met verschillende achtergronden om gehoord te worden. Deze ervaringen zijn consistent over gender, leeftijd en opleidingsniveau heen, wat erop wijst dat het proces inclusief en toegankelijk was.

Deelname aan het burgerberaad versterkte het gevoel dat ‘mensen zoals ik’ gehoord worden en invloed kunnen hebben op de uitkomsten van het burgerberaad. Daarnaast gaven deelnemers aan een beter inzicht te hebben gekregen in de wijze waarop gemeentelijke besluitvorming tot stand komt.

- **Afvalvrij Groningen in 2030**

De steun voor de doelstellingen Groningen Afvalvrij 2030 was onder de deelnemers al hoog en nam gedurende het burgerberaad verder toe. Deelname aan het burgerberaad veranderde ook de kijk op de verantwoordelijkheid voor het behalen van de doelstellingen. Zowel de inwoners als de gemeente werden door de deelnemers significant meer verantwoordelijk gehouden. Tegelijkertijd bleef er sprake van een zekere mate van terughoudendheid over de vraag of de gemeente en inwoners deze afvalvrije doelen uiteindelijk ook zullen bereiken.

Deelname hing ook samen met een toename in kennis over afvalreductie, een sterker persoonlijk verantwoordelijkheidsgevoel om afval te verminderen, ze gaven aan minder afval te produceren én dit doel actief uit te dragen naar anderen na afloop van het burgerberaad.

Daarnaast droeg deelname aan het burgerberaad bij aan een afname van de ervaren polarisatie onder inwoners van Groningen rondom.

Daarnaast ervoeren deelnemers aanvankelijk enige verdeeldheid onder inwoners van Groningen als het gaat om afvalbeleid (*“Als het over afval gaat, zijn de meningen van Groningers sterk verdeeld”*). Deelname aan het burgerberaad ging gepaard met een afname van de ervaren polarisatie, waarbij de perceptie verschoof van een matig naar een meer neutraal niveau.

- **Relatie met de gemeente Groningen en inwoners**

Deelname aan het burgerberaad had consistent middelgrote tot grote positieve effecten op de percepties van deelnemers ten aanzien van de gemeente. Deelnemers aan het burgerberaad ervoeren meer persoonlijke invloed, hadden een sterker gevoel door de gemeente gehoord te worden, een verhoogd vertrouwen in en een sterkere verbondenheid met de gemeente.

Daarnaast ervoeren zij iets minder polarisatie tussen inwoners en de gemeente rondom afvalbeleid. Dit komt mogelijk door het samenwerkingsgerichte karakter van het burgerberaad, waarin sprake was van uitwisseling van de voorstellen tussen de deelnemers en de voor de uitvoering verantwoordelijke ambtenaren.

Deel 2 – Focus op de bredere bevolking van Groningen (Groningen Gehoord)

Vragen:

- a. Hoe bekend waren inwoners van de gemeente Groningen met het Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030?
- b. Heeft het informeren (versus niet informeren) van inwoners over het burgerberaad invloed gehad op hun houding en gedrag rondom afval en hun perceptie van de gemeente Groningen (vertrouwen, verbondenheid)?

Methode: Respondenten maakten deel uit van het online burgerpanel Groningen Gehoord. Zij (aantal van 1.906) vulden een vragenlijst in vóór het burgerberaad (jan 2025) en opnieuw na de eerste communicatiecampagne (nov 2025). In de nameting ontving slechts de helft van de respondenten informatie over de uitkomsten van het burgerberaad, om het effect te beoordelen van geïnformeerd zijn versus niet geïnformeerd zijn.

• Bekendheid onder de Groningse bevolking

De algemene bekendheid van het *Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030* onder de respondenten was laag. Ongeveer twee derde gaf aan niets te hebben gezien, gehoord of gelezen over het burgerberaad. Ondanks een uitgebreide communicatiecampagne van de gemeente Groningen waarbij in elf verschillende wijken ambtenaren met inwoners in gesprek gingen over het burgerberaad, op digitale borden werd gedeeld, in buurthuizen werd gecommuniceerd, gemeentelijke communicatiekanalen en nog diverse andere middelen werden ingezet, gaven de inwoners die wel bekend waren met het burgerberaad aan dat zij deze informatie vooral via de gemeentelijke communicatiekanalen hadden ontvangen.

• Afvalvrij Groningen in 2030 en Relatie met de gemeente Groningen

De steun voor de afvalvrije doelstellingen was en blijft hoog onder de inwoners van de gemeente Groningen. Respondenten ervoeren zichzelf doorgaans als meer betrokken bij en actiever in afvalreductie dan de meeste Groningers. Dit is consistent met enige waargenomen polarisatie tussen inwoners als het gaat om afvalbeleid. Deze constatering biedt kansen om de sociale normen rondom afval te versterken, door zichtbaar te maken dat de meeste inwoners waarde hechten aan afvalreductie en hier al actief naar handelen.

Bovenstaande bevinding hebben wij niet waargenomen onder de bredere groep inwoners die over het burgerberaad was geïnformeerd.

Deel 3 - Ambtenaren

Vraag: Wat zijn de percepties en attitudes van ambtenaren ten aanzien van publieke participatie?

Methode: Drie groepen ambtenaren binnen Stadsbeheer namen deel aan het onderzoek: beleidsmedewerkers, managers die betrokken zijn bij afvalbeleid, medewerkers werkzaam in de uitvoering. Vrijwillige respondenten vulden een vragenlijst in vóór het burgerberaad (maart 2026) en opnieuw na de eerste communicatiecampagne (nov 2025). Daarnaast namen 9 ambtenaren in maart deel aan een interview om hun opvattingen over publieke participatie te delen.

→ Het onderzoek liet aanzienlijke verschillen zien in de bekendheid met het burgerberaad en de bijbehorende uitkomsten tussen verschillende groepen medewerkers. Beleidsmedewerkers waren over het algemeen goed geïnformeerd, terwijl medewerkers uitvoering aangaf weinig tot niets te hebben gehoord over het proces of de uitkomsten.

Alle groepen rapporteerden positieve opvattingen over de integriteit en bijdragen van burgers, en publieke participatie werd gezien als waardevol voor het inbrengen van diverse perspectieven. Een groter vertrouwen in burgers onder de respondenten ging ook gepaard met een grotere bereidheid om participatieve resultaten in hun werk te integreren.

Beleidsmedewerkers rapporteerden doorgaans een hogere ervaren interne steun voor publieke participatie, meer openheid om publieke input te benutten en minder ervaren nadelen (bijv. gerelateerd aan complexiteit of werkdruk). Leidinggevenden en medewerkers uitvoering lieten meer gematigde scores zien. Deze verschillen hangen mogelijk samen met een lagere bekendheid met het burgerberaad, en niet zozeer met een gebrek aan steun voor publieke participatie zelf.

Bovendien gaven respondenten in alle groepen aan verschillen te ervaren in de opvattingen van collega's over publieke participatie, dat erop wijst dat de interne steun voor het burgerberaad binnen de organisatie ongelijk kan zijn.

→ In de interviews had aanvankelijke terughoudendheid vooral betrekking op de uitvoerbaarheid, de benodigde tijdsinvestering en twijfels over de mate waarin het burgerberaad werkelijk nieuwe inzichten zou opleveren. Tegelijkertijd benadrukten de meeste geïnterviewden de meerwaarde van burgerperspectieven, met name bij het signaleren van blinde vlekken, het verbeteren van communicatie en het beter verankeren van beleid in de leefwereld van inwoners.

Burgerparticipatie werd overwegend gezien als aanvullend op professionele expertise en de representatieve democratie, mits rollen, verwachtingen en uitvoeringskaders vanaf het begin duidelijk worden afgebakend. Belangrijke aandachtspunten hadden betrekking op uitvoerbaarheid en organisatorische capaciteit.

Aanbevelingen

Op basis van de resultaten van de evaluatie formuleren we volgende conclusies en aanbevelingen ter ondersteuning van toekomstige participatieprocessen.

1. De manier waarop het Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030 is georganiseerd blijkt effectief in het versterken van de verbinding tussen deelnemers en de gemeente, en onderstreept de waarde van het burgerberaad als instrument voor het opbouwen van vertrouwensrelaties.

- **Blijf inzetten op participatieprocessen die samenwerking tussen inwoners en de gemeente bevorderen**, door gedurende het hele proces tweerichtingsuitwisseling te faciliteren tussen burgers en degenen die verantwoordelijk zijn voor de uitvoering.

2. Een meerderheid van de deelnemers gaf aan te verwachten dat de gemeente de aanbevelingen volledig over zal nemen. Duidelijke terugkoppeling en zichtbare opvolging zijn daarom belangrijk om het vertrouwen van deelnemers te behouden en om breder maatschappelijk draagvlak voor participatieve processen te versterken.

- **Communiceer duidelijk en transparant met zowel deelnemers als de bredere bevolking over de uitwerking, opvolging en implementatie van aanbevelingen**, inclusief welke aanbevelingen worden overgenomen, welke niet, en de redenen achter deze keuzes. Dit draagt bij aan het behouden van publieke betrokkenheid tijdens de verdere ontwikkeling en uitvoering van beleid.

3. De bekendheid van het *Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030* was laag onder het bevroagde burgerpanel. Onder degenen die van het burgerberaad hadden gehoord of erover hadden gelezen, kwam de informatie vrijwel uitsluitend via gemeentelijke communicatiekanalen. Dit wijst op kansen om inwoners te bereiken die minder actief geïnteresseerd zijn in gemeentelijke aangelegenheden.

- **Versterk de communicatiestrategieën rondom participatieve initiatieven verder** door vooraf gericht te analyseren welke communicatiemiddelen, kanalen en vormen het meest effectief zijn voor verschillende doelgroepen, met als doel het bereik en de bekendheid te vergroten buiten de groep die al betrokken is.

4. Deelname aan het burgerberaad had positieve effecten op de percepties van deelnemers ten aanzien van de doelstellingen van Groningen Afvalvrij 2030 en de gemeente. Deze effecten vertalen zich echter niet naar de bredere bevolking als mensen over het burgerberaad worden geïnformeerd.

- **Vergroot de mogelijkheden voor bredere publieke betrokkenheid door een grotere groep inwoners te betrekken.** Dit kan bijvoorbeeld door middel van communicatiecampagnes en / of hybride participatievormen, zoals online consultaties (vgl. Provincie Drenthe).

5. **Ambtenaren:** De bekendheid met het burgerberaad en de bijbehorende uitkomsten was vooral laag onder medewerkers uitvoering. Daarnaast verschilde de waargenomen interne steun voor publieke participatie tussen de groepen medewerkers en gaven de meeste respondenten aan dat collega's uiteenlopende opvattingen hebben over de waarde van publieke participatie.

- **Betrek medewerkers uitvoering personeel actief bij het burgerberaad,** naast beleidsmedewerkers en leidinggevenden. Deel intern feedback over de uitkomsten van het burgerberaad, inclusief hoe aanbevelingen worden meegenomen in besluitvorming en uitvoering.

6. **Andere: Voer (ook in de toekomst) een systematische evaluatie van het burgerberaad uit.** Deze aanpak brengt de totale ervaring en impact voor verschillende betrokkenen nauwkeuriger in beeld, waaronder deelnemers die doorgaans minder zichtbaar of mondig zijn.

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Executive summary

The university of Groningen conducted an independent evaluation of the citizen assembly on waste (*Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030*) organised by the municipality of Groningen between March and July 2025. The research focuses on evaluating the impact of the assembly on (1) **active participants**, (2) the **broader population informed about the burgerberaad** via the residents' panel Groningen Gehoord and (3) assessing civil servants' attitudes toward public participation.

Part 1 - Focus on the active participants

Questions: How did participants experience the burgerberaad, and how did participation affect their perceptions of public participation, the 2030 zero-waste goals, and their relationship with the Municipality of Groningen?

Method: Active participants (and a control group) completed pre- and post-assembly questionnaires to assess changes over time.

- **Participants' experiences in the burgerberaad**

Overall, participants evaluated their experience in the burgerberaad very positively. The process received a high average overall score (8.3 out of 10), and participants expressed strong satisfaction with both the process and the resulting recommendations. A majority of participants expect the municipality to fully adopt the recommendations.

Participants reported positive experiences with the group discussion process. They perceived the facilitators as competent in guiding the discussions, and reported that the format provided sufficient opportunities for all participants to contribute and for people from different backgrounds to be heard. These experiences were consistent across gender, age, and educational background, indicating that the process was inclusive and accessible.

Participation in the burgerberaad significantly increased participants' feeling that "people like them" are heard and able to influence the deliberations, as well as their understanding of how municipal decisions are made.

- **The 2030 waste-free goals**

Support for the 2030 waste-free goals was already high among participants and increased over the course of the assembly. Participation also led to a significant increase in the extent to which both residents and the municipality were seen as responsible for achieving these goals. However, a degree of cautious skepticism remained regarding whether the municipality and residents will eventually reach the zero-waste goals.

Participation was associated with significantly higher levels of knowledge about waste reduction, a stronger personal sense of responsibility to reduce waste, and increased self-reported waste-reducing behaviour and advocacy after the assembly.

Additionally, participants initially perceived some division among residents in Groningen regarding waste management (*"When it comes to waste, Groningen residents' opinions are strongly divided"*). Participation in the assembly was associated with a decrease in perceived polarisation, with perceptions shifting from moderate to neutral level.

- **Relationships with the Gemeente**

Participation in the citizens' assembly was associated with consistent positive shifts in residents' perceptions of the municipality with medium to large effects. Residents who participated in the assembly generally reported significantly higher levels of perceived personal influence, and feeling heard by, trust in, and connection to the municipality. They also perceived slightly less polarisation between the citizens and the municipality regarding waste policy. This could relate to the collaborative process used, with back-and-forth exchanges between citizens' suggestions and those responsible for implementation.

Part 2 - Focus on the broader population

Questions:

- a. What was the level of awareness of the burgerberaad among the broader population?
- b. How did informing (vs not informing) the broader population about the citizen assembly affect their perceptions of the 2030 zero-waste goals and their relationship with the Municipality?

Method: Respondents (n = 1,906) were part of an online citizen panel called Groningen Gehoord. They completed a questionnaire before the citizen assembly (Jan 2025) and again after a first communication campaign (Nov 2025). In the follow-up survey, only half of respondents received information about the assembly's outcomes, to assess the impact of being informed versus not being informed.

- **Awareness among the Groningen population**

Overall awareness of the Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030 was low among respondents in our sample. Approximately two-thirds reported that they had not seen, heard, or read anything about it. Despite an extensive communication campaign by the municipality of Groningen, in which civil servants engaged with residents in eleven different neighborhoods about the citizens' assembly, information was shared on digital signs, communicated in community centers, and municipal communication channels and various other means were used, residents who were familiar with the citizens' assembly indicated that they had received this information primarily through municipal communication channels.

- **The 2030 waste-free goals and Relationships with the Gemeente**

Support for the waste-free goals was and remains high among the broader population. Respondents tended to perceive themselves as more concerned about and engaged in waste reduction than the average resident, consistent with some perceived polarisation within the population when it comes to waste policy. This points to opportunities to strengthen perceived social norms by making it visible that more residents care about waste reduction and already engage in relevant behaviours.

Overall, the positive effects observed among active participants above were not found among members of the broader population who were only briefly informed about the citizens' assembly.

Part 3 - Civil servants

Question: What are civil servants' perceptions and attitudes towards public participation?

Method: Three groups of civil servants in the Stadsbeheer were included in this study: policy makers, managers involved in waste policy and implementation staff. Voluntary respondents completed a questionnaire before the citizen assembly (March 2025) and again after a first communication campaign (Nov 2025). 9 people also agreed to participate in an interview in March 2025 (before the assembly) to share their views on public participation.

The survey highlighted substantial differences in awareness of the citizen assembly and its outcomes across staff groups. Policy makers were generally well informed, while implementation staff reported having heard very little about the process or its outcomes.

All groups reported positive views of citizens' integrity and contributions, and public participation was seen as valuable for bringing in diverse perspectives. Higher trust in citizens among respondents was also associated with greater willingness to integrate participatory outcomes into their work.

Policy makers generally reported higher perceived internal support for public participation, greater openness to incorporating public input and fewer perceived disadvantages (e.g., related to complexity or workload). Management and implementation staff expressed more moderate views. These differences may be linked to lower awareness of the burgerberaad, rather than to a lack of support for public participation itself.

In addition, respondents across all groups reported perceived differences in colleagues' attitudes towards public participation, suggesting that internal support for the burgerberaad can be uneven across the organisation.

In the interviews, initial scepticism towards public participation was commonly reported - often related to feasibility, time investment, or concerns about limited novelty. However, most interviewees emphasised the added value of citizen perspectives in identifying blind spots, improving communication, and grounding policy in lived experience. Participation was largely viewed as complementary to professional expertise and representative democracy, provided that roles, expectations, and implementation constraints were clearly managed from the start. Key concerns focused on executability and organisational capacity.

Conclusions and recommendations

Drawing on the evaluation results, the following conclusions and recommendations are provided to inform future participatory processes.

1. The burgerberaad delivered value beyond improving acceptability for the 2030 waste-free goals. Its design and organisation effectively fostered stronger connections between participants and the municipality, demonstrating its importance as a vehicle for relationship-building.

- **Continue to focus on participatory processes that foster collaboration between residents and municipal authorities** by facilitating two-way exchanges between citizens and those responsible for implementation throughout the process.

2. A majority of participants expected the municipality to fully adopt the recommendations. Clear follow-up and visible implementation are therefore important to maintain trust among participants and to foster broader public support for participatory processes.

- **Communicate clearly and transparently with both participants and the wider population about the development, follow-up, and implementation of recommendations**, including which recommendations are adopted, which are not, and the reasons underlying these decisions. This can help support continued public engagement as policies are developed and implemented.

3. Awareness of the Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030 was low among the surveyed citizen panel. Among those who had heard of or read about the initiative, information was received almost exclusively through municipal communication channels, therefore missing the opportunity to reach beyond residents already interested in municipal affairs.

- **Further strengthen communication strategies for participatory initiatives** by conducting targeted analysis in advance of which communication approaches, channels, and formats are most effective for different audience groups, with the aim of increasing reach and awareness beyond those who are already engaged.

4. Participation in the citizens' assembly had positive effects on participants' perceptions of the 2030 zero-waste goals and their relationship with the municipality. However, these effects

did not extend to the broader population when people were briefly informed about the assembly.

- **Expand opportunities for broader public engagement by involving a wider segment of the population.** This could include communication campaigns (see above) and / or hybrid participation formats, like online consultations (cf. Provincie Drenthe).

5. **Civil servants:** Awareness about the burgerberaad and its outcomes was especially low among the civil servants in charge of the implementation (uitvoering). In addition, perceived internal support for public participation differed across groups, and most respondents reported divergent views among colleagues regarding the value of public participation.

- **Actively inform and engage implementation staff in the burgerberaad process** alongside policy makers and management. Share internal feedback on the outcomes of the citizen assembly, including how recommendations are used in decision-making and implementation.

6. **Other: Conduct a systematic evaluation of the citizen assembly.** This approach more accurately captures the overall experience and impact across different stakeholders, including participants who are typically less vocal.

Evaluation report from Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

The university of Groningen conducted an independent evaluation of the citizen assembly on waste (*Burgerberaad Afvalvrij 2030*) organised by the municipality of Groningen between March and July 2025. The municipality aims to become waste-free by 2030. In line with this ambition, a citizen assembly was commissioned to engage residents in answering the following question: *How can we ensure lasting waste reduction in the municipality of Groningen?* Over 6 sessions, participants received information from the municipality, consulted experts, and collectively developed 25 policy recommendations (e.g., expanding organic waste collection facilities, reducing packaging waste in supermarkets, better informing residents about waste separation). In October 2025, these recommendations were formally presented to the municipal council, which committed to incorporate them into the new waste policy for 2026–2030 unless there were compelling reasons not to.

This research focuses on evaluating the impact of the assembly on (1) **active participants**, (2) the **broader population informed about the burgerberaad** via the residents' panel Groningen Gehoord and (3) assessing civil servants' attitudes toward public participation.

Part 1 - Active participants

The first part of this report evaluates the impact of the Burgerberaad Afvalvrij 2030 on citizens who actively participated in the assembly, and targets the following research questions:

- How did participants experience the Burgerberaad (1)?
- Did participation affect participants' (2) perceptions of the 2030 zero-waste goals, (3) their relationship with the Municipality of Groningen and (4) with fellow citizens, or (5) behaviours and norms around waste reduction?

1. 1. Methods

1. 1. 1. Study design

Participants in the assembly (intervention group) and a comparable control group of citizens not selected for the assembly completed identical surveys before and after the burgerberaad. Pre-surveys were administered online two weeks prior to the first assembly session, via the Qualtrics platform. Post-surveys were distributed online to the control group and in-person for the active participants at the end of the final session.

The questionnaires covered the five questions described above (see section [1. 1. 3.](#)) and included demographic information (age category, gender and - for active participants only - education level). All surveys were administered in Dutch (exp. 2 people in English for non-Dutch speakers) and took 5 - 10 minutes to complete. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen (PSY-2425-S-0241).

1. 1. 2. Participants and recruitment

For the recruitment of the assembly, 15 000 residents of Groningen were invited to register by personalised letter. The invitation sample was drawn via a random selection from the Dutch municipal population registry (*Basisregistratie Personen*), stratified by neighbourhood, age group, gender, education level and waste collection method. Oversampling was applied for neighborhoods and age groups with historically lower response rates. To promote accessibility, practical support was provided (e.g., reimbursement for time and travel, childcare and translation services). A total of 830 residents expressed interest, of whom 777 confirmed availability for at least four of the six planned sessions. A final group of 113 residents was selected through an algorithmic lottery to produce a sample representative of the Groningen population aged 16 years and older (*Figure 1*). Complementary information regarding data cleaning can be found in [Appendix A](#).



Figure 1: Picture of assembly participants during the last session on July 5th

The control group comprised residents who registered for the citizen assembly but were not selected through the lottery, allowing assessment of changes specifically attributable to participation in the assembly.

The demographic breakdown of both groups can be found in *Table 1*. The intervention and control groups were similar in terms of gender composition, with women slightly overrepresented. The control group included fewer younger participants, with 89.3% of respondents aged 45 or older, compared to 53.0% in the intervention group.

Table 1 - Sociodemographic characteristics of participants and control group (%)

	Active participants (intervention)			Control group		
	<i>Before</i> (n = 83)	<i>After</i> (n = 63)	<i>Matched</i> (n = 51)	<i>Before</i> (n = 64)	<i>After</i> (n = 31)	<i>Matched</i> (n = 28)
Gender						
Female	53.0	44.4	56.9	59.4	48.4	57.1
Male	43.4	31.8	39.2	37.5	35.5	39.4
Other / Not specified	3.6	23.8 *	3.9	3.1	16.1 *	3.5
Age category						
16 - 25	22.9	14.3	17.6	7.8	3.2	3.6
26 - 44	27.7	19.1	25.5	18.8	6.5	7.1
45 - 64	27.7	22.2	27.5	32.8	41.9	46.4
65 +	19.3	20.6	25.5	35.9	35.5	42.9
Not specified	2.4	23.8 *	3.9	4.7	12.9 *	0.0
Educational level						
Low	14.5	11.1	13.7			
Medium	34.9	27.0	35.3			
High	48.2	38.1	47.1			
Not specified	2.4	23.8 *	3.9			

* *These higher numbers correspond to respondents who did not enter their unique identifier in the post-survey, making it impossible to match them with their demographic information.*

1. 1. 3. Questionnaires and measures

The questionnaires covered the five key questions highlighted previously: participants' experiences of the burgerberaad; their perceptions of the 2030 waste-free goals; relationships with the municipality and fellow citizens; and norms and behaviours related to waste management. Details about the measures can be found in [Appendix B](#). All responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 5 = *strongly agree*) unless specified otherwise. The questionnaire for the participants can be found in [Appendix C](#).

1. 1. 4. Analysis

Changes following participation in the citizen assembly were analysed using statistical models that account for repeated measurements within individuals. These models estimate overall changes over time, differences between groups (assembly participants compared to control group) and whether changes over time differed between groups. In addition to statistical significance, effect sizes are reported to indicate the practical magnitude of observed changes. We also explored whether the effects of participation differed across demographic groups. These demographic analyses were exploratory and aimed to assess whether the observed patterns were broadly similar across groups. We included gender, age category and educational level (for assembly participants only).

Note on interpreting the reported impacts

Where possible, outcomes for participants in the citizens' assembly were compared with those of the control group to assess whether observed changes could be attributed to participation alone or reflected trends also present in the control group. However, the small size of the control group ($n_{\text{after}} = 28$) limited statistical power to detect smaller effects.

In the results section, changes over time that can be directly attributed to participation in the citizens' assembly are explicitly identified in the text. Other significant differences among participants between the start and end of the assembly remain statistically supported. However, whether these changes are unique to the participation group cannot be concluded.

Analyses were conducted using R (V. 4.5.1). More information can be found in [Appendix E](#).

1. 2. Results

1. 2. 1. Experience and impact of the burgerberaad

The evaluation indicated very positive feedback from participants regarding the burgerberaad process and outcomes. The overall grade awarded at the end was 8.3 (out of 10) on average, reflecting a high level of satisfaction. More detailed feedback on organisational aspects (e.g., location, catering) is documented in the evaluation report by Moventem.

- **Outcomes and expectations**

All respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the recommendations developed by the citizens' council. In addition, 62% of respondents reported expecting the Municipality of Groningen to fully adopt the recommendations (as opposed to 47% prior to the start of the assembly)¹. This increase could be the result of the collaborative and iterative nature of the process between citizens and policymakers - strengthening participants' confidence that the recommendations would be taken seriously and influence municipal decision-making.

While this is a positive outcome of the process design, it also underscores the importance of careful communication about follow-up and implementation. Previous research suggests that when recommendations from citizen deliberation processes are not adopted without clear explanation, this can lead to greater dissatisfaction than if such processes had not been convened at all ([Van Dijk and Lefevre, 2022](#)). Transparent communication about which recommendations are adopted, which are not, and the reasons underlying these decisions will therefore be critical to maintaining trust and support.

- **Process and group discussions**

Among the 51 respondents who completed the evaluation during the final session, participants reported positive experiences with the group discussion process. A large majority (92%) agreed that the facilitators were competent in guiding the discussions. In addition, 86% agreed that the format provided sufficient opportunities for all participants to contribute, and that people from different backgrounds were able to have their voices heard. Importantly, these scores did not differ significantly by gender, educational level, or age category, suggesting that the process

¹ For comparison: A similar study was conducted in Provincie Drenthe (citizen assembly on the topic of housing). Only half of the participants expected the recommendation to be adopted at the end of the assembly - and no significant increase was observed compared to the beginning of the assembly.

was experienced as inclusive and accessible across all groups. Additionally, 88% of participants declare feeling connected or very connected to other participants.

- **Impact of participation**

Participation in the burgerberaad significantly increased participants' feeling that "people like them" are **heard** and able to **influence** deliberations in the assembly (large effects, see *Figure 2*). No comparable improvement was observed in the control group. Aligned with the feedback from the group discussions, the impact was similar across genders, age categories and educational levels.

Compared to the start of the assembly, participants also reported a significant increase (moderate effect) in their "knowledge" or **understanding of how decisions are made** in the municipality: "*Ik weet hoe beslissingen worden genomen in mijn gemeente.*"

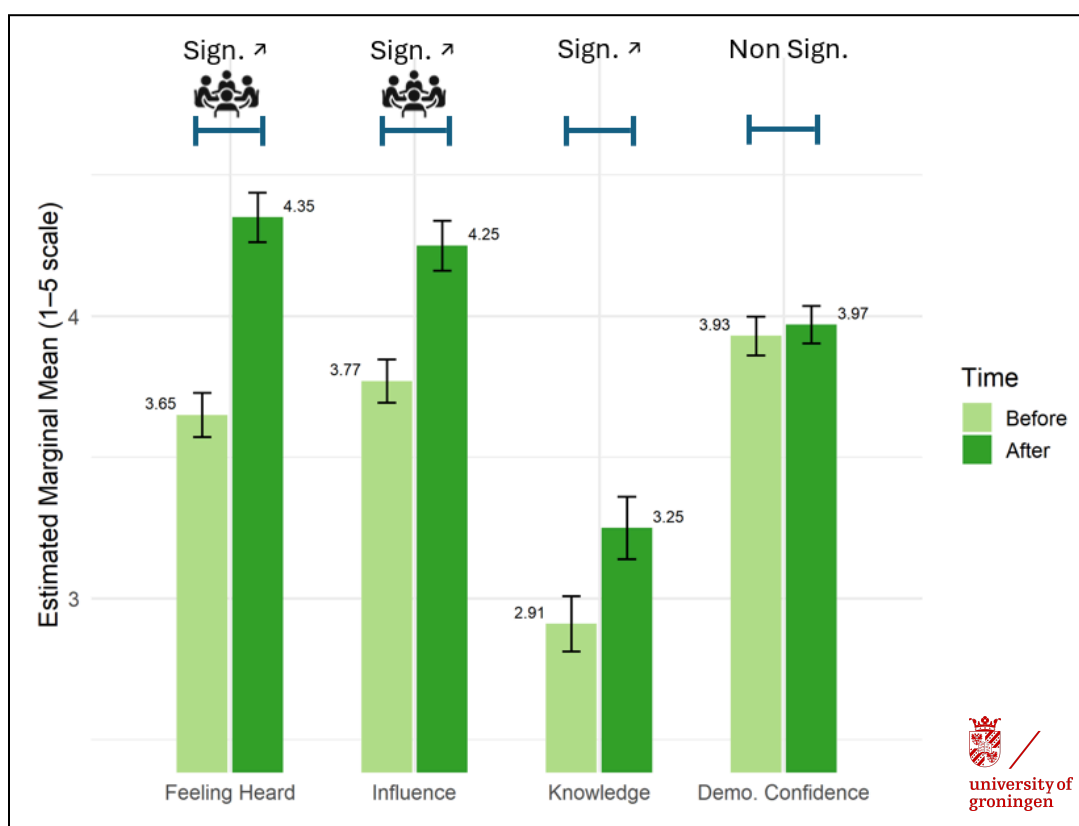


*Figure 2 : Key measures related to participants' experience with the burgerberaad, shown for **active participants** before and after the assembly. Measures for which changes can be attributed to participation in the assembly are highlighted with the small group icon.*

Additionally, we evaluated participants' **democratic self-confidence**. This was defined as (1) the extent to which people find it important to contribute to municipal plans, (2) feel a personal responsibility for the future of Groningen, and (3) perceive their opinion as valuable for the municipality². Democratic self-confidence scores were high at the beginning of the process (around 4 on a 5-point scale). No change was observed on these measures between the start and end of the burgerberaad.

These findings are in line with expectations one could have for citizens who chose to engage in a citizen assembly, and is further supported by results displayed below:

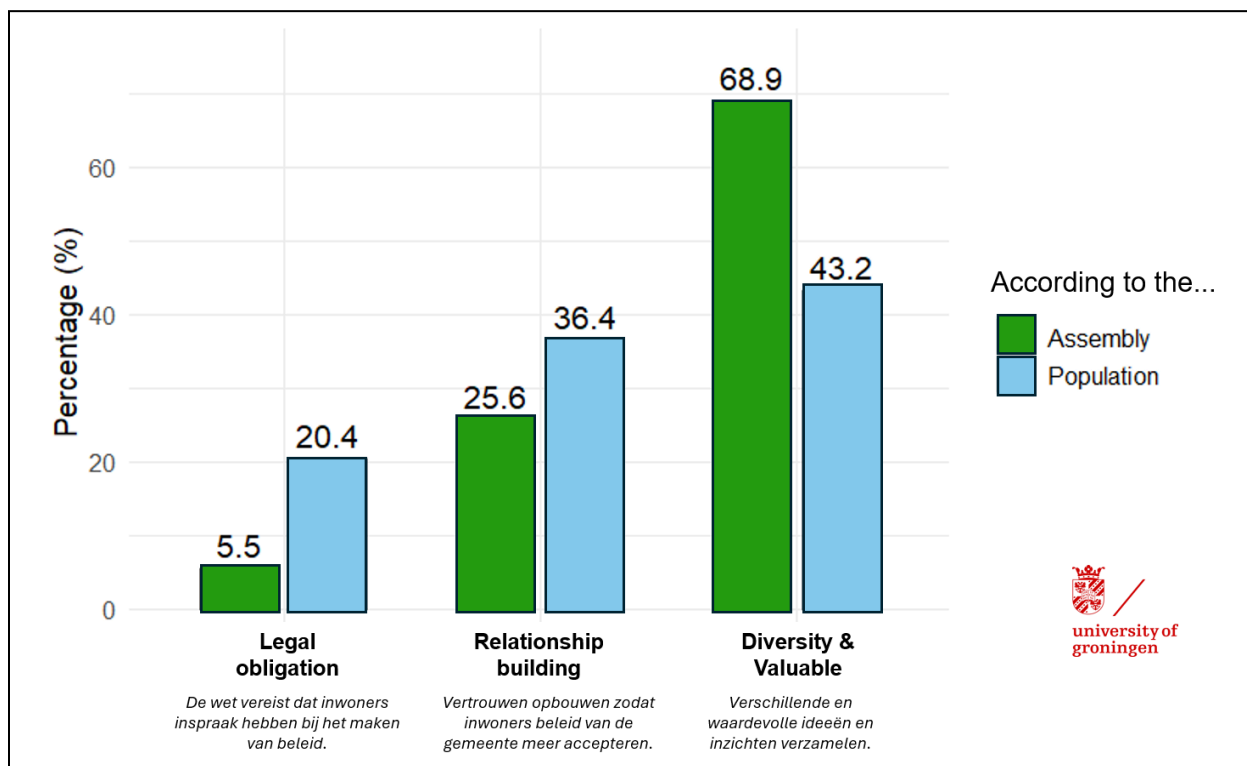


Figure 3 : Answer (%) to the question “Wat is volgens jou de belangrijkste reden van de gemeente om een burgerberaad te organiseren?”. Respondents had to choose one option.

Both active participants' and a panel from Groningen population (see [Part 2](#)) were asked **why** they believed the municipality was organising a citizen assembly (*Figure 3*). Options included:

² 1. “Ik vind het belangrijk mee te denken over plannen van de gemeente Groningen.”
 2. “Ik vind dat mijn mening waardevol is voor de plannen van de gemeente.”
 3. “Ik voel me verantwoordelijk mee te denken over de toekomst van Groningen.”

(1) for legal reasons, (2) to build relationship / trust between citizens and the municipality, or (3) to gather diverse and valuable ideas from citizens. A similar pattern was observed across both groups: a majority of respondents believe that the assembly is organized because the municipality genuinely values citizens' ideas and insights. Fewer respondents attribute the assembly to strategic motives (relationship building), and a minority view it as driven mainly by external legal obligations. This pattern suggests that assembly participants already entered the process with a strong sense that citizen contributions were meaningful and valued by the municipality.

1. 2. 2. Perceptions of the 2030 zero-waste goals

a. Acceptability and efficacy beliefs

Participants entered the burgerberaad with high levels of support for the municipality's waste-free ambitions already (5.7 out of 7). Nevertheless, compared to the start of the assembly, they reported a significant increase in the **acceptability of the 2030 waste-free goals** (small-to-moderate effect). Participation also significantly increased the perception that citizens and the municipality are **aligned** (shared vision³) when it comes to waste management (large effect).

While acceptability and shared vision were high, no significant changes were reported regarding **collective efficacy**, the extent to which respondents believe that *"the residents and the Municipality of Groningen can together achieve the goal of becoming waste-free by 2030"*. Overall, scores for collective efficacy remained moderately positive, suggesting general support for the ambition, alongside a degree of cautious scepticism about whether the goals can ultimately be achieved.

b. Whose responsibility is it to reach the 2030 zero-waste goals?

Participation significantly increased the extent to which the **municipality of Groningen** was seen as responsible for achieving the 2030 zero-waste goals (moderate effect, see *Table 2*). Perceived **responsibility of residents** themselves also increased among participants (small effect). By contrast, perceptions of **responsibility among businesses** were already high ($M = 4.4$) and showed no significant change over time.

³ "De gemeente Groningen en inwoners zijn het met elkaar eens dat Groningen afvalvrij moet worden"

*Table 2: Perceived responsibility of different actors in reaching the zero-waste goals. Estimated marginal means and standard error (scale 1-5), for **active participants** before and after the assembly. Changes attributable to participation in the assembly highlighted with the group icon.*

	Before	After	
Bedrijven	4,38 (0,08)	4,54 (0,09)	Non Sign.
De gemeente Groningen	3,91 (0,09)	4,33 (0,10)	Sign. ↗ 
Inwoners van de gemeente Groningen	3,87 (0,09)	4,17 (0,10)	Sign. ↗

These findings suggest that participation in the citizen assembly primarily strengthened perceptions of shared responsibility between residents and the municipality, while expectations toward businesses were more stable.

More relevant information related to the 2030 zero-waste goals can be found in the section on Behaviours and Norms around waste reduction (see [Result section 1. 2. 5.](#))

1. 2. 2. Relationships with the Municipality

Across all indicators of residents' relationship with the municipality, we observe a general improvement from before to after participation in the citizens assembly. Participation in the burgerberaad significantly increased participants' **connection** to the municipality and perception of **feeling heard** (moderate to large effects, see *Figure 4*).

Compared to the start of the assembly, participants reported significant increases in both **perceived influence** on municipal decision-making and **trust in the municipality** (both moderate effects). Finally, **perceived polarisation** between citizens and the municipality decreased slightly among participants (small effect).

Before the assembly, respondents' scores on trust, connection, feeling heard, and perceived influence were close to or slightly above the neutral midpoint of 3 on a 1–5 scale. Perceived polarisation scores were slightly negative (2.5 - 2.6), suggesting residents did not strongly perceive conflicts between residents and the municipality regarding waste management.

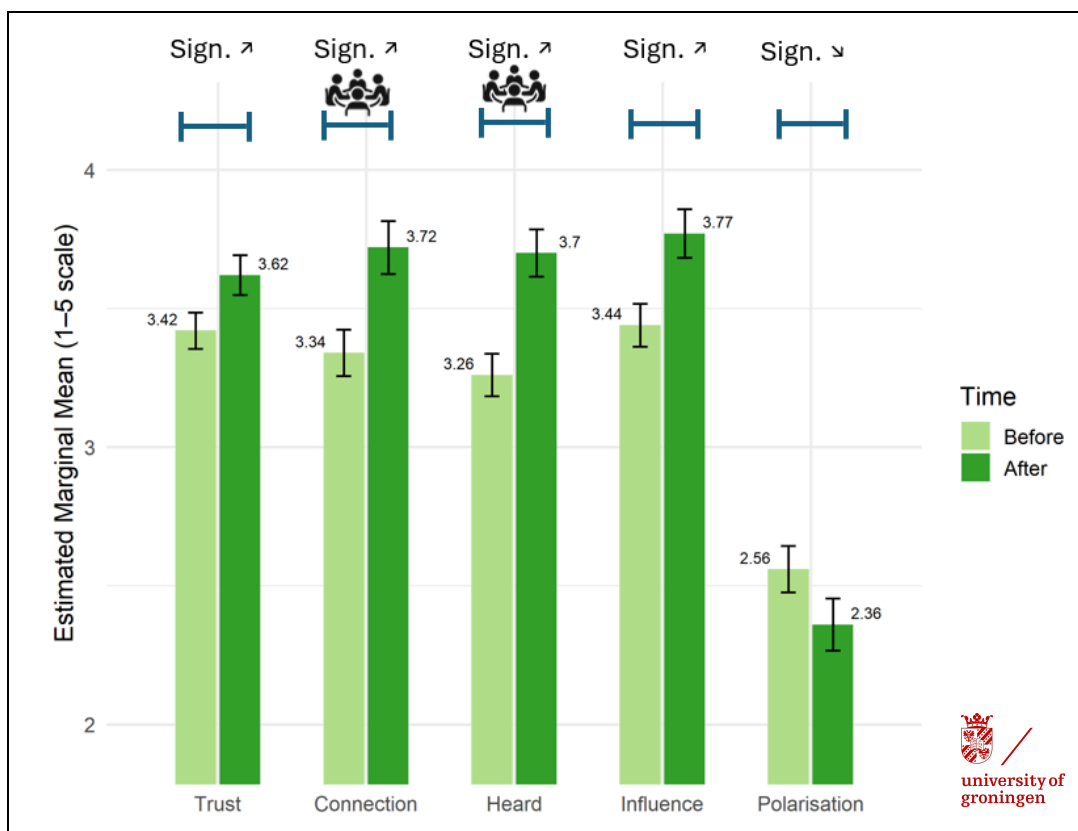


*Figure 4 : Key measures related to participants' perceived relationship with the municipality, shown for **active participants** before and after the assembly. Measures for which changes can be attributed to participation in the assembly are highlighted with the small group icon.*

These results suggest that participation in the assembly can strengthen relationships between participants and their local government. When compared to a similar evaluation conducted in Provincie Drenthe as part of the SPEAK UP project, significant increases were also observed for **connection to** and **feeling heard by** the local government, but no significant increases in **trust** nor reductions in **perceived polarisation** were found in Drenthe. This difference may be linked to Groningen's more collaborative approach, with back-and-forth exchanges between citizens' suggestions and those responsible for implementation⁴.

⁴ Engaging council members more in the assembly was part of the recommendations following the evaluation of the citizen assembly in Provincie Drenthe (English summary p.19): "Both PS and the assembly participants appreciated that Council members were allowed to observe the citizens' assembly meetings. The independence of the citizens' assembly is not compromised if PS and GS can engage with the process without exerting substantive influence on its content".

1. 2. 4. Perception of fellow citizens

Already prior to the assembly, respondents reported relatively high levels of perceived **connection with other residents** ($M = 3.7$ on a five-point scale). The scores remained stable over time and there was no significant change in perceived connectedness following the participation in the assembly.

Interestingly, respondents initially reported perceiving a moderate level of **polarisation among residents** in Groningen regarding waste management ($M = 3.3 - 3.5$ on a five-point scale). For participants in the citizens' assembly, perceived polarisation decreased over time (moderate to large effect). This suggests that participation in the burgerberaad may contribute to reducing perceptions of division among residents, potentially by fostering exposure to diverse viewpoints and highlighting shared concerns. These findings point to the potential of deliberative citizen assemblies to mitigate perceived polarisation within the community.

1. 2. 5. Behaviours and norms around waste reduction

In this section, we begin with a brief overview defining the different types of norms and establishing the baseline scores, before reporting the impact of participation in the assembly.

a. Perceived norms around waste in Groningen

Descriptive norms refer to the extent one thinks a behaviour is widespread within society (e.g. *“De meeste Groningers halen steeds minder producten en verpakkingen (en dus afval) in huis”*). Across studies and groups, respondents initially perceived *waste separation* as the most common behaviour among residents (scores = 3.3 on 5-point scale). In contrast, perceptions were lower for behaviours related to *consuming less*, and *reusing products* or packaging ($M = 2.3$ and 2.7 respectively), suggesting that these practices were seen as less widespread.

Injunctive norms reflect whether people believe a behaviour is considered important by others (e.g. *“De meeste Groningers vinden het belangrijk om hun afval te verminderen”*). Across studies and groups, respondents initially perceived waste reduction to be moderately important to others in Groningen, with mean scores ranging from 3.3 to 3.5 on a five-point scale.

Dynamic norms capture perceptions of change over time in others' behaviour (e.g., *“Steeds meer Groningers verminderen hun afval”*). Across studies and groups, responses were initially

close to neutral (scores $\approx$ 2.9–3.1 on a five-point scale), suggesting that respondents did not clearly perceive a growing trend toward waste reduction among residents.

- **Impact of participation**

Participants' perceptions that others were *reducing consumption* increased significantly over time (small-to-moderate effect). Other descriptive norms related to *reuse* and *waste separation* remained largely stable over time, with no significant changes observed.

Both **injunctive** and **dynamic norms** increased over time (marginally and significantly respectively, with small-to-moderate effects).

While these findings cannot be strictly attributed to participation, they suggest that engaging in participatory processes has the potential to change participants' perceptions of **social norms** around waste management.

b. Personal norms and behaviours

Personal knowledge reflects the extent to which individuals feel they know how to reduce their own waste (e.g. "*Ik weet hoe ik mijn afval kan verminderen*"). Across both the citizens' assembly study and the broader population, self-reported knowledge was already relatively high at baseline (scores $\approx$ 3.6 - 3.8 on a five-point scale).

Personal norms reflect the extent to which individuals consider a behaviour as important (e.g. "*Ik vind het belangrijk om mijn afval te verminderen*"). Across studies and groups, respondents initially reported high levels of personal importance attached to waste reduction (scores $>$ 4.0 on a five-point scale).

Self-reported **waste-reduction behaviour** measures the extent to which respondents believe they personally engage in waste-reducing practices (e.g. "*Ik verminder mijn afval door minder te kopen, beter te scheiden en producten te hergebruiken*"). Across studies and groups, respondents reported relatively high engagement in waste-reduction behaviours (scores $>$ 3.7 on a five-point scale).

Both **personal norms** and **self-reported behavior** were higher than perceptions of others norms and behaviour, indicating that respondents tended to perceive themselves as more concerned about and engaged in waste reduction than the average resident. This finding is

consistent with respondents' perceived polarisation within the population when it comes to waste policy.

Finally, public or “advocacy” behaviours capture the extent to which respondents are willing to address others about waste-related behaviour (e.g. “*Als iemand die ik ken afval op een verkeerde manier weggooit, spreek ik deze persoon hierop aan*”, “*Als ik zie dat afval verkeerd wordt weggegooid in mijn buurt, vertel ik dit aan anderen.*”). Across studies and groups, respondents initially reported moderate willingness to correct people they know (scores around 3.3 on a five-point scale), and low willingness to address improper waste disposal in the wider neighbourhood (scores = 2.6 - 2.7). Respondents appear more comfortable addressing waste behaviour within their personal networks than engaging in broader public intervention.

- **Impact of participation**

Participation in the assembly was associated with a significant increase in **perceived personal knowledge** about waste reduction (moderate effect). This quantitative finding is consistent with open-ended responses, where participants repeatedly highlighted increased awareness (“bewustwording”) as a central outcome of the assembly.

Personal norms and **self-reported waste reduction behaviours** also increased significantly over time for the participants.

Positive effects directly attributable to participation were also observed for **public and advocacy-related behaviours**. Willingness to “correct others who dispose of waste incorrectly” increased significantly among participants while decreasing in the control group (moderate-to-large effect). Likewise, behaviours involving discussing improper waste disposal showed a significant increase among participants but not among control (moderate-to-large effect). These findings indicate that participation in the assembly was associated with greater readiness to speak up and engage others about waste-related behaviour.

More details available in App. G (assembly) and App. H (broader population)

Part 2 - Broader population (Groningen Gehoord panel)

The second part of this report evaluates the impact of the Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030 on the broader population of Groningen, using data from the Groningen Gehoord inwonerspanel. The evaluation targets the following questions:

- (1) What was the level of awareness of the assembly among the broader population?
- Did informing (compared to not-informing) the broader population about the citizen assembly affect (2) their perceptions of the 2030 zero-waste goals, (3) their relationship with the Municipality of Groningen and (4) with fellow citizens, or (5) behaviours and norms around waste reduction - despite not engaging actively in the process?

2. 1. Methods

2. 1. 1. Study design

Panel members completed identical online surveys before and after the citizen assembly took place. The pre-survey was administered in January 2025, prior to the start of the burgerberaad, and the post-survey in November 2025, following a small communication campaign that informed residents about the citizen assembly and its process.

In the post-survey, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: half of the respondents received brief information about the burgerberaad, its process and outcomes (e.g., themes discussed) before completing the questionnaire (intervention group). The other half did not receive any extra information about the assembly (control group). This design allowed for an assessment of whether being informed about the citizen assembly affected respondents' perceptions and attitudes. All respondents had been briefly informed that a citizen assembly was to take place in Groningen during the pre-survey.

The questionnaire covered the five themes described above and included demographic information (age category, gender, and area-level socioeconomic status). In the post-survey, respondents were also asked whether they had independently heard, seen, or read anything about the burgerberaad outside of the survey context. All surveys were administered in Dutch and took approximately five minutes to complete. They were directly collected online by the

Research, Information and Statistics department of the Municipality of Groningen (OIS). Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen (PSY-2425-S-0157).

2. 1. 2. Participants and recruitment

Respondents were part of an online citizen panel called [Groningen Gehoord](#). It consists of inhabitants aged 18 years and older in the municipality of Groningen. Panel members periodically receive invitations to complete short surveys on current municipal topics and may choose whether or not to participate. As participation in the panel is voluntary, the sample should be considered a convenience sample and is not necessarily representative of the Groningen population as a whole.

For the pre-survey, 11,000 panel members were invited to participate, of whom 3,569 started the questionnaire. At the end of the pre-survey, respondents were asked whether they consented to receiving a follow-up survey. Of the 2,975 respondents who agreed, 1,906 subsequently started the post-survey questionnaire.

The intervention and control groups were comparable in terms of gender, age category, and area-level socioeconomic status. Across both groups, men were slightly overrepresented, a majority of respondents were aged 45 years and older, and respondents were more likely to reside in neighbourhoods with medium to high socioeconomic status. The demographic breakdown of the intervention and control groups is presented in *Table 3*. Compared with the general population of Groningen, the study sample was slightly older, reflecting the higher proportion of respondents aged 45 years and above.

Table 3 - Sociodemographic characteristics of the inwonerspanel (intervention and control) (%)

	Intervention		Control group	
	<i>Before</i> (<i>n</i> = 1851)	<i>After</i> (<i>n</i> = 931)	<i>Before</i> (<i>n</i> = 1739)	<i>After</i> (<i>n</i> = 993)
Gender				
Female	43.5	40.1	45.0	42.3
Male	53.5	56.8	51.5	55.7
Other / Not specified	3.0	3.1	3.5	1.9

Age category

18 - 27	3.7	1.8	4.1	1.7
28 - 44	19.5	15.3	19.2	15.0
45 - 64	33.9	36.4	34.8	33.9
65 - 74	28.0	32.2	28.3	33.1
75 +	14.9	14.3	13.7	16.4

Area Income level

Low	29.3	28.8	30.9	30.5
Medium	38.0	37.8	35.1	35.7
High	32.7	33.4	34.0	33.8

2. 1. 3. Questionnaires and measures

The questionnaires covered the five key themes highlighted previously: awareness of the burgerberaad; perceptions of the 2030 waste-free goals; relationships with the municipality and fellow citizens; and norms and behaviours related to waste management. Details about the measures can be found in [Appendix B](#). All responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 5 = *strongly agree*) unless specified otherwise. The questionnaires for the broader population can be found in [Appendix D](#).

2. 1. 4. Analysis

Changes following exposure to information about the assembly were analysed using statistical models that account for repeated measurements within individuals. These models estimate overall changes over time, differences between groups (informed vs not informed), and whether changes differed between groups. In addition to statistical significance, effect sizes were reported to indicate the practical magnitude of observed changes. We also explored whether the effects of the intervention differed across demographic groups. These analyses were exploratory and aimed to assess whether the observed patterns were broadly similar across groups. We included gender, age category, area income-level and “awareness about the burgerberaad” (see [2. 2. 1 in Results](#)) in the models.

Analyses were conducted using R (V. 4.5.1). The R code for the analysis on the broader population was first prepared on a synthetic dataset to ensure anonymity. More information about the analyses can be found in [Appendix E](#).

2. 2. Results

2. 2. 1. Reach of the Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030

Awareness of the burgerberaad was generally low among the respondents in the broader population. Approximately two-thirds reported not having seen, read, or heard anything about the initiative (see *Figure 5*). Of the remaining one-third, the vast majority reported having heard only “a little”, while only 5.5% reported hearing “quite a bit” or “a lot”. This low awareness in the broader public is consistent with results from a similar evaluation in Provincie Drenthe as part of the SPEAK UP project (citizen assembly on the topic of “housing”).

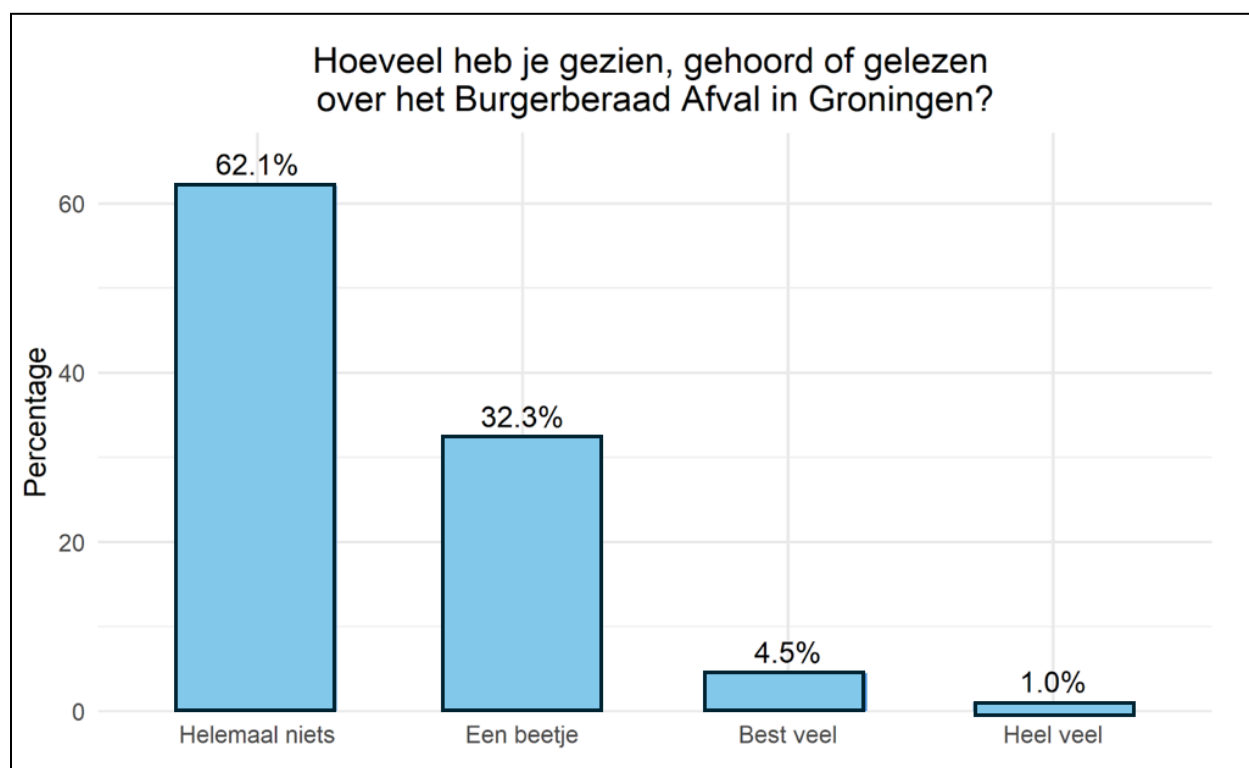


Figure 5: Awareness of the Burgerberaad Afval among the broader population (% , n = 1906)

Additionally, despite an extensive communication campaign by the municipality of Groningen (engaging in-person with residents in eleven different neighborhoods, sharing information on

digital signs, in community centers etc.), residents familiar with the citizens' assembly indicated that they had received this information primarily through municipal communication channels. The most frequently reported sources were the Gemeente Groningen newsletter, local newspapers, and the municipal website (see *Figure 6*), while social media played a limited role.

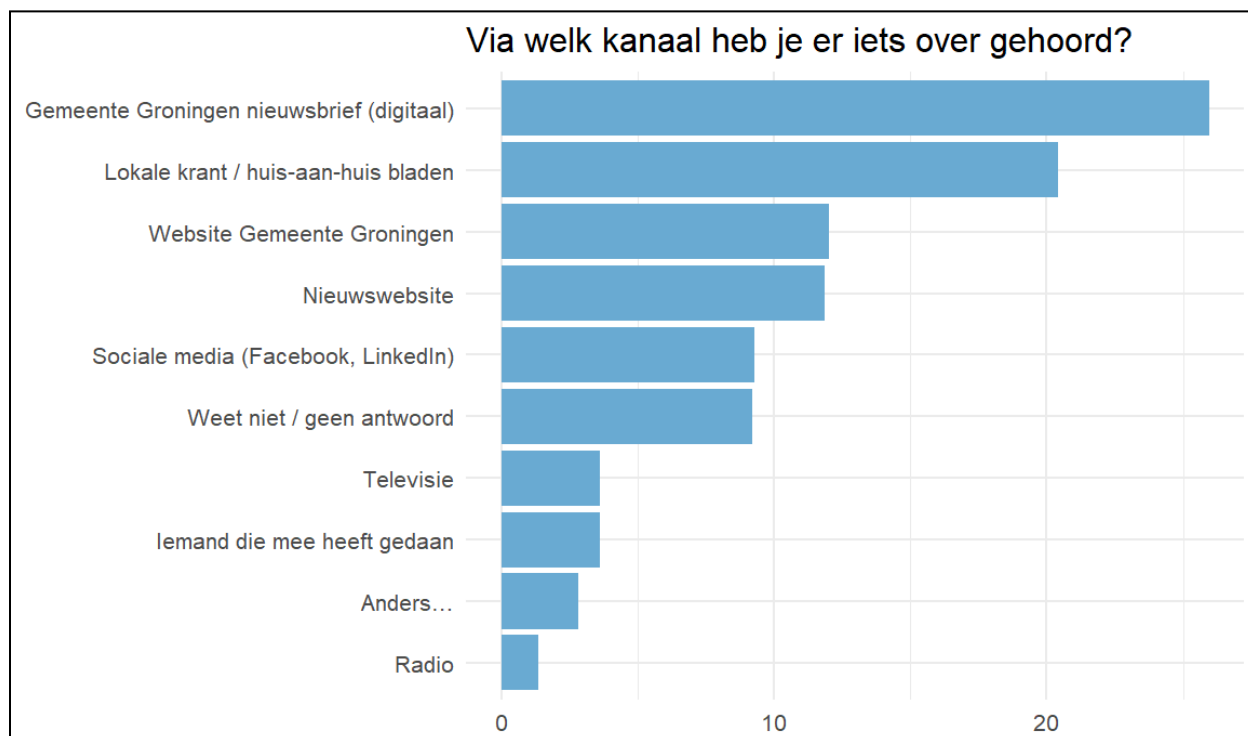


Figure 6: Reported communication channels for the burgerberaad (% , n = 720). Respondents could select multiple channels.

Respondents who reported having seen, heard, or read at least some information about the burgerberaad⁵ (n = 720) already reported more positive attitudes toward the zero-waste goals, and higher levels of connection with the municipality in the pre-questionnaire, before any intervention. This group already reported higher trust in and a stronger feeling of being heard by the municipality compared to respondents who were not aware of the initiative.

⁵ Women tended to report higher awareness of the initiative, and awareness increased slightly with age. These patterns are similar to findings from the evaluation conducted in Provincie Drenthe.

While these findings may suggest a positive impact of learning about the assembly on important variables, the causality is most likely reversed: awareness of the burgerberaad remains concentrated among residents who are already engaged with the municipality and its goals.

These findings highlight the opportunity to reach residents who are less actively interested in municipal affairs. The limited role of social media in how people heard about the initiative suggests that future outreach could move beyond traditional municipal channels. This is particularly relevant for younger residents, including international students, for whom tailored communication strategies - using platforms such as Instagram and TikTok and short video formats - may be more effective. To this end, municipalities could proactively collaborate with existing networks such as local media, journalists, universities, and other organizations, while also making use of additional channels such as social media advertising. Developing targeted and accessible communication formats (short videos, narrative portraits, and English subtitles for internationals) would further help to reach less engaged groups and increase overall awareness. Emphasizing tangible issues, everyday examples, and concrete outcomes could also make participatory initiatives and their resulting policies more relevant and appealing to a broader public.

2. 2. 2. Perceptions of the 2030 zero-waste goals

a. Acceptability and efficacy beliefs

Acceptability of the 2030 waste-free goals was already high among the broader population (scores above 5.6) and remained stable over time. Informing residents about the burgerberaad did not lead to significant changes in acceptability, nor did it affect perceptions of whether residents and the Municipality of Groningen can jointly achieve the waste-free goals. Scores on **collective efficacy** remained neutral (around 3.1 on a 5-point scale), suggesting general support for the ambition alongside a degree of cautious scepticism about its feasibility.

b. Whose responsibility is it to reach the 2030 zero-waste goals?

Perceptions of responsibility for achieving the waste-free goals showed limited change in the broader population when residents were informed about the citizen assembly. A small increase was observed in the intervention group in perceived municipal responsibility, but this effect should be interpreted with caution in terms of practical significance. Perceptions of residents' and businesses' responsibilities remained unchanged over time and after the intervention.

Overall, the results suggest that informing the population about the citizen assembly had little influence on how responsibility for achieving the waste-free goals is distributed.

More relevant information related to the 2030 zero-waste goals can be found in the section on Behaviours and Norms around waste reduction ([Result section 1. 2. 5.](#))

2. 2. 3. Relationships with the Municipality

The results of the experiment indicate that when we informed citizens through our survey about the citizen assembly did not have an impact. Across all key measures (feelings of being heard, perceived influence on municipal plans, connection with the municipality, trust and perceived polarisation between citizens and the municipality), virtually no differences were observed among residents who were informed about the burgerberaad compared to those who were not. Where changes did occur, they were small and did not differ significantly between the groups.

The perceived connection with the municipality of Groningen and overall trust remained moderately positive (3.3 - 3.6 on a five-point scale), while feelings of being heard and perceived influence on municipal decision-making remained close to neutral (around 3) in both groups.

Residents did not perceive a strong division between the municipality and citizens regarding waste management (negative scores around 2.5 - 2.7 on a five-point scale). A small but statistically significant decline in perceived polarisation was reported across the broader population over time. However, the decline was observed in both the intervention and control group, and therefore not attributable to being informed about the assembly.

2. 2. 4. Perception of fellow citizens

Similar to the active participants, respondents in the broader population reported relatively high levels of **perceived connection with other residents** (M = 3.7 on a 5-point scale). The scores remained stable over time for both the intervention and the control group.

Respondents in the broader population initially reported a moderate level of **perceived polarisation among residents** in Groningen (M = 3.5 on a five-point scale). Over time,

perceived polarisation showed a small but statistically significant overall decline. This change was similar among respondents who were informed about the citizens' assembly and those who weren't, providing no evidence that informing residents about the burgerberaad had any impact.

2. 2. 5. Behaviours and norms around waste reduction

The similar trends around norms observed within assembly participants and the broader population are already discussed in section (See [results in 1. 2. 5.](#)). The changes observed after participation in the assembly did not transfer to respondents in the broader population, when solely informed about the assembly. The scores in personal knowledge, norms or behaviours remained stable over time and across groups.

More details available in [Appendix H](#) (broader population)

Part 3 - Civil servants

The third part of this report explores civil servants' perceptions and attitudes towards the Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030 and public participation in general. This study uses both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative data (interviews) and focuses on the following themes: (1) awareness of the burgerberaad and its outcomes, (2) perceptions of the 2030 zero-waste goals, (3) perceptions of public participation and (4) perceptions of Groningers and their waste management behaviours.

3. 1. Methods

3. 1. 1. Study design

Respondents completed online surveys before and after the citizen assembly took place. The pre-survey was administered in February-March 2025, prior to the start of the burgerberaad, and the post-survey in November 2025, following a small communication campaign about the citizen assembly and its process.

The questionnaire included variables covering the themes mentioned in the section above and did not include demographic information for anonymity purposes. Only a filter question asked respondents to specify what type of position they were holding within the municipality of Groningen (policymaker, manager or executive) - to account for differences across roles. In the post-survey, respondents were also asked whether they had independently heard, seen, or read anything about the burgerberaad outside of the survey context. All surveys were administered on Qualtrics, in Dutch and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The full questionnaire can be found in [Appendix D](#).

A voluntary sample was also invited for one-on-one interviews in March 2025, to share their experience or opinions related to the burgerberaad and public participation in general. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and was conducted by a Dutch-speaking master student from the university of Groningen.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen (PSY-2425-S-0241).

3. 1. 2. Participants and recruitment

Eligible participants were employees of the department of Stadsbeheer of the municipality of Groningen, with work related to waste management in the city. There were 205 eligible employees (~13 in management positions, ~12 policymakers and ~180 in executive positions) and participation was voluntarily pseudo-anonymised. Invitations to participate were directly distributed internally via email or in-person.

For the questionnaires, we collected 61 individual responses in February / March (10 policy makers, 7 in management and 44 in implementation), and 29 in November (6 policy makers, 7 in management and 16 in implementation). Among the respondents in the first questionnaire, 9 employees agreed to be interviewed (3 policy makers, 2 managers and 4 implementation staff).

3. 1. 3. Analysis

We used descriptive statistics and correlations to explore patterns in the questionnaire data. Because only a small number of participants provided an identifier (email address), we were able to match only 12 responses across both time points. As a result, there was **insufficient statistical power to conduct inferential analyses** and assess changes over time.

3. 2. Results

3. 2. 1. Awareness about the burgerberaad

We enquired about respondents' (1) overall awareness about the burgerberaad and (2) awareness about the 25 recommendations that were crafted by the citizens in the assembly.

Awareness of the citizen assembly and its recommendations differed significantly across groups (*Figure 7 and 8*). Most policy makers ($n = 6$) reported being well informed about the burgerberaad and its outcomes. Among management staff ($n = 7$), awareness was mixed, with some respondents indicating familiarity with the process and recommendations, while others reported limited knowledge. Implementation staff ($n = 16$) reported having little to no awareness of the burgerberaad or its recommendations. These patterns were also reflected in the interviews, which showed that most implementation staff were not aware of the citizen assembly prior to its start. The questionnaires indicated that this situation did not change after the

assembly, despite internal communication about the burgerberaad (e.g., internal newsletter). Alternative channels could be explored to reach civil servants across the whole organisation.

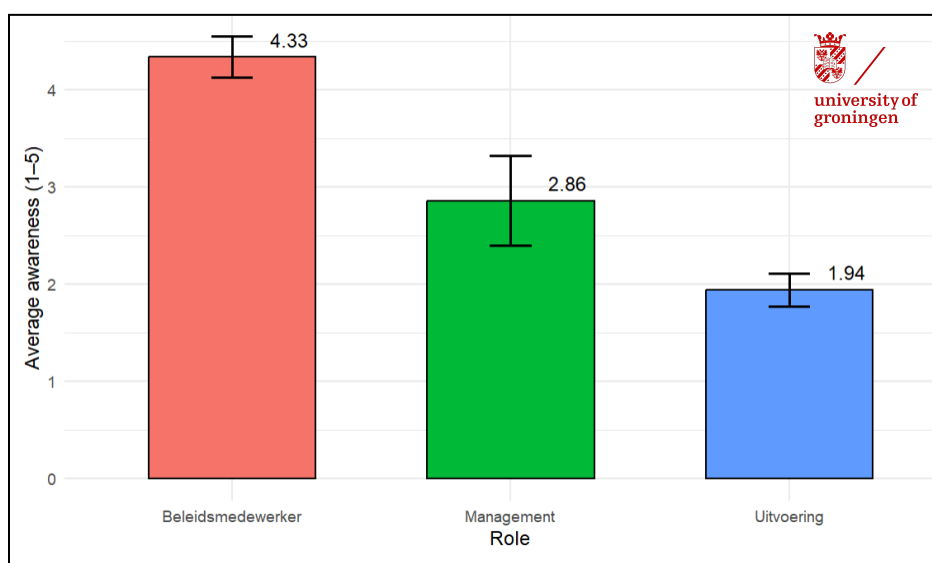


Figure 7 : Average scores (+SD) to the question “*Heb je de afgelopen zes maanden op een andere manier iets gehoord over het Burgerberaad Afval?*” (scale from 1 - nothing, to 5 - a lot)

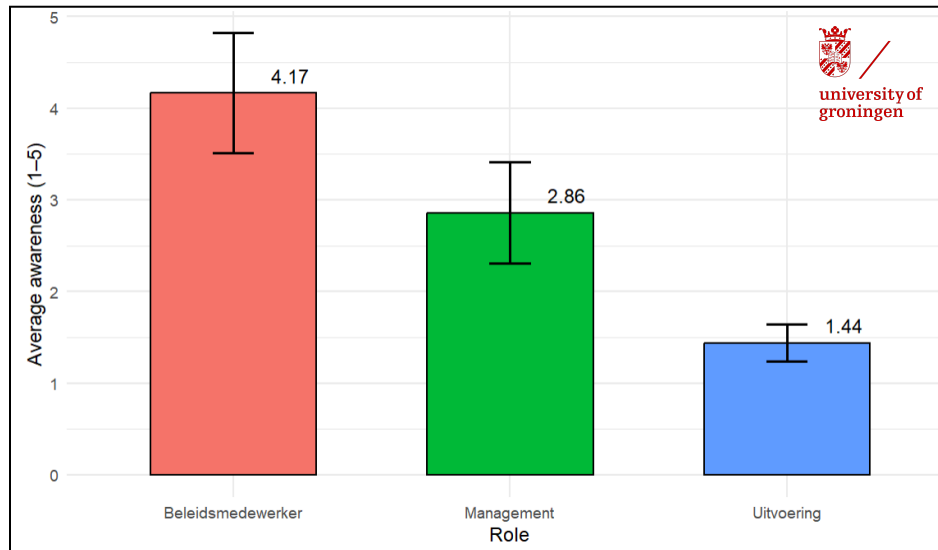


Figure 8 : Average scores (+SD) to the question “*Ben je op de hoogte van de adviezen van het Burgerberaad Afval?*” (scale from 1 - nothing, to 5 - a lot)

Correlation analyses indicated that greater awareness of the burgerberaad and its recommendations was associated with a higher willingness to incorporate participatory

outcomes into daily work and to contribute to the success of public participation. Higher awareness was also linked to lower perceptions that public participation reduced municipal influence or increased work complexity. However, as stated above, awareness was primarily reported by policy makers, who were more directly involved in the citizen assembly process.

3. 2. 2. Perceptions of 2030 zero-waste goals

- Acceptability of the zero-waste goals (Likert 1-7)

Overall, **acceptability of the 2030 zero-waste goals** was positive across all groups, with policy makers reporting the highest levels (Figure 9). Average acceptability increased slightly among management and implementation staff, although changes were limited. Notably, participants from the assembly and panel reported higher acceptability scores than civil servants.

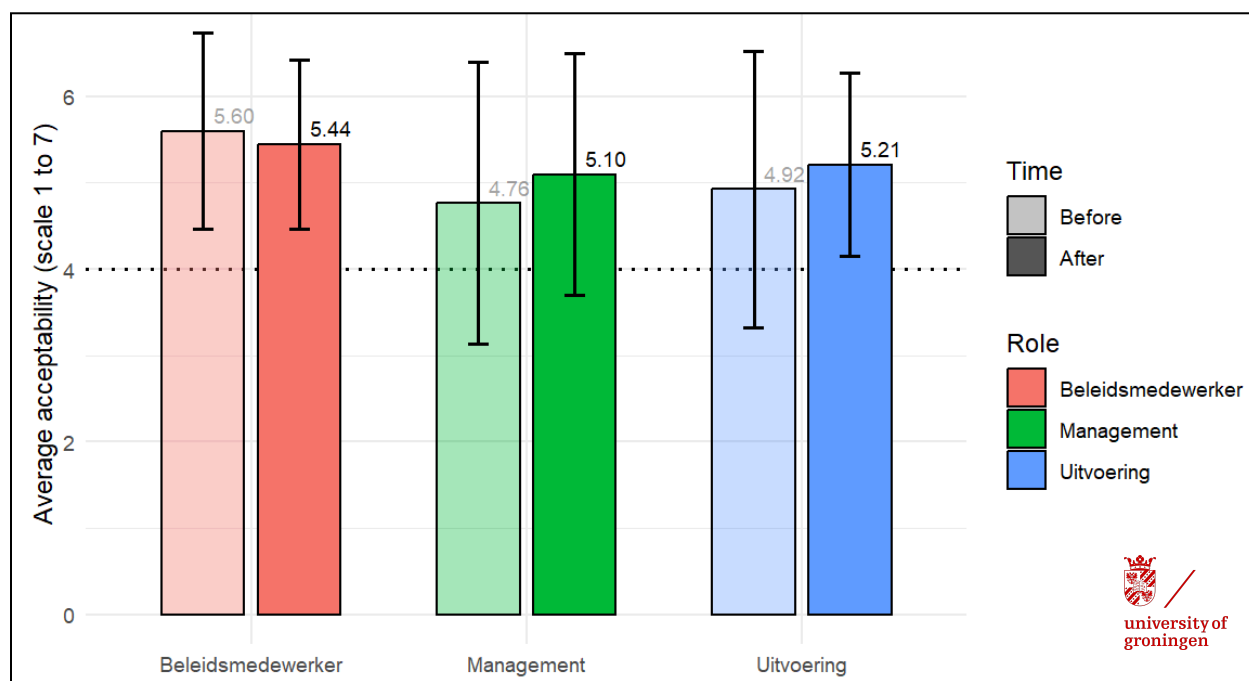


Figure 9 : Acceptability of the zero-waste goals

Average scores of acceptability (+SD) per role before (lighter colour on the left) and after the assembly (darker colour on the right). The dotted line represents the neutral value.

Perceived alignment between the municipality of Groningen and its residents regarding the waste-free goals was moderate across all staff groups. (scores around 3 out of 5). Policy

makers reported an increase in perceived shared vision afterwards (3.7), whereas management reported a decrease (2.9). Perceptions among implementation staff remained stable (3.1 - 3.2).

Perception of **collective efficacy**, the extent to which respondents believe that "*the residents and the Municipality of Groningen can together achieve the goal of becoming waste-free by 2030*", was moderate across all staff groups. The highest averages were reported by policy makers (3.7 - 3.8) and mean scores increased slightly over time across all groups.

- **Perceived responsibility to reach the zero-waste goals** (Likert 1-5, neutral = 3)

Perceived responsibility for achieving the zero-waste goals was generally attributed evenly to all three actors - municipality, residents, and businesses - across staff roles (all scores around 3.7). Policy makers consistently reported higher responsibility scores for all entities compared to management and implementation staff. Over time, perceived responsibility of residents increased across all roles (non-significant). In contrast, perceptions of the municipality's responsibility and businesses' remained relatively stable over time.

3. 2. 3. Perceptions of public participation

- **Personal perceived value of public participation** (Likert 1-5)

Items - Denk jij **persoonlijk** dat burgerparticipatie kan bijdragen aan...

- **Legal:** *Het voldoen aan de wettelijke verplichting van de overheid om burgers te betrekken bij het nemen van besluiten?*
- **Relationship building:** *Het vertrouwen van inwoners in het beleid van de gemeente Groningen vergroten?*
- **Fairness of policies:** *Het eerlijker maken van nieuw beleid?*
- **Diverse feedback:** *Het verzamelen van verschillende en waardevolle ideeën en inzichten?*

Civil servants generally attributed positive personal value to citizen participation across all four dimensions (*Figure 10*).

Perceived **legal value** was moderately positive to positive and relatively stable across groups, with small decreases among policy staff. Perceived value for **relationship-building** between

residents and the municipality was rated positively and increased over time across all staff groups. Perceived contributions to fairer policies was moderately positive across staff groups. They declined slightly among policy staff and management, while implementation staff reported an increase. A similar pattern was observed for the perceived value of **gathering diverse perspectives**: although scores remained positive overall (scores between 3.7 - 4.4), policy staff and management reported small decreases, with implementation staff remaining stable.

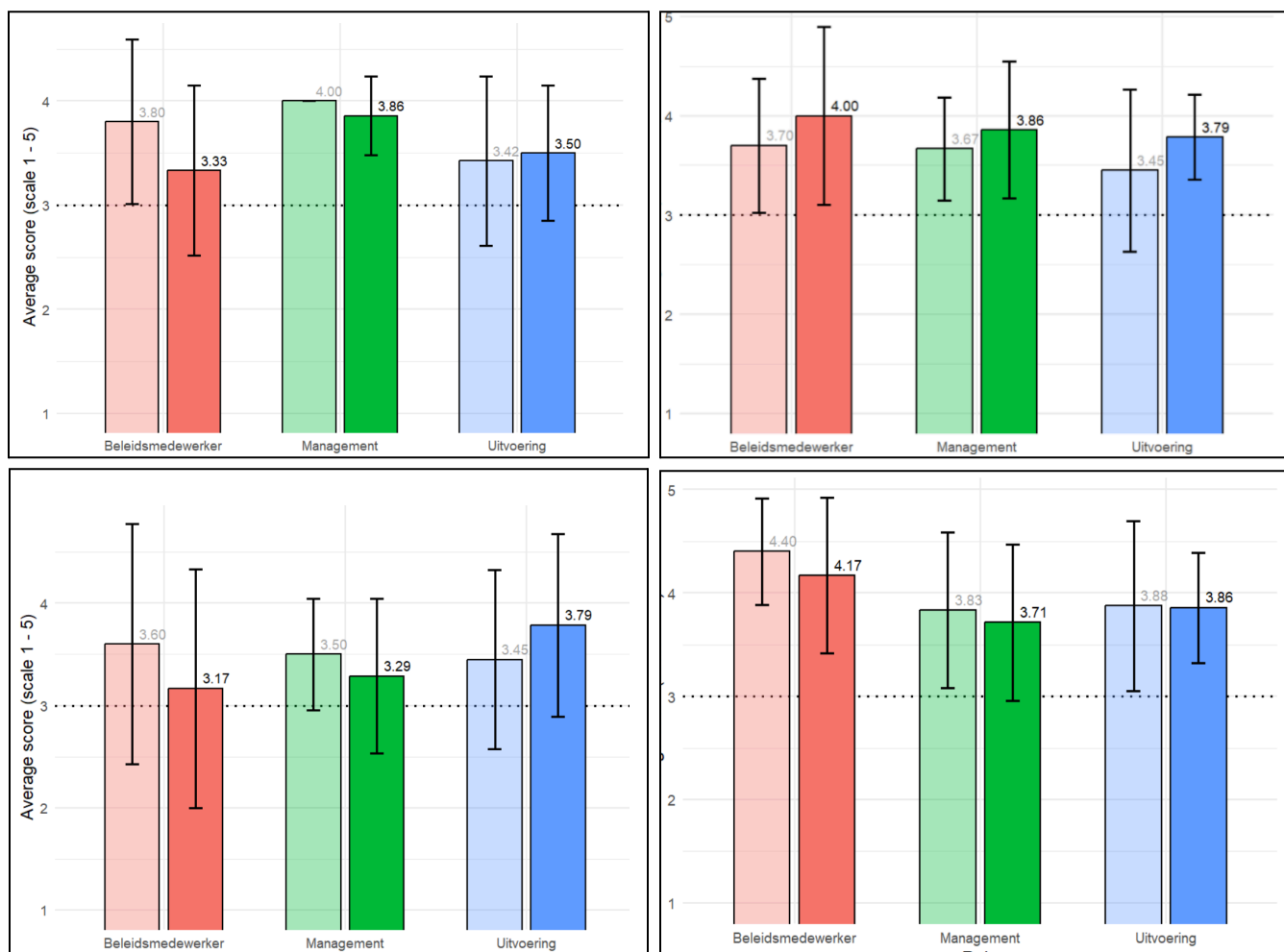


Figure 10 : Personal perceived value of public participation

Left to right, top to bottom: Legal, Relationship building, Fair policies and Diverse feedback. Average scores (+SD) per role before (lighter colour on the left) and after the assembly (darker colour on the right). The dotted line represents the neutral value.

- **Costs and benefits (zero-sum mindset)**

Items

- **Reduced influence:** *De invloed van de gemeente Groningen op het nemen van besluiten wordt verminderd door burgerparticipatie. (negatively phrased item)*
- **Increased influence:** *Hoe meer je burgers betreft bij het nemen van besluiten, hoe meer invloed het beleid van de gemeente Groningen zal hebben.*
- **Complex work:** *Hoe meer je burgers betreft, hoe ingewikkelder het werk van de gemeente Groningen zal worden. (negatively phrased item)*
- **Benefits over costs:** *De voordelen van burgerparticipatie wegen op tegen de kosten.*

Policy staff tended to perceive fewer drawbacks and more benefits of citizen participation than management and implementation staff (*Figure 11*). Before the assembly, policy staff generally disagreed with the idea that citizen participation reduces the municipality's influence or makes municipal work more complex. Perceptions of increased work complexity among policy staff rose slightly after the assembly, reaching the neutral midpoint.

Management and implementation staff reported more neutral scores on these negatively phrased items throughout. Among management staff, negative perceptions decreased slightly in the post-assembly measurement, particularly regarding reduced municipal influence, where average scores fell below the neutral midpoint.

Perceptions that citizen participation increases the influence of municipal policy and that its benefits outweigh the costs were moderately positive and relatively stable across roles and time. Overall, these findings indicate that policy staff tend to view citizen participation as less of a zero-sum trade-off, while management and implementation staff perceive more practical drawbacks, particularly in terms of complexity of work.

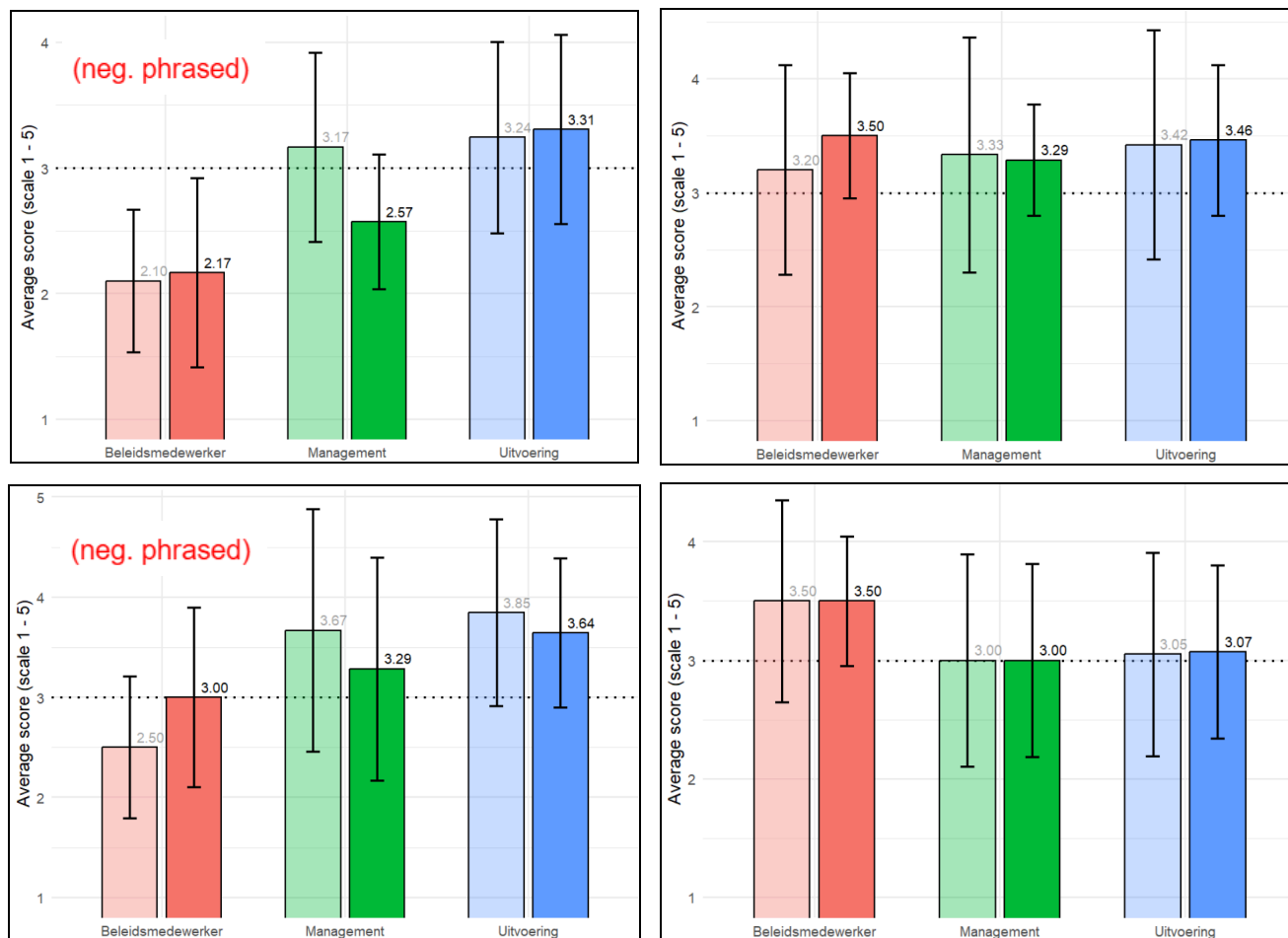


Figure 11 : Personal perceived value of public participation - Left to right, top to bottom: **Reduced influence (neg. phrased)**, **Increased influence**, **Complex work (neg. phrased)** and **Benefits over costs**. Average scores (+SD) per role before (lighter colour on the left) and after the assembly (darker colour on the right). The dotted line represents the neutral value.

- **Willingness to incorporate** public input and **impact on motivation**

Items

- **Willingness to incorporate:** *Ik wil graag de plannen van het Burgerberaad Afval meenemen in mijn werk.*
- **Motivation from citizens' ideas:** *Ik ben meer gemotiveerd om mijn werk te doen als burgers met ideeën komen.*

Willingness to incorporate the outcomes of the citizens' assembly into daily work was generally positive, particularly among policy staff and management. Policy staff reported the highest levels both before and after the assembly (scores around 4.2 out of 5), while implementation staff reported moderate levels of willingness at both time points (scores around 3.4). Average scores decreased slightly over time for management, but remained stable for other staff groups.

When asked whether **ideas from citizens increase their motivation** to do their job, policy staff reported higher average scores both before and after the assembly, although their scores decreased slightly over time (from 4.1 to 3.8). Management staff expressed moderately positive motivation levels pre and post-assembly (scores around 3.3 - 3.4). Implementation staff reported more neutral levels of motivation, but also showed a small increase over time (from 3.1 to 3.3).

Both variables, higher scores were positively associated with trust in and perceived connection to citizens, perceptions that public participation brings more benefits than costs, and negatively associated with perceptions that public participation unnecessarily complicates work. These associations suggest that supportive orientations toward citizen participation are closely linked to broader beliefs about its value and feasibility within municipal work.

- **Personal public attitude** (support and contribution to success)

Items

- **Public support:** *Ik vertel openlijk dat ik het Burgerberaad Afval steun.*
- **Contribution:** *Ik draag bij aan de succesvolle uitvoering van het Burgerberaad Afval.*

Civil servants reported moderately positive levels of **public support** for the citizens' assembly, with a small increase over time across all staff groups. Policy staff and management expressed moderate willingness to openly support the assembly (scores between 3.5 - 3.7), while implementation staff reported more neutral levels of public support (scores between 3.0 - 3.2).

Perceived personal contribution to the successful implementation of the citizens' assembly differed more clearly between roles. Policy staff reported high levels of perceived contribution at both time points (*Figure 12*), significantly higher than management and implementation staff. Management and implementation staff reported moderately positive contribution scores, with

small increases after the assembly. Overall, these patterns reflect role-specific involvement in the citizens' assembly with policy staff reporting the strongest behavioural engagement. This is consistent with their direct involvement in the organisation of the assembly.

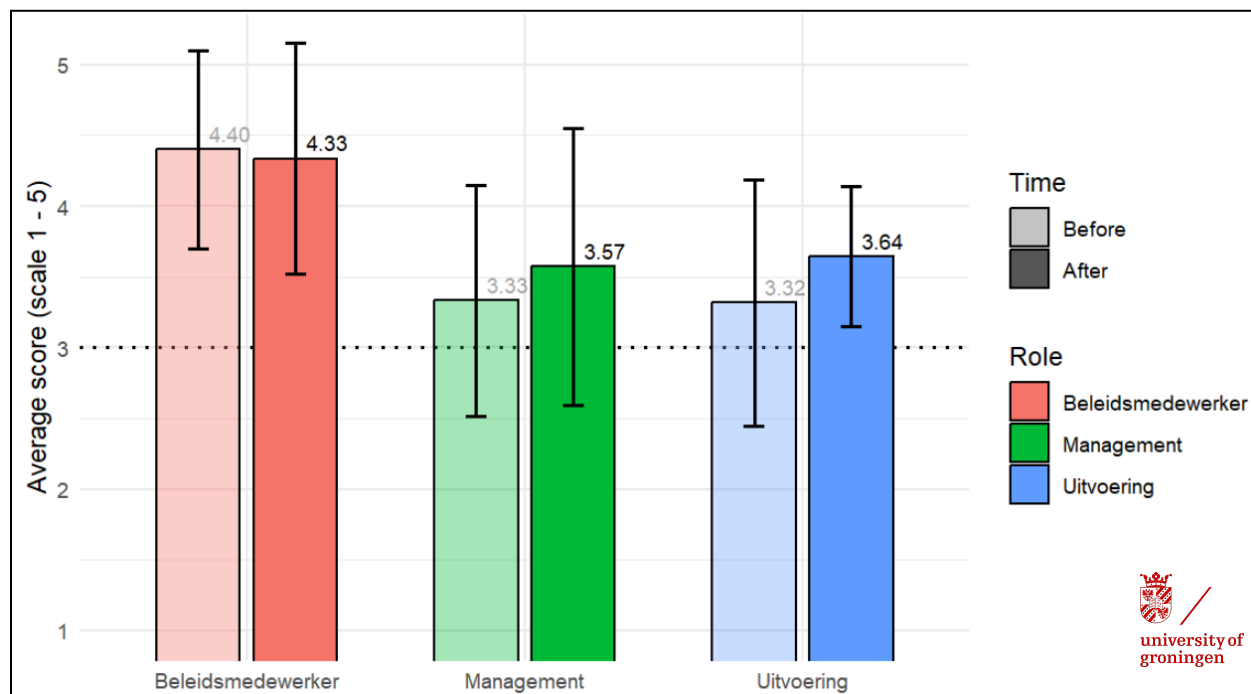


Figure 12 : Perceived contribution to the success of public participation

Average scores (+SD) per role before (lighter colour on the left) and after the assembly (darker colour on the right). The dotted line represents the neutral value.

3. 2. 4. Perceived norms for public participation among colleagues

Items

- **Perceived internal support for public participation:** *“Mijn meeste collega’s steunen het idee om burgers te betrekken bij het maken van beleid”*
- **Perceived internal polarisation:** *“Binnen de gemeente Groningen verschillen de meningen van ambtenaren over de waarde van burgerparticipatie sterk”* - **neg. phrased**

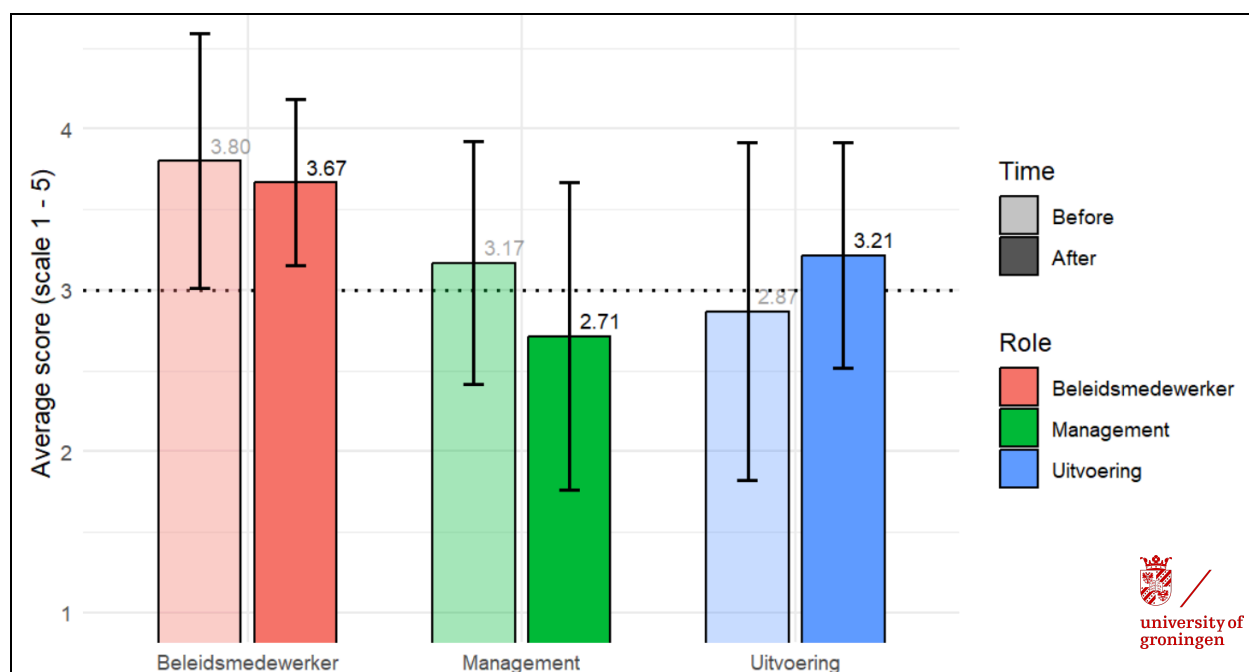


Figure 13 : Perceived internal support for public participation - Average scores (+SD) per role before (left) and after the assembly (right). The dotted line represents the neutral value.

Perceptions of **internal support for involving citizens** in policymaking differed between staff groups (*Figure 13*). Before the assembly, policy staff reported the highest levels of perceived support ($M = 3.80$), followed by management ($M = 3.17$) and implementation staff ($M = 2.87$). After the assembly, average support scores decreased among both policy staff ($M = 3.67$) and management, with the latter dropping below the neutral midpoint ($M = 2.71$). In contrast, implementation staff showed an increase in perceived support (from $M = 2.87$ to $M = 3.21$), although this change may partly reflect selective dropout of less supportive respondents.

Mean scores for **perceived internal polarisation** were above the neutral midpoint (3) across roles and time points, indicating that respondents perceived ongoing differences of opinion among civil servants regarding the value of citizen participation (*Figure 14*). These perceptions showed little change over time.

These findings suggest that civil servants perceive that views on citizen participation are not fully aligned within the organisation. These perceptions may affect internal coordination and the consistency with which citizen participation is supported or communicated in practice. At the same time, the low awareness of the citizens' assembly among implementation staff indicates

that these perceptions may not always be based on direct exposure to the initiative itself, but rather on more general impressions of organisational attitudes. This highlights the importance of internal communication and shared understanding when introducing participatory approaches.

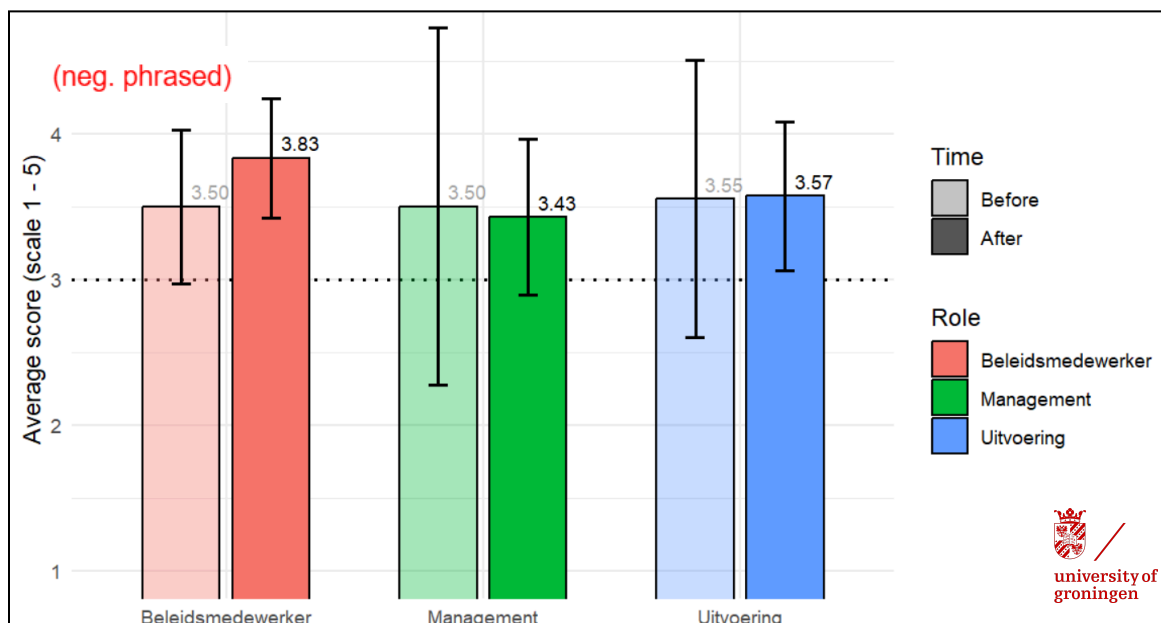


Figure 14 : Perceived internal polarisation - **negatively phrased**
 Average scores (+SD) per role before (left) and after the assembly (right).

3. 2. 5. Perceptions of Groningers

- Connection with and Trust in citizens

Civil servants reported positive levels of connection to and trust in citizens across all staff groups. Perceived connection to citizens was significantly higher among policy staff before and after the assembly ($M = 4.50 - 4.7$), while management and implementation staff reported lower connection scores over time (management: 4.3 to 3.7; implementation: 4.0 to 3.4). In contrast, trust in citizens - capturing perceptions of citizens' integrity, openness and capability - was consistently positive (3.5 to 4.1) and increased slightly after the assembly for all groups.

Both before and after the assembly, higher trust in citizens was positively associated with greater willingness and motivation to incorporate public participation inputs into daily work, stronger perceived personal value of participation, higher perceived internal support for public participation, and greater self-reported public support for citizen participation.

- **Perceived polarization** in Groningen when it comes to waste management

Items

- **Perceived polarisation among residents:** *“Als het over afval gaat, zijn de meningen van de inwoners van de gemeente Groningen sterk verdeeld.”*
- **Perceived polarisation between residents and the municipality:** *“Als het over afval gaat, staan inwoners en de gemeente Groningen lijnrecht tegenover elkaar.”*

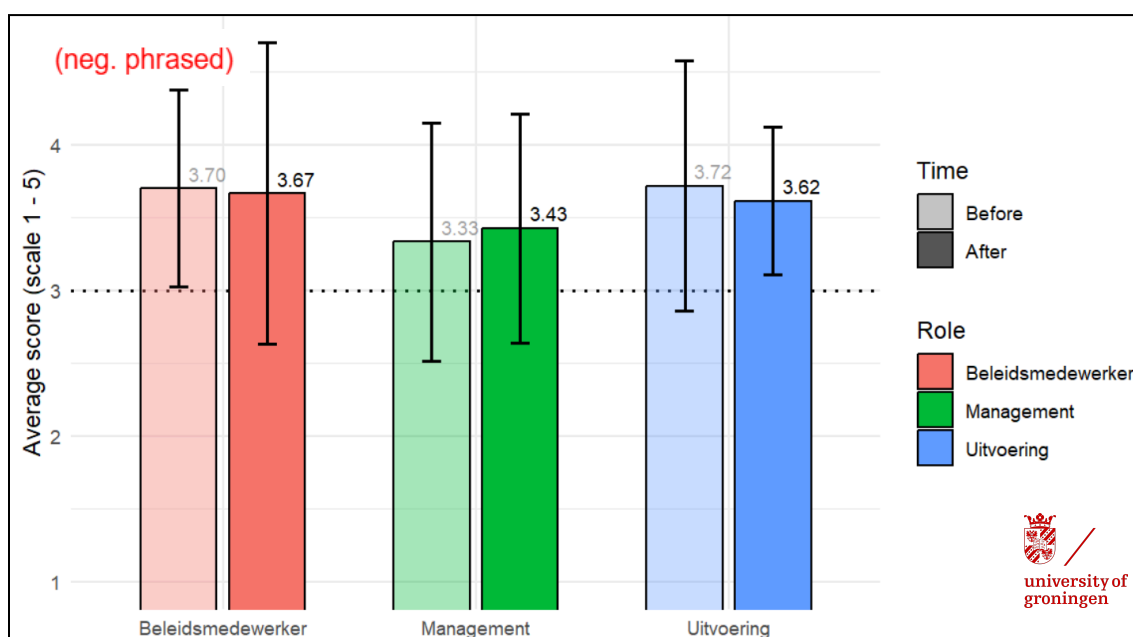


Figure 15 : Perceived polarisation among residents when it comes to waste management
 Average scores (+SD) per role before (left) and after the assembly (right) - **negatively phrased**

Perceptions of **polarisation among residents** regarding waste management were moderate positive across all staff groups (mean scores 3.3 to 3.7, *Figure 15*). Policy makers and implementation staff reported slightly higher perceived polarisation compared to management, but differences between roles were limited. Scores remained stable before and after the assembly for all groups, indicating no notable change over time in how divided residents were perceived to be on waste management.

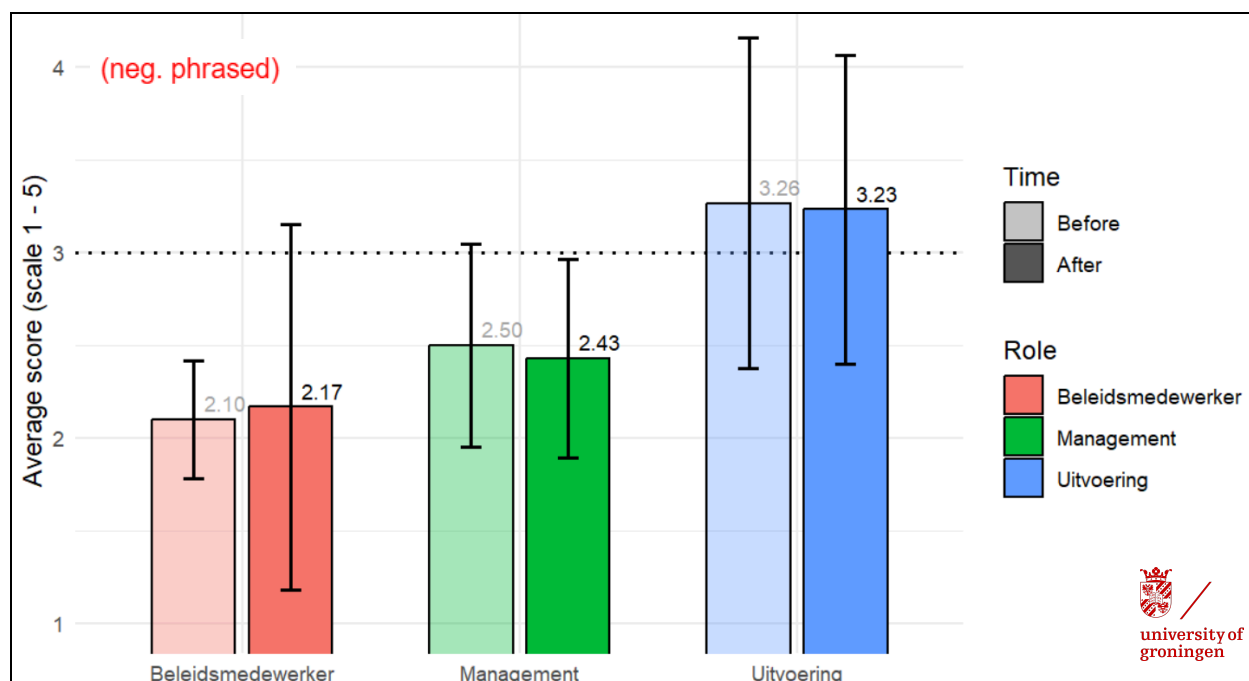


Figure 16 : Perceived polarisation between residents and the municipality. Average scores (+SD) per role before (left) and after the assembly (right) - **negatively phrased**

Perceived **polarisation between residents and the municipality** showed clearer differences between staff roles (Figure 16). Policy staff and management reported perceiving relatively low levels of polarisation both before and after the assembly (means around 2.1 - 2.5). In contrast, implementation staff perceived more polarisation between residents and the municipality when it comes to waste management (means around 3.2). These differences between roles indicate that implementation staff perceive greater tension between residents and the municipality compared to other groups.

Qualitative findings can help interpret these results: during interviews, several implementation staff described frustrations with specific resident groups, particularly international students, whom they perceived as frequently disposing of waste improperly or littering when leaving Groningen. Such experiences may explain the stronger perceptions of tension between residents and the municipality for this group.

- **Perceived norms** (descriptive, injunctive and dynamics) within population

Items

- **Descriptive norms:** *“De meeste inwoners halen **steeds minder** producten en verpakkingen (en dus afval) in huis.”, “**steeds minder** producten” en **scheiden** hun afval”*
- **Perceived importance of waste reduction among Groningen residents (injunctive):** *“De meeste inwoners vinden het belangrijk om hun afval te verminderen.”*
- **Evolution of norms re-waste reduction among Groningen residents (dynamic):** *“**Steeds meer** inwoners verminderen hun afval.”*

Descriptive norms on waste-reduction behaviour among residents were generally perceived as weak, particularly for **waste reduction** and **reuse** (*Figure 17 a and b*). Across all staff groups, average scores for reducing and reusing products remained below the neutral midpoint (3), indicating a shared perception that most residents do not engage in these waste-related behaviours. Average scores increased slightly in the post-measurement for norms around “reducing waste”, but remained below 3.

Perceptions of **recycling** differed more clearly between roles (*Figure 17c*). Policy staff perceived recycling to be a common practice among residents (scores around 4), while management and implementation staff reported more moderate perceptions. These role differences mirror the previous findings on perceived polarisation between residents and the municipality, suggesting that frontline staff who interact hands-on with waste-related challenges tend to hold more sceptical views about residents’ waste behaviours.

Finally, perceived **injunctive** and **dynamic norms** regarding waste reduction among Groningen residents were moderate across all staff groups. Perceptions of the importance residents attach to waste reduction clustered around the neutral midpoint before the assembly. It increased slightly afterwards for all roles, with the highest post-assembly scores reported by management ($M = 3.71$). Similarly, perceptions of dynamic norms - reflecting whether more residents are seen as reducing their waste more over time - were close to the neutral point (with a lower score for implementation staff). Overall, these findings suggest cautious optimism about changing social norms around waste reduction, although perceptions remained moderately positive.

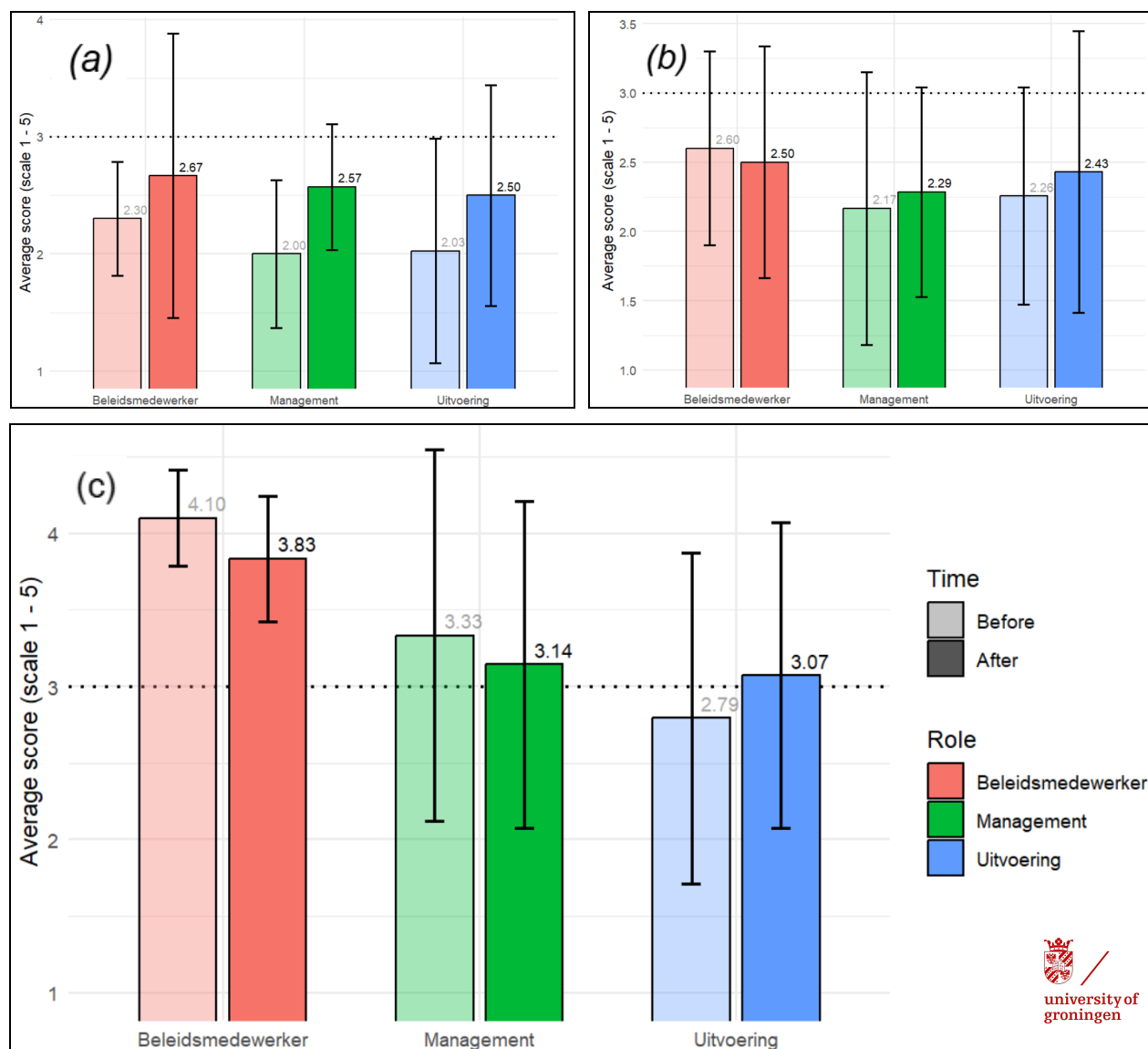


Figure 17: Descriptive norms around waste for residents in Groningen with (a) reducing, (b) reusing and (c) recycling. Average scores (+SD) per role before (and after the assembly).

3. 2. 6. Interviews

Overall attitudes and perceived value of the burgerberaad

Interviewees expressed broad support for the burgerberaad. Initial scepticism was often mentioned, particularly around feasibility, time investment, or concerns that “nothing new” or truly innovative would emerge. However, most interviewees also reflected on the added value of

citizen perspectives, especially in identifying potential blind spots and grounding policy and communication in lived experience. Many framed the burgerberaad as a learning instrument rather than a threat to professional expertise.

A consistent theme was that the burgerberaad is seen as most valuable for improving alignment between policy intentions and everyday realities. Some respondents highlighted that staff working on waste and circularity are often deeply immersed in the topic, whereas residents operate with different priorities, constraints, and levels of motivation. The burgerberaad was therefore viewed as a way to reduce the distance between “system logic” and citizen behaviour, particularly for practical issues like waste separation and infrastructure placement. Several interviewees stressed that even when advice is not fully adopted, the process itself can generate awareness, public attention, legitimacy, potential behavioural change among participants and the wider public and as a way to strengthen relationships between the municipality and residents.

Main concerns

Interviewees repeatedly emphasised the importance of feasibility and executability. While there was openness to citizen input, policy makers and managers stressed that advice must be balanced against technical, financial, and spatial constraints, as well as administrative capacity. A few respondents also stressed that constructive participation - rather than complaint-driven involvement - was important to lead to practical improvements and avoid additional, unnecessary workload. Many saw their own role as translating citizen recommendations into workable solutions, rather than simply accepting or rejecting them. This resulted in a pragmatic stance: participation is welcomed, provided expectations are managed (on either side) and trade-offs are transparently communicated.

Participation and influence

Most policy makers and managers did not perceive public participation influence as a zero-sum game between citizens and the municipality. Instead, they described participation as additive: citizen input can increase the overall quality and legitimacy of decisions without undermining democratic institutions. The burgerberaad was generally seen as compatible with representative democracy, provided that roles, mandates, and decision boundaries are clearly defined. Some respondents argued that the biggest challenge lies with organisational culture - particularly the willingness of officials and decision-makers to genuinely engage with advice.

Awareness

Interviews with implementation-level staff suggest that awareness of the citizens' assembly remained limited within the municipality beyond the staff directly involved. Aligned with findings in the questionnaire, implementation-level employees reported little familiarity with the assembly or its objectives among their peers. This was confirmed in the questionnaires.

Conclusions and recommendations

Drawing on the evaluation results, the following conclusions and recommendations are provided to inform future participatory processes.

1. The burgerberaad delivered value beyond improving acceptability for the 2030 waste-free goals. Its design and organisation effectively fostered stronger connections between participants and the municipality, demonstrating its importance as a vehicle for relationship-building.

- **Continue to focus on participatory processes that foster collaboration between residents and municipal authorities** by facilitating two-way exchanges between citizens and those responsible for implementation throughout the process.

2. A majority of participants expected the municipality to fully adopt the recommendations. Clear follow-up and visible implementation are therefore important to maintain trust among participants and to foster broader public support for participatory processes.

- **Communicate clearly and transparently with both participants and the wider population about the development, follow-up, and implementation of recommendations**, including which recommendations are adopted, which are not, and the reasons underlying these decisions. This can help support continued public engagement as policies are developed and implemented.

3. Awareness of the Burgerberaad Groningen Afvalvrij 2030 was low among the surveyed citizen panel. Among those who had heard of or read about the initiative, information was received almost exclusively through municipal communication channels, therefore missing the opportunity to reach beyond residents already interested in municipal affairs.

- **Further strengthen communication strategies for participatory initiatives** by conducting targeted analysis in advance of which communication approaches, channels, and formats are most effective for different audience groups, with the aim of increasing reach and awareness beyond those who are already engaged.

4. Participation in the citizens' assembly had positive effects on participants' perceptions of the 2030 zero-waste goals and their relationship with the municipality. However, these effects

did not extend to the broader population when people were briefly informed about the assembly.

- **Expand opportunities for broader public engagement by involving a wider segment of the population.** This could include communication campaigns (see above) and / or hybrid participation formats, like online consultations (cf. Provincie Drenthe).

5. **Civil servants:** Awareness about the burgerberaad and its outcomes was especially low among the civil servants in charge of the implementation (uitvoering). In addition, perceived internal support for public participation differed across groups, and most respondents reported divergent views among colleagues regarding the value of public participation.

- **Actively inform and engage implementation staff in the burgerberaad process** alongside policy makers and management. Share internal feedback on the outcomes of the citizen assembly, including how recommendations are used in decision-making and implementation.

6. **Other: Conduct a systematic evaluation of the citizen assembly.** This approach more accurately captures the overall experience and impact across different stakeholders, including participants who are typically less vocal.