A smaller smart city: learning from ‘controversing Amersfoort’

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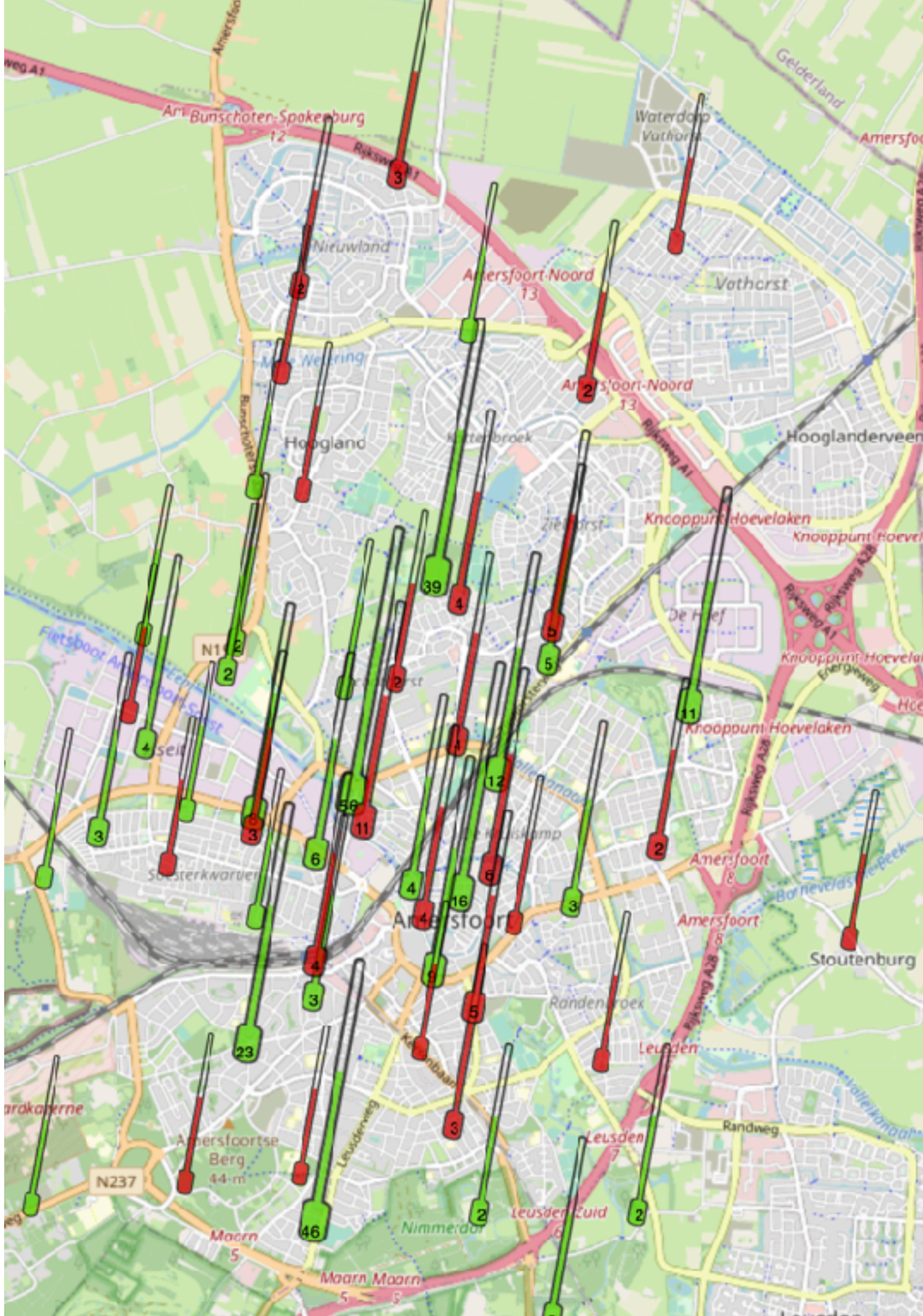


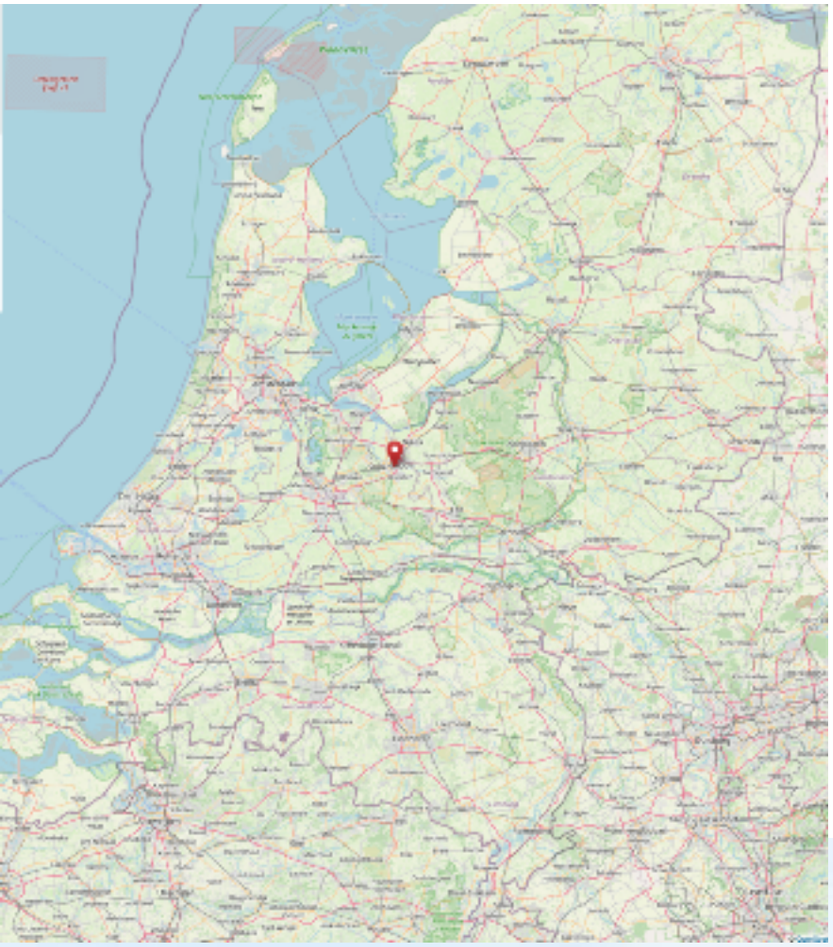
This talk: ‘scale’ as a smart city heuristics

Aim: look at citizen engagement with datafied smart cities through the lense of ‘scale’ on 3 interconnected levels:

1. **Spatio-temporal dimensions:** What can we learn from Amersfoort as a small (and often slow) smart city?
2. **Degree of civic engagement:** Rethinking civic engagement in the datafied smart city.
3. **Onto-political measure:** ‘Responsible’ smart city development centering on public values.

Central concept: *controversing*, a strategy for making datafication in Amersfoort controversial.

Project *"Designing for Controversies in Responsible Smart Cities"*



Core idea: smart cities as contested forms of public space, where citizens ('the public') gather around socio-technical controversies ('issues').

Aim: fostering 'responsible smart cities', by developing approaches for dealing with controversies and public values.

Case city: Amersfoort (pop. ca. 158.000, ranking 15th in NL)

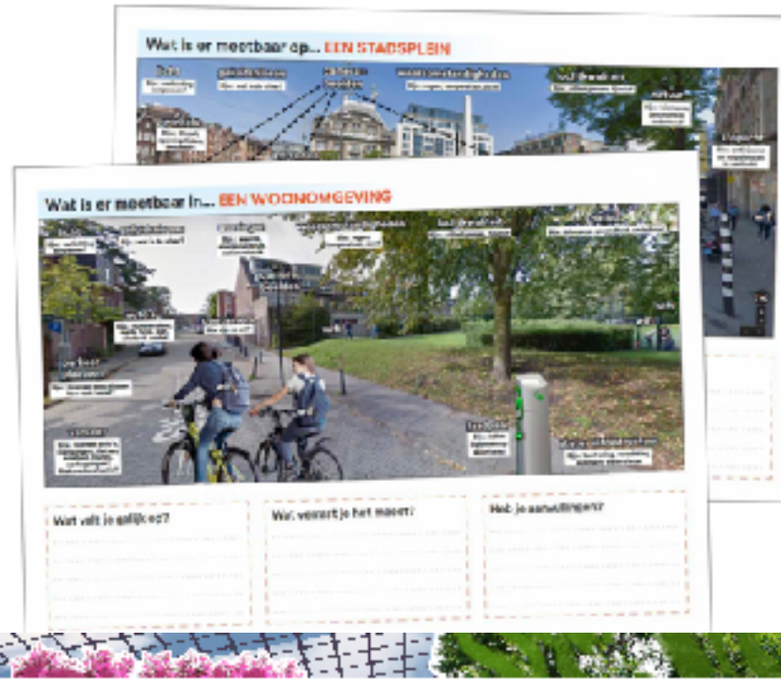
Sept 2018 - Sept 2022, https://responsiblecities.nl

Team:

- Julieta Matos Castaño (postdoc)
- Anouk Geenen (PhD)
- Corelia Baibarac-Duignan (postdoc)
- Mascha van der Voort (lead)
- Peter-Paul Verbeek (co-lead)
- Michiel de Lange (co-lead)

+ consortium partners

Fieldwork & Workshops



credits: Julieta, Anouk, Cora & DIG team

Controversing: strategy for making datafication controversial

Approach that addresses questions how people can become engaged in issues and debates around public values in the datafied smart city.
E.g.:

- how does citizen engagement in the datafied city actually happen and what it is composed of?

- who gets to define and articulate what are controversial issues in the datafied city?

- how can public values be renegotiated and redefined by multiple and diverse publics?

Photo: "Designing for Controversies in Responsible Smart Cities"; Illustrations: Julieta Matos Castaño

See:
Baibarac-Duignan, Corelia, and Michiel de Lange. 2021. "Controversing the datafied smart city: Conceptualising a 'making-controversial' approach to civic engagement." *Big Data & Society* 8 (2). doi: 10.1177/20539517211025557.

Controversing: recontextualization - meaning-making - agency

i. Recontextualization: situating contestations around datafication in specific spatio-temporal settings.

- bringing abstract ‘datafication’ closer to everyday urban life.
- people formulate their own questions and issues, instead of externally defined controversies.

ii. Meaning-making: ‘interfacing’ with abstract dimensions of datafication and ‘translating’ this into collective issues of concern.

- frictional interfaces make potential tensions around datafication visible, and generate debate (e.g. maps, narratives, speculative design, public performance, etc.).
- interventions translate particular issues into collective issues.

iii. Agency: shifting the onus from individuals to the conditions and strategies for participating in shaping smart city futures.

- finding ways for participants to meet and renegotiate public values, and defining means and actions to protect them.
- creating conditions for collective reflection and action about the mediating role of technology in the city.

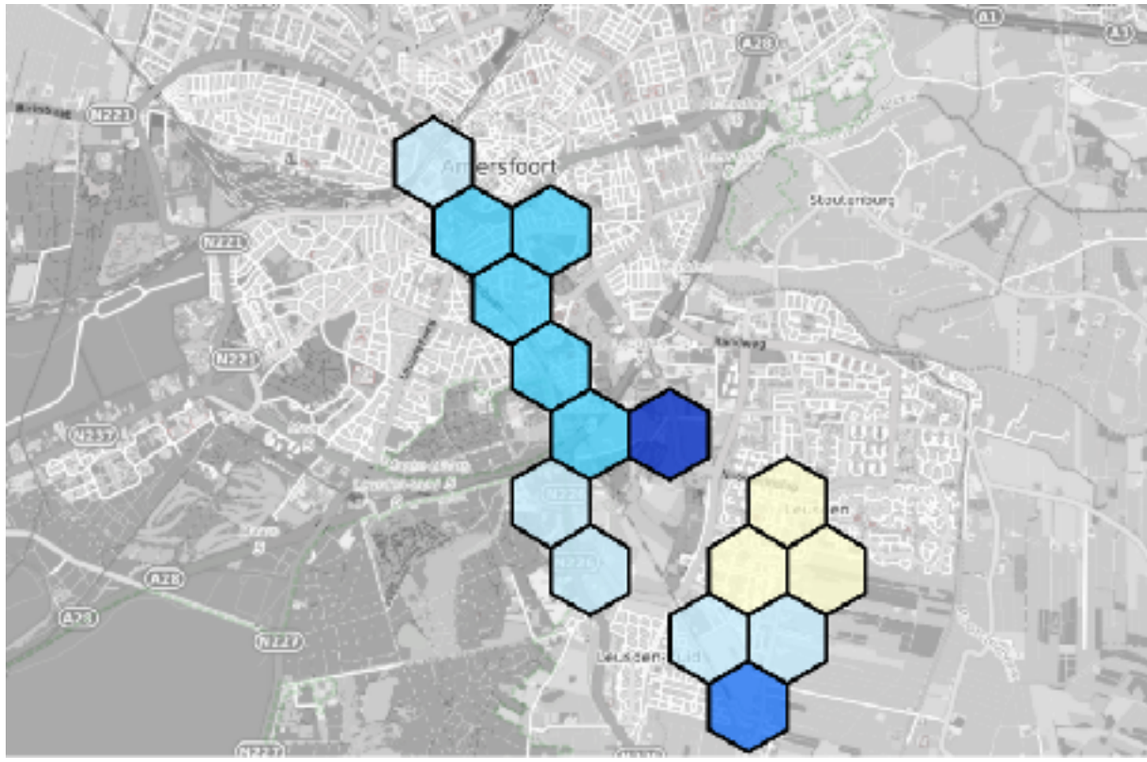
Source: “Designing for Controversies in Responsible Smart Cities”

1. Spatio-temporal dimensions: scaling up (and down, slowly)

Amersfoort examples like *Meet Je Stad* (“Measure Your City”) and *Snuffelfiets* (”Sniffer Bike”) recontextualize data. Invisible abstract issues like air quality become localized, current, tangible, participatory, collaborative.

Yet datafication of urban life creates ‘scalar frictions’:

- Big and small: how to marry trailblazer ambitions (smart technologies for ”cleaner, safer, and more comfortable” living) with acknowledgement of being small?
- Here and there: connecting own bottom-up local experiments with ‘trickle-down’ lessons from bigger smart cities.
- Fast and slow: balancing a lean and mean cooperative approach with responsibly slowing down on important moments when public values matter.



https://www.amersfoort.nl/project/amersfoort-smart-city.htm
https://meetjestad.net/index3.php?loc=Amf
https://snuffelfiets.nl

2. Civic engagement: ‘smart citizenship’ as scaling across levels

A. Smart citizenship as *interface* challenge: establishing meaningful associations between people-city-tech.

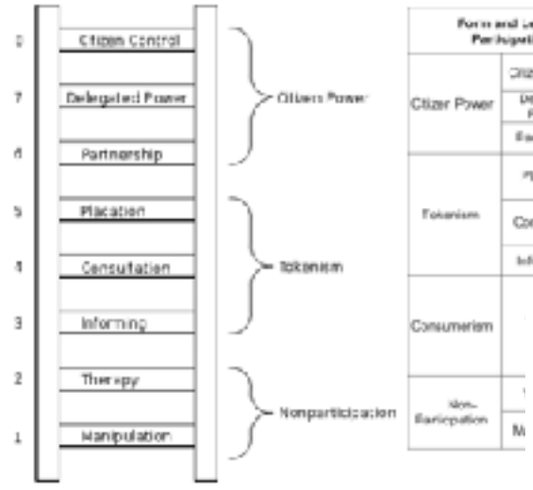
- interfacing between ‘stack’ of sensors-data-algorithms-platforms-networks-people-environments-institutions-regulations-etc.
- tech metaphors attempts at crosscutting these scales: city in the pocket/remote control; platform/plugin/API urbanism; collective intelligence/crowdsourcing, etc.

>> seamlessness norm; by contrast controversing approach highlights frictions inherent in interfacing and mediation.

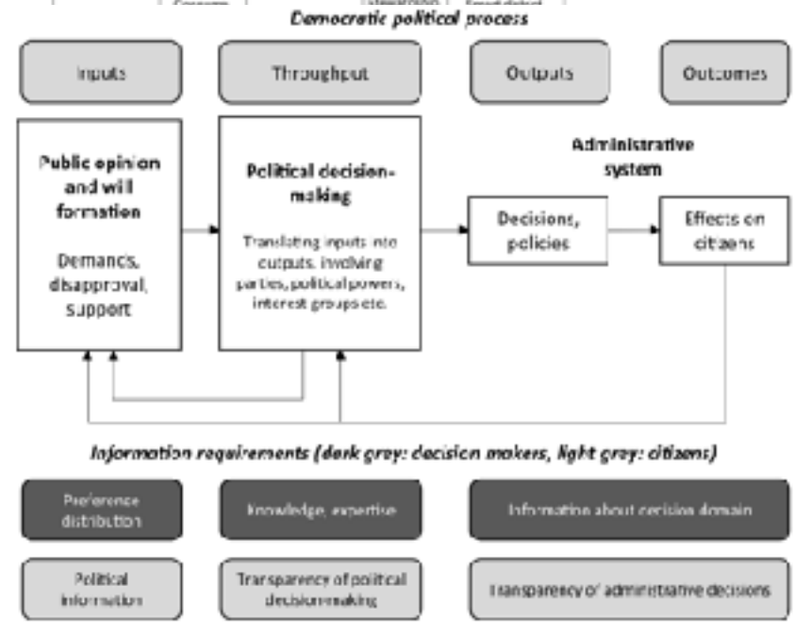
B. Smart citizenship as *translation* challenge: effective information flows and feedback loops between agents and stages.

- when/where in these (cybernetic) models do citizens become engaged (only as ‘input’)? who are excluded where/when? whose vocabularies, vernacular? how brokered? which biases?

>> generally lacking from (cybernetic) models of citizenship are underlying discussions about public values and agency.



Form and Level of Participation		Role	Citizen Involvement	Political Discourse/ Framing	Modality	Dublin Examples
Citizen Power	Citizen Control	Leader, Monitor	Ideas, Vision, Leadership, Ownership, Create	Rights, Socio-Political Citizenship, Commons	Inclusive, Bottom-up, Collective, Autonomy, Experimental	Code for Ireland, Tog
	Delegated Power	Decision-maker, Maker				Civic Hacking, Marketthons, Living Labs, Dublin Beta
	Partnership	Co-creator	Negotiate, Produce	Participation, Co-creation		
Tokenism	Placation	Proposer	Suggest			Fix-Your-Street, SmartDublin Advisory Network
	Consultation	Participant, Tester, Player	Feedback	Civic Engagement		CIVIQ Smart Stadium
	Information	Recipient			Top-down, Civic Paternalism, Management	Dublinked, Dublin Dashboard, RTPI
Consumerism			Browse,			Smart building/
Non-Participation						

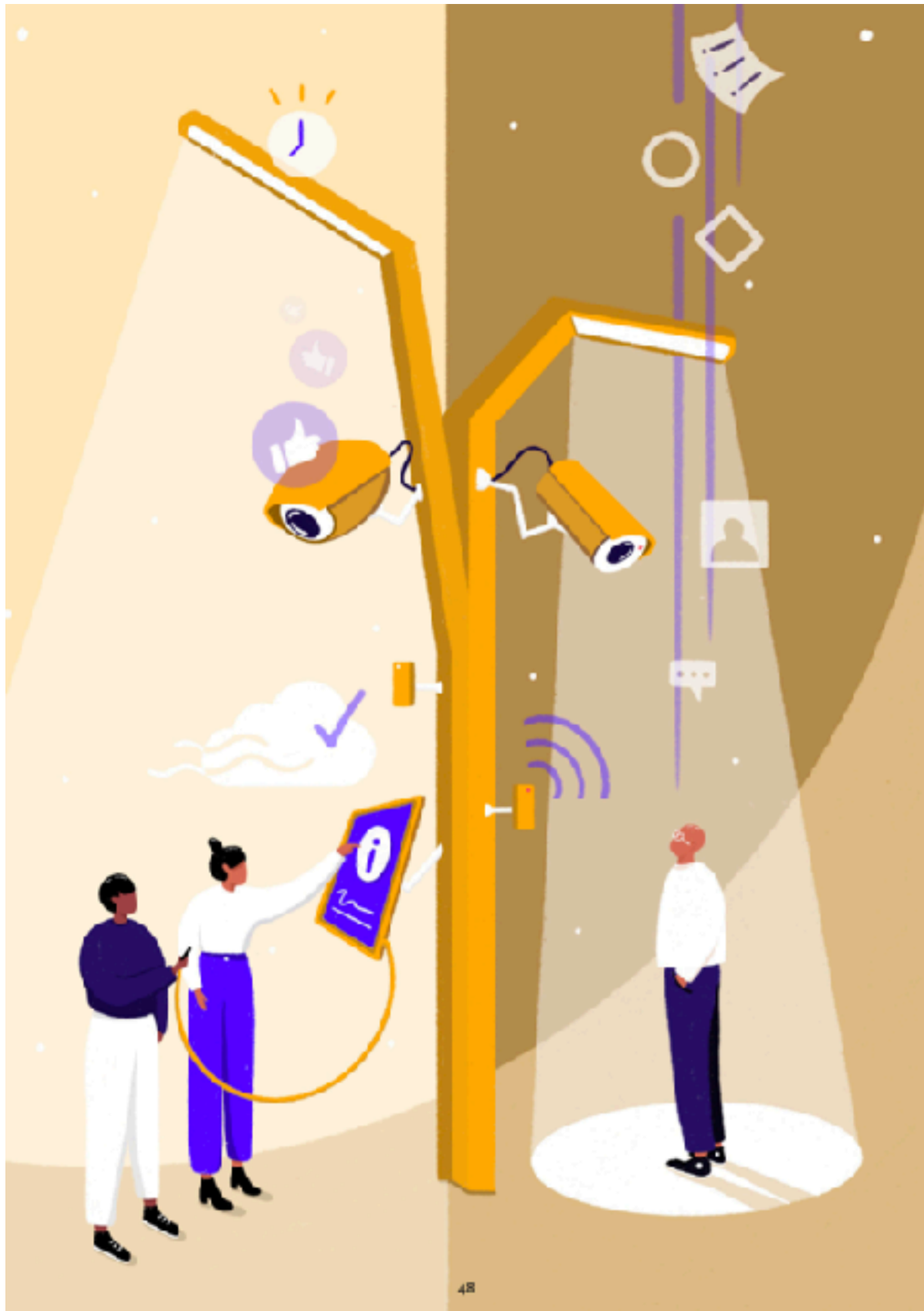


Sources: KPMG 2020; Arnstein 1969 ; Cardullo & Kitchin 2019 ; Code for America 2019; König & Wenzelburger 2020

3. Scaling out as onto-political gesture: incorporating public values, agency, Others in smart cities

How can Amersfoort develop as a responsible smart city centering on public values and citizen agency?

- Lessons so far: the controversing approach offers an embodied form of engagement with abstract issues, provokes collective imagination, and has performative potential to disrupt established imaginaries and generate multi-vocal alternatives.
- Further leads: Citizen agency requires recursiveness (Kelty 2008): people owning and managing the very (technological) conditions of their own participation.
- ‘Scaling up, across, and out’ means extending care beyond the local, and embracing the more-than-human in imagining equitable urban futures.



Thanks!
Any questions?

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