

Urban Maestro

New governance strategies
for Urban Design

Q-teams

the balancing act and the tool repertoire
for stimulating spatial quality (NL)

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1. SUMMARY

This paper contributes to the European typology of tools for urban design governance, by providing insight into Dutch spatial quality teams (q-teams) and their tools. It comprises part of the *Q-factor* research programme that addresses the influence of q-teams by compiling an evidence base. Q-teams are a unique instrument in Dutch design governance that address spatial quality in planning and design. The findings, based on a national survey and case study, suggest a broadening scope and an expanding tool repertoire, which represent a shift towards indicative planning strategies. Their dynamic use of tools is what has resulted in the necessary flexibility and robustness of q-teams. Therefore, they can be seen as a meta-instrument for urban design governance.

2. INTRODUCTION



Q-teams meeting at the start of the Q-factor research programme in 2012, photo: Annemarie Hoogwoud

In the Netherlands, more than 450 spatial quality teams, or q-teams, advise governments and involved actors about enhancing the spatial quality of buildings, streets, neighbourhoods, cities, landscape and regions. Q-teams do not design projects but rather use various tools to stimulate and preserve spatial quality. They manifest themselves in different forms, from the descendants of aesthetic control committees (*welstandscommissies*) to pro-active teams focused on spatial and environmental quality. 'Q-teams' is used as umbrella term.

Q-teams are shaped by the indicative planning system and national design governance policy. In the Dutch context, spatial plans are not prescriptive but rather leave room for interpretation. Planning and design processes are increasingly based on collaboration, deliberation, and stimulating bottom-up initiatives, in order to strengthen defined public interests. Furthermore, Q-teams are design governance instruments operating between general policy and the design of specific rules, projects and areas. They integrate and interpret spatial ambitions with the aim of improving spatial quality.

International interest in q-teams is increasing, since more countries have begun to adopt indicative planning and the development of new design governance strategies.

In fact, several organisations¹ have identified the Dutch q-teams method as an innovative approach to improving the quality of the built environment. However, limited research has been conducted on the q-teams. Therefore, the *Q-factor* research programme was launched in 2011 with a survey resulting in an atlas of Dutch q-teams (Van Assen and Van Campen 2014). In 2017, the programme continued with two PhD studies on the influence of q-teams, this expert paper using sources of evidence that have been gathered in the ongoing research.

The question this paper addresses is: what tools do Dutch q-teams use? Specifically, it examines whether the use of tools differs in relation to the governance profile of the teams: either regulative or indicative. The answers advance knowledge of design governance tools in the context of indicative planning strategies. In fact, Q-teams may have potential for transferability elsewhere, if evidence of their influence is delivered.

The paper builds on the literature on indicative planning and urban design governance, as well as on empirical research. First, the paper describes the emergence of q-teams and their context of indicative planning and design governance. Then, it turns to the general characteristics of q-teams, followed by the analysis of six exemplary q-teams, which are classified according to their governance profile: either regulative or indicative. Thereafter, this paper examines the tool repertoire of the teams and relates the tools and teams to the European typology of tools for urban design governance (Maestro s.a.). Finally, challenges and conclusions are formulated.

3. CONTEXT AND ADMINISTRATION

3.1. The emergence of a new generation of q-teams

In the Netherlands, the provision of spatial quality advice first started with the first aesthetic control committee in Amsterdam in 1898, followed by those in the majority of municipalities (Beek 1985). This practice of aesthetic control became mandatory in 1962 in the Housing Act, and was made voluntary in 2013 due to deregulation and

¹ For example : the Technical University of Sydney, the Government Architect of New South Wales, Kyoto Sangyo University, and Urban Maestro.

decentralization. To date, 95% of all municipalities still have an aesthetic control committee, in most cases combined with the committee for monuments and cultural heritage. These committees are often called committees for spatial quality (*commissie ruimtelijke kwaliteit*).

The starting point for a new generation of q-teams might be the 1988 Fourth Report on Spatial Planning (*Vierde Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening*) that designated spatial quality as a central aim of Dutch spatial policy. Spatial quality was defined as the balanced syntheses of user value, experiential value, and future value. Thus, the quality of architecture, urban planning, landscape architecture and public space became issues at the national, provincial and municipal levels.

In 1991, urban planner Riek Bakker, at that time Director of the Rotterdam City Development Department (*Dienst Stedelijke Ontwikkeling*) introduced a 'q-team' for the redevelopment of the Kop van Zuid district (*Kwaliteitsteam Kop van Zuid*). Bakker stated that spatial quality advice should transcend design and aesthetics. Furthermore, it should not be as interwoven into the bureaucratic system as the municipal aesthetic control committee had been. Taking the example of a design review panel in Baltimore, she appointed a q-team with five members of international renown and fame, and two members as representatives of the Rotterdam aesthetic control committee (Bakker 2013, 2016).

The example of a q-team with a broad scope and indicative profile was followed throughout the entire country. Over the next three decades, at least 139 q-teams were appointed by local, provincial and national authorities (Figure 1) (Van Assen and Van Campen 2014). They advise in collaborative settings early in planning and design processes, concerning both the built and unbuilt environment, by integrating and interpreting spatial ambitions, thus influencing decision-making on material and immaterial purposes and objects.



Figure 1: Map of the new generation of q-teams in the Netherlands (Van Assen and Van Campen 2014)

3.2. Indicative planning and the need for informal tools

The emergence of this new generation of q-teams mirrors the shift from regulative to indicative planning in the Netherlands. Indicative strategies involve collaboration and negotiation, with such plans aimed not at prescribing the material object, but at structuring and informing decision-making processes about that material object (Mastop 2000, Buitelaar 2012). Furthermore, they guide spatial transformations as 'step(s) in an ongoing sequence of events' (Buitelaar 2012, 214), with decisions being legitimised by the 'negotiated interpretation' of the planning guidance (Balz, 2018).

The new Environment and Planning Act (*Omgevingswet*), which is expected to come into force in 2022, sanctions and advances the aforementioned shift to indicative planning. It broadens the scope of planning by bringing together dozens of acts that influence the physical living environment. Good spatial and environmental quality (*omgevingskwaliteit*) comprise one of the main objectives of the Act, with health and safety being the other two.

Indicative planning requires planning tools that allow for the interpretation of policy, planning principles and 'open rules.'² However, the Act provides little guidance on the use of informal tools, with two legal provisions being relevant to design governance. First, initiators of spatial interventions are obliged to organise social participation. Second, the advice of a municipal advisory committee is *mandatory* for interventions on national monuments and *optional* for other matters. This allows municipalities to have the statutory committee next to, or combined with, informal q-team practices.

3.3. Dutch design governance

The Fourth Report (1988) also marked the beginning of national design governance with the first design policy document (*Architectuurnota, 1991*) aimed at strong institutionalization and several organisations having been established to stimulate and subsidize spatial quality and design culture. The second (1996) and third (2000) design policy documents extended the scope from architecture to cultural heritage, urban planning, landscape and infrastructure, and the integration of design in spatial

² In contrast to closed rules which can be objectively assessed, open rules offer discretionary room and require interpretation depending on the specific situation. Open rules are often elaborated in policy documents.

processes became the main goal. After 2005, Dutch design policy became more pragmatic and budgets were lowered. The current national Spatial Design Action Agenda 2017-2020 (*Actie Agenda Ruimtelijk Ontwerp*) addresses the design of spatial interventions, the development of policy, and overall *Baukultur*.³ The aim is to strengthen the cooperation between designers and clients and to support the application of design in assignments and projects.

Furthermore, Dutch design governance has moved beyond the boundaries of the built environment, as it currently includes landscape and nature. In this light, the Dutch use the concept of *design governance* where other countries may use *urban design governance* (e.g., Maestro s.a., Carmona 2013).

Dutch design governance is connected to spatial policy and planning, and as such has material and immaterial purposes. The material objectives concern 'forethought in [the] making' of spatial projects (De Jonge 2009, 28) and delivering policy and rules in order to preserve or stimulate spatial quality. Immaterial purposes stimulate reflection, 'challenge or enrich prevailing spatial concepts' (Balz 2018, 337), and identify 'relevant ideas and opportunities' (Sanders and Stappers 2012, 21). Hence, this distinction is comparable to the distinction between quality delivery and quality culture in the European typology of tools for urban design governance (EU tool typology).

Additionally, Q-teams have been expanding their scope since the 1990s. Now that the scope of the Dutch design governance has widened, we may assume that their tool repertoire will broaden as well. Q-teams, therefore, are possibly familiar with the numerous categories of the EU tool typology, although arguably some differences may occur that relate to Dutch design governance.

4. CHARACTERISTICS

The sources of evidence of the Q-factor research reveal that no two q-teams are alike. This section presents their main characteristics derived from a survey among 90 new generation q-teams⁴ (Van Assen and Van Campen 2014).

³ Baukultur refers to the Davos Declaration 2018, adopted by the European Ministers of Culture.
<https://davosdeclaration2018.ch/> (accessed May 25, 2020)

⁴ The 2012 survey was the first inventory of the new generation of q-teams. This survey was intended to be as representative as possible, however, there are limits to generalisation given that the population is not registered, so as such there is no sampling frame. Therefore, non-probability convenience sampling (or 'spread the word' sampling) was used. The questionnaire consisted of ten pre-coded and three open questions. All questions were factual, no perceptions were asked, and each team was asked to complete one questionnaire.

4.1. Commissioners and funding

Q-teams are commissioned by governments (80%) or public-private or semi-public commissioners (20%) and are active on a local, provincial or national scale.

The majority of q-teams are publicly funded. If they have a role in the assessment of building applications, the costs are included in the permit fee. In other cases, there is an earmarked budget for quality-advice, or the costs are part of a project-budget. Few teams are financed through fees levied on developers or public-private partnerships. Q-teams have individual commissioners, and some commissioners use several q-teams.⁵ No central organisation initiates, steers, governs or coordinates the practices, although the national Federation of Spatial Quality (*Federatie Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit*), established in 1931, functions as a representative of the municipal advisory committees.

The relation between q-teams and aesthetic control committees is diffuse. In most municipalities, the aesthetic control committee has been broadened to a committee for spatial quality. Thus, many (former) aesthetic control committees are q-teams, but not all q-teams are (former) aesthetic control committees.

4.2. Scope

Q-teams advise at all scales, from single buildings to entire regions to the national scale. 50% of the teams address urban developments such as city centers, residential areas, business parks and urban renewal, while 40% address landscape or water assignments on the regional scale, and the other 10% specific subjects or themes.

The composition of a team is related to the assignment, with the average number of team members being four to five and all teams consist of spatial designers (landscape architecture, urban design, architecture or public space design). On average 50% of team members are designers, often complemented by other experts, for example on cultural heritage, spatial planning, archaeology, sociology, sustainability, ecology, infrastructure, or recreation. Some q-teams have one or more nonprofessionals as members.

⁵ The Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management for example, appoints q-teams to combine spatial quality with water safety or infrastructure. The Dutch Railways (Nederlandse Spoorwegen) uses q-teams that focus on railway

stations and station surroundings, with the Railways Architect (spoorbouwmeester) as one of the members. The Board of Government Advisors (College van Rijksadviseurs) and the national Cultural Heritage Agency (Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed) participate in q-teams whenever national interests are at stake, for example regarding national cultural heritage, or water management and dike reinforcement.

The actor network of a team follows the scope of their work and consists of team- and project-related commissioners, project-related clients, designers, stakeholders and citizens. Moreover, a wider network of actors may be involved, such as societal organisations and citizens.

4.3. Level of independence

Overall, there is diversity in the level of independence. Members of q-teams can be employed by the commissioner of the team or be independent, with such independent members not falling under the responsibility of the commissioner, and have no interest in the projects under review nor do they bear any administrative responsibility for them. They are selected by a formal application process, or via societal or professional organisations.

About 15% of the teams consist entirely of internal members, 35% consist of independent members, and 50% combine independent and internal members.

4.4. Management styles

Management styles differ. Some q-teams have a regulated character with a detailed assessment framework, a carefully defined meeting schedule, and a protocol that defines how advice should be drawn up and what should happen in the event of conflicting opinions. Others have a more indicative profile, with unconstrained tasks, a global policy framework, and irregular meetings.

Some teams have a secretariat that records deliberations, and formulates and disseminates written recommendations. Other teams present their advice orally or visually, for example in presentations, via excursions or through campaigns or flyers.

5. SIX EXAMPLES

This section highlights the character and tool use of six q-teams in further detail.⁶ Although these teams are not representative for the whole population of q-teams, they can be seen as an exemplary cross-section. The q-teams can have either a regulative or an indicative governance profile (Table 1):



Figure 2. Areas the six teams advise about (numbers match the numbers in Table 1).

- Teams with a regulative profile deliver recommendations based on formal provisions, such as legal provisions, planning rules or formal agreements (Examples 1,2,3).
- Teams with an indicative profile use informal agreements, informal planning ambitions, collegial cooperation, service provisions or protocols (Examples 3,4,5).

There is no rigid division between the regulative and indicative governance profiles and they often overlap as the examples will illustrate. Furthermore, the selected teams advise about different levels and areas and are spread all over the country (Figure 2).

Governance profile	Definition	Q-teams in this study
Regulative	Q-teams that deliver recommendations based on formal provisions	1. Commissie voor Monumenten en Welstand Hoorn
		2. Commissie Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Apeldoorn
		3. Q-team Ruimte voor de Rivier
Indicative	Q-teams that deliver recommendations based on indicative plans, frameworks and agreements	4. Nije Pleats
		5. Hoeksche Waard
		6. Team Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Provincie Fryslân

Table 1. Governance profile of the six q-teams

⁶ The selection of six q-teams was based on the governance profiles. Additional selection criteria were: an even distribution across the country, variation in scale (object, area, region) and diversity of assignments (the built and unbuilt environment). Furthermore, the availability of documentation was a practical criterion. Relevant documentation was used, such as literary

publications about the teams, frameworks, team assignments, team mission statements, advisory reports, evaluation documents, annual reports, information on webpages and newspapers. The study concerns documents from the entire period of existence of four newer teams as well as a three-year period (2017-2019) for the two older committees, both of which have operated for over a hundred years.

Example 1: Commissie voor Monumenten en Welstand Hoorn (1916 - Present)

Hoorn is a city of 73.000 inhabitants, boasting a rich history as a port town. The municipal *Commissie voor Monumenten en Welstand Hoorn*, dating back to 1916 (De Vreeze 2006), is a regulative q-team. It delivers multidisciplinary advice on the conservation of monuments and the architectural quality of buildings. This independent team is appointed by the municipal council and hosted by the organisation for spatial quality in the province of Noord-Holland, *MOOI Noord-Holland*. The team advises in accordance with the policy and rules, and in order to obtain a building or monument permit, a positive advice from the team is needed, although it is non-binding for the municipal executive board. The team consists of two architects and three cultural heritage experts and pays attention to visual, social, sustainable and user qualities. The team's recommendations are public and review meetings are open to visitors. On average, this q-team addresses about 300-350 requests a year (Van Zandbergen 2018, 2019). Their assessment is part of the regular permitting process and integrated in the permit fee.

An example of a tool that this team often uses is 'pre-consultation.' Pre-consultation is an informal, voluntary dialogue early in the planning and design process. It is a review of the intended design before the permit application is made and the final formal assessment takes place. In particular, the team delivered 78 and 82 pre-consultations in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

According to the team, many initiators consider pre-consultation (2017 and 2018, respectively (ibid.)) to be welcome input as delivering advice at an early stage offers opportunities for creating added value. 'The best result is achieved if the team cooperates with the initiators and designers of building developments at an early stage when the input can easily be integrated into plans and designs... Having a constructive conversation with the initiator - aimed at creating added value - is actually more important than the final assessment' (Van Zandbergen 2018, 9, translation by the authors). Thus, in this example, investing time in pre-consultations has a double impact—it results in added value for spatial quality and a swifter and smoother final assessment of the permit application.

Example 2: Commissie Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Apeldoorn (1919 - Present)

Apeldoorn is a city of 160.000 inhabitants, with historic characteristics that are still intact. The regulative, independent *Commissie Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Apeldoorn* (CRK) is appointed by the municipal council, with this team dating back to 1919 (Segers 1994). It is hosted by the organisation for spatial quality in Gelderland,



Figure 3. *Commissie voor Monumenten en Welstand Hoorn*, photo: Mooi Noord-Holland

Gelders Genootschap. The team advises upon request and occasionally on its own initiative, with the advice provided being based on policy and rules. To obtain a building or monument permit, positive advice is needed, albeit non-binding for the municipal executive board. The committee is comprised of an architect, landscape architect, urban planner, heritage expert, restoration expert and an expert in the field of sustainability (Gelders Genootschap 2020). The team strives to advise at the earliest possible opportunity in processes, delivering pre-consultations and developing frameworks. The team cooperates with stakeholders to invite inhabitants and professionals to participate in developments, with the commission's recommendations regularly published and their meetings open to the public. The number of recommendations a year is about 650, and the assessment is part of the regular permitting process with the costs integrated in the permit fees (Gelders Genootschap and Gemeente Apeldoorn 2018).

Besides the assessment tools, the team uses other tools, such as events to explore spatial quality. In 2018, the team cooperated with the city in a design competition for the central town square that was aimed at adding value and increasing spatial quality, sustainability, and citizen participation. Four designs were submitted and 25.000 residents of Apeldoorn, invited via e-mail, voted for their favourite design. Many stakeholders contributed to the process: city officials provided input, the CRK delivered advice, local entrepreneurs developed initiatives, and inhabitants cast their votes (Gelders Genootschap and Gemeente Apeldoorn 2018, Omroep Gelderland 2018). This example illustrates how a q-team and its tools are part of the wider governance landscape.

Example 3: Kwaliteitsteam Ruimte voor de Rivier (2011 - 2016)

The national Room for the River programme focused on future (water) safety and the spatial quality of the Rhine River Delta. In this area of 24.000 hectares, floodplains were deepened, dikes were moved and secondary channels were constructed. During the programme, *Kwaliteitsteam Ruimte voor de Rivier* was commissioned and funded to coach planners and designers, and review plans and designs. This regulative q-team, appointed by the Minister for Infrastructure and Water Management, provided solicited and unsolicited advice and support based on frameworks of the national government. Additionally, the q-team developed 'soft guidelines' on quality and processes. Furthermore, their recommendations, directed to the programme management, were authoritative but not-binding (Sijmons et al. 2017). The team was comprised of a landscape architect, urban planner, river engineer, ecologist and physical geographer, with their meetings open for stakeholders and most recommendations being published. The programme management took positions in response to both the q-team's advice and the project

initiator's reaction (Klijn et al., 2013). However, not all recommendations of the team were followed. This q-team used tools and contributed to the development of other tools. Often, the tools employed were coaching, final assessment and framework development. According to the team, frequent reviews were important to achieve designs that would enhance spatial quality (Klijn et al. 2013). Therefore, the team members visited each project at least five times during the early study and design phases, before any decisions were taken, and during the realisation (Busscher et al. 2017). The team acted proactively as well as reactively.

Additionally, the team developed a design quality assessment framework with soft guidelines instead of hard rules, given that hard rules would 'conflict with the essence of planning and design – namely that each situation is different and requires another approach and solution' (Klijn et al. 2013, 292). Furthermore, 'human work leads to creativity, innovation, surprises that shouldn't be frustrated by rigid rules' (Hulsker et al. 2011, 33), and it appeared that 'the sense of being peer-reviewed made the project teams quite anxious to perform and display their best side' (Klijn et al. 2013, 292). Thus, the very idea of peer review stimulated the attitude within the project teams towards enhancing the quality of their work.



Figure 4. Q-team Hoeksche Waard, photo: Christiaan Krouwels

Example 4: Kwaliteitsteam Hoeksche Waard (2012 - Present)

Hoeksche Waard is an agricultural region of 30.000 hectares and 85.000 inhabitants south of Rotterdam. *Kwaliteitsteam Hoeksche Waard* is an independent q-team with an indicative governance profile, with their assignment being to promote and encourage regional spatial quality. This team was appointed by the partnership of five municipalities on request of societal organisations and provides solicited and unsolicited recommendations early on in processes of nature development, recreation, policy development for energy transition, the landscape integration of infrastructure projects etc. Their recommendations, based on quality criteria for the National Landscape, and the Structural Vision, are authoritative but non-binding. The team cooperates with the aesthetic control committee and cultural heritage committee, which both deliver final assessments in permitting processes. The team consists of an independent urban planner from outside the region (as the chair) and twelve regional members from social organisations. These members, with backgrounds in agriculture, landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage, recreation, sustainability, entrepreneurship etc., act on personal basis, thus combining local knowledge with independence. Recommendations are public and published on a website, and meetings are open to visitors.

This q-team uses tools and contributes to the development of tools. The tools they employ are activities rather than reviews that end in a written advisory document. One example is research by design for the village of Goudswaard. Since 2000, actors in Hoeksche Waard have been discussing plans for a polder near Goudswaard. Here, the intention was to re-introduce tidal nature in the area. As this would mean the end of the agricultural companies and activities in the polder, this topic was highly sensitive. The q-team took a stimulating and guiding role and proposed to determine cooperatively common guiding principles instead of a blueprint-based solution. Using research by design, a possible new identity for the area was examined, in which historical, programmatic, spatial and process goals were integrated. This research by design facilitated an interactive and integrative process, and the collaborative research, visualization and discussion of current and future place values resulted in more support, and spatial and programmatic opportunities for the follow-up process (Van Bergen 2017).

Example 5: Nije Pleats (2008 - Present)

The province of Fryslân is situated in the Northern part of the Netherlands, comprising an area of 5.700 square kilometres with 650.000 inhabitants. In this rural province, q-team *Nije Pleats* advises early on in design processes of expansion plans for farmsteads. The aim is to ensure the best match between the ambitions of the farmer and landscape quality. This indicative, independent q-team was initiated by the province of Fryslân and is hosted by the organisation for spatial quality in *Fryslân Hus en Hiem*. Since its launch, one hundred and forty *Nije Pleats* design workshops have been organised (Team Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Provincie Fryslân, 2019). The team works upon request of the farmer and municipality, using informal guiding principles formulated by the team. At the heart of the team are landscape designers, architects and experts of cultural heritage. In addition, other experts join, for example, planners or archeologists. The farmer often brings their own experts, such as stable builders or architects.

Nije Pleats uses design workshops and professional hands-on enabling. The team facilitates co-creative design workshops 'at the kitchen table' of farmers as the setting is informal and hands-on. The farmer, advisors, institutional actors and other relevant actors are present. Usually, one workshop is enough to come with an advice all can agree upon and one or more sketches often accompany this advice. The recommendations provide the basis for the final assessment of the permit application by the municipality. If in accordance, obtaining the permit is a formality with respect to spatial quality. Advice is confidential until it is integrated in the planning permit, meaning workshops are not open to the public. The costs of advice from *Nije Pleats*

amount to approximately 2500 euro, to be paid by the farmer, although one municipality refunds permit fees when farmers consult *Nije Pleats*. *Nije Pleats* has proven to be successful because it ensures the functionality and sustainability of a farm, combined with the quality of the landscape. It results in enhanced spatial quality and a more rapid development process for the farmer. Additionally, the informal design workshops form an alternative for formal rules, and the team has contributed to the development of guiding principles in their first years and now represents a successful tailor-made solution that shortens traditional planning procedures. As such, the province of Fryslân has stopped developing a formal planning framework for the enlargement of agricultural plots larger than 1,5 hectares. Instead, provincial policy now obliges farmers to use the *Nije Pleats* method to address landscape quality (Provincie Fryslân, 2014).

Example 6: Team Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Provincie Fryslân (2008- Present)



Figure 5. *Team Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Provincie Fryslân*, photo: Sandra van Assen

In the same province, *Team Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Provincie Fryslân* aims at influencing and supporting spatial and environmental quality in policy, programs and projects. This indicative team is involved in integrative issues such as energy transition, reducing carbon emissions and circular agriculture. It started as a self-organised internal team, providing solicited and unsolicited advice based on provincial policy and rules. In addition, as the themes and places dealt with are diverse, the team has no fixed principles but instead uses specific theme- and place-based criteria. Recommendations are collegial and not-binding. The team consists of provincial designers and other provincial experts on archaeology, heritage, infrastructure and sustainability, and makes use of a number of tools, such as explorative and design workshops, fieldwork, events and research by design. Moreover, the team develops frameworks and participates in the selection of the best offer in tenders related to spatial quality, with their input seamlessly integrated during planning and design processes. In weekly meetings the common thread of the advisory work is coordinated and if possible, recommendations are made public. Meetings are open to governmental clients and colleagues. The team has successfully expanded its output over the years, earning a justified position within the organisation given that it now has an extensive track record of hundreds of recommendations (Van Campen et al. 2015).

An example of a tool used by the team is the development of frameworks. In 2014, the team drafted a spatial quality policy document, entitled *Grutsk op 'e romte* (Proud of the Frisian landscape). During the co-creation process, a wide range of disciplines was involved, and workshops and field trips were organised to solicit feedback from a large number of actors. The final framework allows for the identification of key attributes of the cultural landscape and provides guiding principles for the

development thereof. *Grutsk op 'e romte* was formally approved by the provincial council (Fermo et al. 2014, Van Campen et al. 2015). Since then, it has been an important framework for provincial policy and projects. Additionally, it is frequently being used by municipalities as a framework for local developments or to elaborate guidance on a local level. The document was included in the provincial vision for the built and unbuilt environment. Thus, the informal process of developing frameworks has had double impact, resulting in an enhanced quality culture, as well as increased quality delivery.

6. TOOL REPERTOIRE

The six portrayed q-teams all use more tools than described. This section analyses the tools and relates them to the EU tool typology.

Advice categories and tools

Together, the six teams use at least 20 tools, with Table 2 and Appendix 1 presenting an overview of the observed tools related to the purpose of the advice: policy, exploration, design development or assessment. The first three categories concern both material and immaterial objectives of design, with the last one predominantly concerning material objectives. The q-teams use more tools when delivering policy advice (7) and exploratory advice (5) than for design development advice (4) and assessment (4).

Advice categories	Purpose	Tools
Policy advice	Advice on general spatial quality policy and rules	Research Research by design (policy) Policy development workshop Framework development Dissemination Policy feedback Field-work
Exploratory advice	Early advice on specific areas, transformations or developments, exploring opportunities and conditions for spatial quality before design processes start or permit applications are made	Research by design (design) Events Explorative workshop Designer selection Excursions
Design development advice	Advice on the design of a specific transformation or development aimed at elaborating or refining the spatial quality of a design or plan	Design workshop Coaching Enabling Site-visits
Assessment	Expert judgement linked to formal procedures, culminating in advice to decision-makers	Pre-consultation Final assessment Jury Tender

Table 2. Advice categories and tools

Tool repertoire and governance profile

Table 3 lists the tool repertoire of the six q-teams in relation to their governance profile. All teams deliver advice in at least three advice categories and use eight different tools or more. *Team Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit Provincie Fryslân*, for example, uses 18 out of the 20 tools. Furthermore, tools for design development advice form the central axis underpinning all teams.

Q-teams do not use financial incentives, as they usually do not have financial resources to encourage better outcomes or to stimulate predefined ends. However, the study demonstrates that in fact some q-teams do function as incentives or as means to enable (regulative) processes to run more smoothly and rapidly. They foster public support, bridge interests, and serve as alternative mechanisms for formal planning frameworks. However, taking into consideration the modest incentive of the one municipality that refunds fees when q-team advice is followed (*Nije Pleats*); any financial incentive can be seen as a missing link.

Regulative teams have a broad repertoire of tools, together using 12 out of 20 tools, with their tools serving all advice categories. Nevertheless, there is a focus on tools that serve design development advice and the assessment of design in formal procedures. Additionally, regulative teams organise excursions to explore or evaluate thematic issues. Two regulative teams deliver advice during the development of policy, and organise or participate in knowledge- or policy-oriented fieldwork. The tool repertoire of regulative teams mainly concerns material objectives of design, although they may use tools that have immaterial objectives or side effects (such as dissemination, framework development, fieldwork, events, and excursions).

Indicative teams have a larger tool repertoire than regulative q-teams, particularly in the categories of policy advice and exploratory advice. Together, they use 18 out of 20 tools. Their tool repertoire serves all advice categories, but mainly supports policy advice, exploratory advice and design development advice. Two of the indicative teams do not deliver assessments. The tool repertoires of the three indicative teams serve both the material and immaterial objectives of design.

Thus, the case study acknowledges that q-teams with a different governance profile utilise different tools, although there are subtle differences between the tool repertoires of the individual teams with similar governance profiles.

Advice category	Tools	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
		regulative			indicative		
Policy advice	Research				X	X	X
	Research by design (policy)						X
	Policy development workshop				X		X
	Framework development		X	X	X	X	X
	Dissemination			X	X	X	X
	Policy feedback	X	X			X	X
	Field-work	X	X				X
Exploratory advice	Research by design (design)				X	X	X
	Event		X			X	X
	Explorative workshop		X			X	X
	Designer selection						X
	Excursions	X	X	X		X	X
Design development advice	Design workshop				X	X	X
	Coaching	X	X	X		X	X
	Enabling	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Site-visits	X	X	X	X	X	X
Assessment	Pre-consultation	X	X	X			
	Final assessment	X	X	X			
	Jury						X
	Tender						X

Table 3. Tool repertoire of the six q-teams

Q-teams as meta-instruments

The EU tool typology is based on a classification of formal versus informal tools and quality culture versus quality delivery tools. The EU tool typology distinguishes nine tool categories:

- Informal quality culture tools: analysis, information, persuasion
- Informal quality delivery tools: rating, support, exploration
- Formal quality delivery tools: guidance, incentive, control

According to Urban Maestro, 'it is important not to be overly rigid in how the classification is used. In reality, many tools have both culture and delivery implications, and the division between the formal and informal tools of the state are not hard and fast. The classification is instead a relational tool, designed to understand and relate broad types, rather than to strictly classify' (Urban Maestro s.a., 4).

When the 20 q-team tools are assigned to the EU tool typology (see Appendix 2), the tools do not always match the EU tool typology's vocabulary. For example, what q-teams call the 'final assessment' tool matches the category 'rating' in the EU tool typology, but a synonym for 'final assessment' in the Netherlands would be 'control.' However, the EU category of 'control' does not match the 'final assessment' tool, nor does it match any of the other Dutch q-team tools. Comparing tools across Europe may support knowledge dissemination; however, there is a risk of getting lost in translation.

With this disclaimer, the study reveals that all tools fit into one or more categories of the EU tool typology. In fact, many of the tools fit the categories of exploration, support and persuasion. Regulative q-teams mostly use tools that fit into the category support, where indicative q-teams mainly use tools that fit into the categories of support, persuasion and exploration. Again, this acknowledges that q-teams with different governance profiles use different tools and that indicative teams have a broader tool repertoire than regulative teams.

Table 4 summarizes how the six q-teams are classified based on their tool repertoire. Q-teams are familiar with six of the nine tool categories from the EU tool typology. This shows that q-teams are multi-purpose design governance instruments. For the most part, the three regulative teams operate as rating and support instruments, while the three indicative teams operate as instruments for analysis, persuasion, support, exploration and guidance. Since they hardly use information, incentive or control tools, they are not informational, incentive or control instruments.

Governance profile	Q-TEAM	EU tool typology								
		IQCT			IQDT			FQDT		
		Analysis	Information	Persuasion	Rating	Support	Exploration	Guidance	Incentive	Control
Regulative	T1				x	x				
	T2			x	x	x				
	T3			x	x	x		x		
Indicative	T4	x	x			x	x	x		
	T5	x	x			x	x	x	x	
	T6	x	x			x	x	x		

Table 4. Six q-teams related to the EU typology of tools

Regulative q-teams cannot be considered as formal instruments and indicative q-teams do not solely use informal tools, given that both use quality delivery and quality culture tools. The common denominator of regulative and indicative q-teams is therefore their roles as support and persuasion instruments.

Thus, in the Dutch situation, the boundaries between tool categories are thin or even non-existent. Even after considering their main objectives, the teams cannot be assigned to one single category of the EU tool typology. Their considerable matching with several tool categories reveals the broad scope of the Dutch q-teams. Additionally, although the findings are based on a small sample size and primarily on document-based research, the results do point out that q-teams may be considered as meta-instruments of design governance.

7. KEY LESSONS AND TRANSFERABILITY

Balancing act

As meta-instruments, q-teams use different tools to steer public and private actors towards good spatial quality of the built and unbuilt environment. This combination of tools allows teams to customize the advisory process, given that the teams need to pick the right tools for every advice situation and create a balance between informal and formal tools. As such, Q-teams should be responsive to individual situations and offer flexibility and potential for collaboration and integration. On the other hand, they require legitimacy and formal planning tools as a condition and backstop for the application of informal tools. The coherence between robustness and flexibility, introduced by Hartman, Parra and De Roo (2015), may prove fruitful for the future research agenda: 'the concepts of robustness and flexibility allow for a more systematic analysis of practice and provide analytical leverage on planning practices' (Hartman, Parra and De Roo 2015, referring to Gershenson, 2007 and Portugali et al., 2012). Presumably, informal tools allow for the necessary flexibility, whereas formal tools result in the robustness of the meta-instruments.

Choosing the right team and tools for the right situation at the right time seems crucial, so therefore the members of q-teams need the necessary skills to both use and choose the tools. Insight into this balancing act may add to a better understanding and performance of the q-teams.

Boundary spanning practices

Q-teams are flexible and loose structures, in terms of their composition and operating rules, which is useful for ensuring the right expertise for each type of development. Nevertheless, q-teams are an instrument in a wider design governance landscape and do not work in isolation. They manifest themselves as boundary spanning practices, enhancing 'collaboration across institutional and disciplinary boundaries' (Brink et al. 2019, 13, referring to Neuvel & Van der Knaap, 2010; Huntjens et al., 2012) and engaging the public in their processes. In doing so, q-teams help to bridge gaps between actors. Moreover, they stimulate and coach designers, assist in adding value and 'enable the cross-fertilisation of ideas, knowledge and interests' (Busscher et al., 2018, p. 10).

The potential positive impact of these practices seems to be highly consistent, but again members of q-teams need the skills necessary to span the boundaries between private and public interests, between planning and design, between expertise and participation, and between formal and informal tools.

Reflecting indicative planning

The mixed use of formal and informal tools and the broadening scope of spatial quality in q-team practices represent the changing mechanisms of the planning system. The interplay between hard (regulative) and soft (indicative) governance allows q-teams to not only operate within the governance frameworks, but to interpret and influence those frameworks as well. The previous examples illustrate that the teams use and create tools, and that the informal q-team method sometimes serves as an alternative to formal rules. Additionally, Dutch q-teams deliver recommendations that are non-binding and not prescriptive (no boxes to tick). In doing so, they support negotiations on the interpretation of the planning guidance (Balz, 2018), delivering added value and leverage along the way. As such, expert input through q-teams and similar mechanisms may prove vital in complex spatial quality issues. The broader range of tools allows for discussion and debate on public interests, integrating participatory formats and activating new innovative actors.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This paper contributes to knowledge about European design governance tools, by providing insight into the tools used by Dutch spatial quality teams (q-teams). Since the 1990s, a new generation of q-teams has emerged in the Netherlands. This younger generation advises in collaborative settings early on in the planning and design processes concerning both the built and the unbuilt environment. Their character and tool repertoire mirror indicative approaches in planning and design that are increasingly based on collaboration, deliberation, and stimulating bottom-up initiatives, in order to strengthen defined public interests.

To examine what tools the Dutch q-teams use, this paper utilized literature on indicative planning and urban design governance, in addition to empirical research. It related q-team practices to the EU tool typology, and six exemplary q-teams were examined in detail, being classified for this analysis according to their governance profile as either regulative or indicative.

The sources of evidence on which this study is based demonstrated that no two q-teams are the same. Q-teams predominantly use informal tools, regardless of their regulative or indicative profile. In total, the study listed 20 q-team tools that encompass numerous categories of the EU tool typology, although they do not necessarily overlap on a one-to-one basis. Some q-team tools, for example, match with more than one category in the EU tool typology. The tool repertoire illustrates that there are no sharp dividing lines between formal and informal tools, nor are there any between quality delivery and quality culture. Q-teams with a regulative governance profile can use informal tools, and q-teams with indicative profiles use informal tools. An advice on quality delivery often influences quality culture and vice versa. It is precisely the combination of tools that allows q-teams to customize their advisory processes. Furthermore, q-teams use design governance tools, albeit simultaneously also influencing these tools. For example, q-teams may operate within policy frameworks, but also develop and influence them as well.

Although conclusions have been drawn from a small sample of q-teams and further research is ongoing, this study presents q-teams as a meta-instrument for design governance. They alter their tool repertoire depending on the situation. While evidence gathering on their influence is ongoing, the potential positive impact of q-team practices appears consistent. The mix and mixing of tools result in flexibility and robustness, and this interplay between tools allows q-teams to use and influence frameworks. This continuous balancing act requires skills, networks, knowledge and political awareness.

The rise of this new generation of q-teams with a broadening scope and mixed tool repertoire, represent the changing mechanisms of the planning system. Q-teams operate between general policy and specific rules, projects and areas, integrating and interpreting general spatial ambitions in specific situations, thus influencing decision-making on material and immaterial purposes and objects. The extensive tool repertoire at their disposal is precisely what makes q-teams a versatile instrument of precision in design governance.

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APPENDIX 1. ADVICE CATEGORIES, TOOLS INCLUDING DESCRIPTIONS

Advice categories	Purpose	Tools	Description
Policy advice	Advice on general spatial quality policy and rules	Research	Use of research to collect data, test hypotheses, determine spatial characteristics, etc.
		Research by design (policy)	Use of design to explore and analyse policy issues, test hypotheses, support societal dialogue, etc.
		Policy development workshop	Participation in, or the organisation of, an interactive meeting with actors and designers to explore or develop policy, with active support of designers
		Framework development	Development of operational policy or design parameters to direct the spatial quality of an area or development project
		Dissemination	(Public) dissemination of knowledge, such as guides, folders, films, exhibitions, (annual) evaluations, and any similar manifestations
		Policy feedback	Advice or feedback during the development of policy regarding aspects of the spatial quality
		Field-work	Organisation of or participation in knowledge- or policy-oriented field trips with relevant actors, alongside on-site experimentation
Exploratory advice	Early advice on specific areas, transformations or developments, exploring opportunities and conditions for spatial quality before design processes start or permit applications are made	Research by design (design)	Use of design to explore opportunities and conditions, to test specific hypotheses, etc.
		Events	Participation in, or the organisation of, a public event(s) to explore or draw attention to transformations, such as a competition, public/political discussions etc.
		Explorative workshop	Participation in, or the organisation of, an interactive meeting with actors and designers to explore a specific transformation, with the active support of designers
		Designer selection	Advice or feedback during the selection of designers at the start of the design processes
		Excursions	Exploratory trips with relevant actors, dedicated to a specific transformation
Design development advice	Advice on the design of a specific transformation or development aimed at elaborating or refining the spatial quality of the design or plan	Design workshop	Participation in, or the organisation of, an interactive meeting of actors and designers participating in a transformation, with active support of designers
		Coaching	Provide professional advice on how to attain design goals, supervision
		Enabling	Enhancing the possibilities of actors and designers to fit their plans into the context, enhancing progress of a design processes, co-design
		Site-visits	Site-visits with actors and designers participating in a transformation, with the active support of designers
Assessment	Expert judgement linked to formal procedures, culminating in advice to decision-makers	Pre-consultation	Review of the intended design (shortly) before the permit-application is made
		Final assessment	Review of the design during the formal permitting and decision-making procedures
		Jury	(Participation in) the selection of the winners from entries submitted for a competition related to spatial quality
		Tender	(Participation in) the selection of the best offer from the tenders related to spatial quality

APPENDIX 2. Q-TEAM TOOLS AND THE EU TOOL TYPOLOGY

Advice categories	Q-team tools	EU tool typology								
		IQCT			IQDT			FQDT		
		Analysis	Information	Persuasion	Rating	Support	Exploration	Guidance	Incentive	Control
Policy advice	Research	x								
	Research by design (policy)	x					x			
	Policy development workshop						x	x		
	Framework development		x	x				x		
	Dissemination		x	x				x		
	Policy feedback					x				
	Field-work						x			
Exploratory advice	Research by design (design)	x					x			
	Events			x						
	Explorative workshop			x		x	x			
	Designer selection							x		
	Excursions			x		x	x			
Design development advice	Design workshop			x		x	x			
	Coaching					x				
	Enabling					x			x	
	Site-visits			x		x	x			
Assessment	Pre-consultation					x				
	Final assessment					x				x
	Jury					x				
	Tender					x				

Explanation of abbreviations:

IQCT: Informal Quality Culture Tools: informally influencing the broad culture in which spatial quality is prioritised

IQDT: Informal Quality Delivery Tools: shaping actual projects and places by informal influence on decision-making

FQDT: Formal Quality Delivery Tools: shaping actual projects and places by formal influence on decision-making

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URBAN MAESTRO

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