Q-factor: Dutch Spatial Quality Advisory Practices

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Work in progress; please contact authors before quote.

Keywords

Abstract

This paper addresses spatial quality advisory practices in the Netherlands. In our paper we introduce the emerging practice of spatial quality teams (q-teams) in the Netherlands as a subject of both planning and spatial design research. We aim to contribute to the international discourse on design review and further development of spatial quality advisory practices. The research, involving 139 q-teams, indicates that the Dutch q-teams and their 'fuzzy legality' (Cohn, 2001) are an important aspect of Dutch planning culture since 1990. Q-teams build on the tradition of aesthetic advisory committees, but have a broader scope and more discretionary space. The Dutch spatial quality advisory practice has added new methods to the existing systems of design review and aesthetic control. In our view the Dutch spatial quality advisory practice is an expression of the indicative and collaborative planning and design culture and is not due to specific regulations. We argue that the recent Dutch q-teams can offer a hub of professional creativity and knowledge, a deliberative stage and a political environment to discuss spatial quality as a public value. This paper provides an overview of the characteristics of q-teams and discusses how to assess their impact. We conclude with a research agenda aimed at a theoretical framework to assess the performance and conformance (Faludi, 1973, 1987, 2000; Faludi & Altes, 1994) of q-teams, and understanding of the importance and role of public value, expertise, designerly and plannerly ways of knowing.

Introduction

This paper addresses the widespread emergence of *spatial quality teams* in the Netherlands since the early nineties of the last century, by which time the Dutch seem to have entered a new phase in design review. The Dutch have a long history in this area, starting in 1898 with the precursor of the aesthetic control committee[1] in Amsterdam. During the first three decades of the twentieth century the majority of municipalities followed by setting up an aesthetic control committee (Beek, 1985). In 1962 the practice of aesthetic control became statutory in the Housing Act. Due to the desire of deregulation and decentralization, this obligation was skipped in 2013. Aesthetic control committees are not unique for the Netherlands. Scholars in the UK, USA and New Zealand described the rise of architectural advisory panels (Punter, 1984), commissions of fine arts (Carmona & Renninger, 2018; Punter, 1984, 2007; Youngson, 1990), design review boards (Scheer & Preiser, 1994), advisory panels or review panels (Gjerde, 2013) and urban design panels (Wood, 2014). Scholars extensively described the development of Dutch aesthetic control committees (Beek, 2014; Nelissen & De Vocht, 1988, 1991; Nelissen & Ten Cate, 2009; Punter, 2003; van Weert, 1999). Several of them noted that the Netherlands have had a leading role in developing systems of aesthetic control (Nelissen, 2002; Punter, 2003).

The Dutch system of statutory aesthetic control, however, is only one part of the picture. The complementary, less-statutory advisory practices developed by multidisciplinary teams of experts, focused on the early stages of planning and design processes, seem to go unnoticed in research and academic literature. In the thirties and forties of the twentieth century the first "spatial quality teams avant la lettre" can be recognized (Beek, 2014). In retrospect, however, we can mark the initiation of the Q-team Kop van Zuid for the harbour redevelopment in Rotterdam (Bakker, 2013, 2016) and the municipal Spatial Quality Control Committee of Bussum (Van Campen 2008; Zonneveld, 1992), as the starting point of a broad and rapid rise of spatial quality advisory practices (Van Assen & Van Campen, 2014). Over the last three decades, at least 139 spatial quality teams and spatial quality control committees (both hereafter called 'q-teams') were established by local, regional, provincial and national authorities. The rise of q-teams is not due to specific regulations but, as we will argue in this paper, it can be seen as an expression of the indicative and collaborative planning and design culture in the Netherlands. In the background we see the political and societal discourse on spatial quality as public value. In 1988, in the Fourth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning (*Vierde Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening*), spatial quality was designated as central aim of Dutch national policy. The approach of spatial quality was based on the quality concept that Vitruvius described anno 60 B.C. in his 'De Architectura': architectural quality is the balanced synthesis of durability, convenience and beauty (Morgan, 1914). The Fourth Policy Document transferred this concept to contemporary spatial planning and design policy, aimed at increasing the future value, the use value and the amenity quality of an area. Currently, the concept of spatial quality is receiving a legal basis in the Environment and Planning Act (*Omgevingswet*) which is expected to come into effect in 2021. One of the societal objectives of the Act is to achieve and maintain good *spatial environment quality*. With this term, the concept of spatial quality is broadened to a synthesis of culture and nature. This does not, however, result in the disappearance of the older approaches. In the current Dutch discourse on spatial quality three approaches are used - and often confused: visual quality (narrow approach), spatial coherence (broad approach) and spatial environment quality (integrative approach) (Stolk, 2015; Van Campen, 2013).

In search for the theoretical underpinning of spatial quality advisory practices, a comprehensive holistic picture is missing. A quick scan of discourses in the fields of planning and design provides a number of themes that may contribute to frame the phenomenon. *Creativity* is a frequent topic of discussion. Aesthetic control and design review are at times considered restrictive on creativity and exceptional works (Delafons, 1994). This phenomenon even has a name: "The 'Dolby' effect: a review that cuts out the highs and the lows" (Scheer & Preiser, 1994, p. 6). In the case of q-teams the

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[1] See glossary with specific Dutch terms at the end of this paper.

opposite might be possible, as q-teams are expected to activate and stimulate creativity. Another theme is the *public interest*. Q-teams work in commission of public authorities; they are public bodies that collaborate on individual cases (plans, projects, designs) with individual actors (clients, designers, stakeholders) (Noordegraaf, 2015). Spatial quality advisory practices necessitate a *broad conception of context* in which space, actors, interests and politics converge. Comprehensive research on the practices of CABE (UK) confirms the importance of this presumption by introducing the concept of 'macro-context' as "the full range of influences that act together to shape the process and thereby the outcomes of urban change" (Carmona, Magelhaes, & Natarajan, 2017, pp. 5-6). Another theme is *multidisciplinarity*. Although we do discern a growing body of literature on multidisciplinary teamwork, it is to a large extend related to different fields of work (Beech & Crane, 1999; Max-Neef, 2005; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Where multidisciplinarity is reported in relation to design review and aesthetic control committees, it is by noticing a shortage of expertise and skills in the fields of architecture or urban design (Dawson & Higgins, 2009; Punter, 1993). The multidisciplinary *dialogue* that takes place in spatial quality advisory practices is another theme. It offers the opportunity to bridge different interests, create meaning, exchange knowledge and ideas, catalyze reflection and incentivize learning and innovation. Habermas and Healey emphasize the value of 'opening conversations' (Healey, 1997) to transcend different perspectives, values and truths: "when these dialogues are reflexive we can arrive at the richest conceptions" (Habermas (1993) in Healey, 1997).

On the assessment of the impact of spatial quality advisory practices, research into the effectiveness of aesthetic control committees (Carmona et al., 2017; Gjerde, 2013; Nelissen, 2002; Punter, 1999, 2003) is of limited use because q-teams have a broader scope and more discretionary space. The essence of q-teams apparently lies in their 'fuzzy legality' (Cohn, 2001) which makes it challenging to assess their impact. But still, in their pursuit of spatial quality, q-teams must be able to account for their usefulness and necessity. The need for deeper understanding of (the perception of) impact is felt by all stakeholders of q-teams who participated in our research (Van Assen & Van Campen, 2014).

By providing insight in the Dutch spatial quality advisory practices and probing an appropriate theoretical approach to assess the impact of q-teams, we aim to contribute to the international discourse on design review and further development of spatial quality advisory practices. The research questions we address in this paper are: *(1) What are the characteristics of the Dutch spatial quality advisory practices? (2) How to assess their impact?* In the next section we will present the results of our research among 139 q-teams. After that, we will discuss how to approach the impact of spatial quality advisory practices, and thereafter present our findings as well as a research agenda to further elaborate these findings. We end with a brief conclusion.

Characteristics of q-teams in the Netherlands

In this section we present the results of our research on Dutch q-teams from 2012 till 2014. The research started while working in practice, driven by curiosity and amazed no research could be found on this topic. We assumed q-teams, active at all scales and in various types of spatial projects, to have a distinct influence on planning and design practices. The aim was to open up the black box of the q-team practices. We preliminary defined a q-team as *a multidisciplinary team of experts that advises on matters of spatial quality in spatial assignments*. With this definition we included spatial quality control committees but excluded monodisciplinary aesthetic control committees and individual supervisors. The term 'multidisciplinarity' was used as a basic concept to indicate all kinds of collaboration between different disciplines within a q-team, drawing on their disciplinary knowledge.

We used both quantitative and qualitative research methods and started with a survey. We were able to identify 139 teams, of which 90 teams responded (65%). Subsequently we processed and visualized the data statistically in an Atlas of Dutch q-teams (Van Assen & Van Campen, 2014). To

explore the perception of team members and their commissioners and clients, we used qualitative methods: in-depth interviews with key persons, observations and focus groups, integrated in two seminars. The research was supervised by an advisory committee with members from academia (Delft University of Technology), local and provincial government and designers.

Commission and composition

80% of the 90 responding q-teams had a governmental commissioner, on local, provincial or national scale. The other 20% were public-private partnerships or semi-public organisations. 52% of the responding teams advised mainly on urban developments: city center developments, residential areas, business parks and urban renewal. 37% advised on landscape or water assignments on the regional scale, like the ensemble of world heritage Beemster Polder, the increasing scale in agriculture or recreational developments. The other 11% was focused on various subjects or themes. Q-teams with urban focus usually had a municipality as commissioner. Seven of the twelve provinces were commissioner of a provincial q-team. Several q-teams with assignments on regional, provincial or national scale, had joint commissioning of the state, province and municipalities. Nearly 50% of the responding q-teams functioned in cooperation with, or with mandate of, a local aesthetic control committee.

The composition of the q-teams varied, depending on the spatial assignment of the area and the ambitions of the commissioner. The average number of team members was four to five, more than half of which consisted of spatial designers (landscape architecture, urban design, architecture or public space design). Other disciplines were: cultural history, public space, spatial planning, archaeology, sociology, housing, sustainability, ecology and nature, (planning) economics, finance, infrastructure, water management, welfare, recreation and tourism, and public administration. Some q-teams also had one or more laymen as member.

Typology: specific or generic

The research showed that no two q-teams are exactly alike. Considering the plurality of the phenomenon we did not seek strict categorization or best practice principles. Our analysis revealed a typology of specific and generic q-teams and six main characteristics (see below) that contribute to the profile of a q-team.

A *specific q-team* operates within the framework of a specific planning or development area, within physical boundaries of the spatial assignment, such as an urban development zone or an infrastructural or landscape development. The team guides and assesses individual projects on their contribution to the quality of the whole. The specific q-team can play a role in design tenders and in the implementation phases. The assessment framework is often an urban or landscape master plan, possibly elaborated in a zoning plan, an urban development plan, a visual quality plan or an aesthetic policy document. The team is mostly set up for the duration of the project.

An example of a specific q-team is the Quality Team Room for the River. Established by the minister of Transport, Public Works, this q-team started early in the project Room for the River (2006). Unrestrained by formal governmental or institutional opinions the advisory practice is independent. The five specialists represent a broad focus: landscape architecture, urban planning, river engineering, ecology and physical geography. All experts are experienced and acquainted with the Rhine River delta. The advisory practice is proactive as well as reactive, featuring a balanced mix of excellent professional knowledge, power of persuasion and adequate procedures. The Q-team was commissioned to coach planners and designers and to peer review the designs and plans. For monitoring and reporting to the minister the Q-team's uses a 'logbook' of written recommendations and final judgments per project and public (multi-)annual reports (Klijn, Bruin, Hoog, Jansen, & Sijmons, 2013).

A generic q-team operates within administrative boundaries: a province, region, municipality or district. The team has a broad task. It can bring up topics for discussion, stimulate, investigate, supervise, assess and evaluate. The generic team is seen as interface between the spatial vision established for an area and the diverse planned and spontaneous initiatives of private and public actors. The assessment framework is often strategic and abstract, like a vision document or an indicative quality policy document. The team usually has an indefinite end date.

An example of a generic q-team is the Quality Team Fryslân (Team ruimtelijke kwaliteit), a non-statutory provincial team. This internal q-team consists of designers (50%) and experts on archaeology, heritage, infrastructure and sustainability (50%). Since the start (2008) the team focusses on proactive advising and is involved in projects on different scales throughout the province, relying mainly on professional authority and their understanding of the context. The advisory practice often takes place in discussions, fieldwork, boat trips, sketch sessions or in project groups. This way the team seamlessly integrates its input during the spatial planning and design processes. The weekly team meetings are meant to monitor the red thread of the advisory processes. Clients are welcome to join. The team works with a broad interpretation of spatial quality, no fixed principles or criteria, a spatial vision as a reference framework and informal evaluation of their work (Van Campen, Van Assen, Fermo, De Jong, & Van Weezel Errens, 2015).

Main characteristics

In our research we identified six main characteristics that contribute to the profile of a q-team: (1) role, (2) spatial quality focus, (3) degree of independence, (4) degree of disclosure of the work, (5) degree of regulation and (6) authority.

The first main characteristic is the *role*. Q-teams can play a role in spatial and design processes from start to finish. Depending on the timing the emphasis is on collaboration, interpretation or assessment. Some teams are also involved in the selection of designers and/or design themselves. A reactive q-team advises almost only when asked to do so. This team is primarily aimed at supervising and assessing plans and projects that are submitted to the team by the commissioner, the clients or other external parties. A proactive q-team offers both solicited and unsolicited advice and plays an active role in raising discussion. It stimulates spatial innovation, brings parties together, initiates projects and research and plays a role in public discussions on spatial questions.

The *spatial quality focus* of q-teams can vary, parallel to the three approaches in the Dutch discourse on spatial quality (Stolk, 2015; Van Campen, 2013). A visual quality-team emphasizes urban design, architecture or landscape design and is made up largely of urban designers, architects and landscape architects. A spatial coherence-focused team emphasizes the qualitative integration of a project into its territorial context. In addition to the above-mentioned designers, it usually includes spatial experts such as cultural historians, archaeologists, public space designers and planners. The spatial environmental quality-team focuses on a comprehensive consideration of the interests and values of various actors and policy sectors. The team includes not only experts from the spatial disciplines but also of other disciplines such as ecology, sustainability, water management, sociology or (planning) economics.

The definition employed for the *degree of independence* is that an independent member does not work under the responsibility of the commissioner to whom she or he advises, has no vested interest in the project under review and does not bear any administrative responsibility for it. Although the independence of aesthetic control committees is legally required since 1991 (Nijmeijer, 2001) and the importance of independence is stressed in literature and case law (Nelissen & De Vocht, 1991; Nijmeijer, 2001) we see variations in the degree of independence of q-team members. We distinguish an internal q-team (14%) that consists entirely of non-independent members, a mixed q-team (48%) that is made up of a combination of independent and non-independent members and an independent q-team (31%) made up entirely of independent members (7% non-response). There

is a correlation between the degree of independence and the focus on control: the more control, the more independent members.

The next characteristic is the *degree of disclosure* of the work of the q-team. Are the advices published in public sources? Is the team visible and findable or is it 'hidden'? Are its meetings open to the public and does it communicate with the outside world? We distinguish a closed, semi-closed or disclosed character. A closed character means that the team advises only its own commissioner. The advices are not published and meetings are held behind closed doors. Q-teams with a semi-closed character make their advices available to their commissioner as well as to the client and other stakeholders of the project under review. Q-teams with a disclosed character publish their advices (usually on the internet), their meetings are open to the public and freely accessible, these teams enter into dialogue with their visitors and evaluate their work in annual reports or evaluations. Only 20% of the research population could be classified as disclosed.

The *degree of regulation* refers to the extent to which q-team work is bound to assessment frameworks, design guidance rules or protocols. An unregulated q-team has an inspirational, unconstrained task and works on the basis of a global policy framework and global objectives. A semi-regulated q-team has some necessary regulation established (a short protocol for example) and then improvises depending on the advice request. The regulated q-team has a carefully defined assessment framework and protocol. Q-teams with more focus on the assessment of projects record their working methods more often in advance because they are bound by permit periods and have to offer legal certainty. A certain standardization is possible when the objects of advice are clear and comparable.

The *authority* is seen as the way q-teams use their professional knowledge, skills and persuasiveness. Some q-teams derive their status mainly from protocols and procedures. Other q-teams rely heavily on their professional authority and have little regard for the context in which the advising takes place. Therefore, their advices sometimes stay unnoticed or unanswered. Combining (excellent) professional knowledge with power of persuasion and adequate procedures seems the best. The Q-team Room for the Rivers for example concluded: "It was our experience that in practice the informal coaching produced more design quality than only a formal procedure might have, but on the other hand this may not have been the case without the formal procedures sustaining it. In our opinion, this double approach pays off in the high quality of the designs that are now being implemented" (Klijn et al., 2013, p. 297).

Assessing the impact of q-teams

The results of spatial quality advisory practices are not always self-evident and tangible. During interviews and focus groups, team members and commissioners indicated that q-teams must be able to account for their usefulness and necessity, if only to be prepared for cutbacks and liberalization. The need for a better view and deeper understanding of (the perception of) impact is felt by all stakeholders of q-teams that we interviewed.

The international discourse on design review and design governance focusses on the pros and cons and the formulation of principles for review (Carmona et al., 2017; Punter, 1999, 2007). We could not find an answer to the question how to assess the impact of q-teams. Assessing this impact is difficult, "not least because 'other material considerations' constantly intrude into every control decision" (Punter & Carmona, 1997, p. 333). This applies even more strongly to the plural spatial quality advisory practices, which are not only concerned with control but also with collaborative and interpretative dialogues. The qualitative returns, the creation of public value, the influence on decision-making and the significance for the planning and design disciplines are not made explicit.

For an approach of the assessment of the impact of spatial quality advisory practices we turn to Faludi's theory on plan conformance and plan performance (1973, 1987, 2000; Faludi & Altes, 1994), developed in the context of his decision-centered view of planning. Faludi does not deny the importance of substantive knowledge but argues against the idea that planning is only the

application of substantive knowledge. He states that planning is concerned with improving day-to-day decision-making. Decision-making is thereby understood as the broad process that precedes decision-taking (Friend&Jessop, 1969, in Faludi, 1973, p. 234).

> "The planner negotiates much like everybody else. […] In order to be really helpful to his or her clients he or she must have a special understanding of, and also empathy for, their situation. Plans have no superior claims to be implemented. They form part of an intricate web of influences on on-going decision-making (Faludi, 1987, p. 114).

According to Faludi, planning tools and decision-making are the primary object of planning. Planning works indirectly, therefore we cannot measure the effectiveness of plans by the conformance of the implementation to the plan.

> "Planning has no material object. Planning is rearranging decisions, not intervening in the material world as such" (Faludi, 1987, p. 128). "The purpose of plans […] is to help improve the quality of subsequent decisions" (Faludi & Altes, 1994, p. 407). "A plan is fulfilling its purpose, and is in this sense 'performing', if and only if it plays a tangible role in the choices of the actors to whom it is addressed" (Faludi, 2000, p. 306).

In our view, like plans and planning, spatial quality advice and advising work mainly indirectly. The impact of spatial quality advices must be first sought in terms of facilitating decision-making of all parties involved. Performance refers to how spatial quality advisory practices put forward valid arguments for decisions on spatial quality and improve the quality of these decisions. However, in spatial quality advisory practice, the concept of conformance cannot be dismissed as radically as Faludi does for planning practice. Spatial quality advices and advising intervene directly in design and designing. The material object is the design object. Conformance refers to how spatial quality advisory practices put forward design expertise to improve the spatial quality of the design object.

Assessing the impact of q-teams means that both performance and conformance have to be taken into consideration. Research on the impact of q-teams cannot be limited to the tangible advices (the 'things') but have to examine the entire advisory process. The impact of q-teams depends on the extent to which they put forward (1) valid arguments for decisions on spatial quality and improve the quality of these decisions and (2) design expertise to improve the spatial quality of the design object. By arguing this, we leave the fundamental question 'what is better spatial quality?' out of consideration. The spatial quality that is ultimately realized, can never be credited solely to the q-team. Furthermore, the concept of spatial quality is subject, space and time dependent (Janssen-Jansen, Klijn, & Opdam, 2009). Therefore, we cannot assess the impact of the spatial quality advisory practices in terms of better spatial quality only.

Findings and research agenda

In this section we will answer the main questions addressed in this paper. The answers are summarized and visualized in four conceptual images. In the second part of this section we will formulate a research agenda for further research.

Characteristics of the Dutch spatial quality advisory practices

We have elaborated a typology and six main characteristics (Fig. 1). We conclude that the plurality of q-team profiles and the flexible dialogues of q-teams are determining characteristics.

On the *profile*, the research indicates that no two q-teams are exactly alike. A team profile must be clear and consistent, which does not mean static, as team profiles might change over time, responding to a change in context or when entering a new phase in the development process. We assume the main characteristics to have a correlation with the typology, but no convincing

relationship could be demonstrated on the basis of the research results. Further research could be useful at this point.
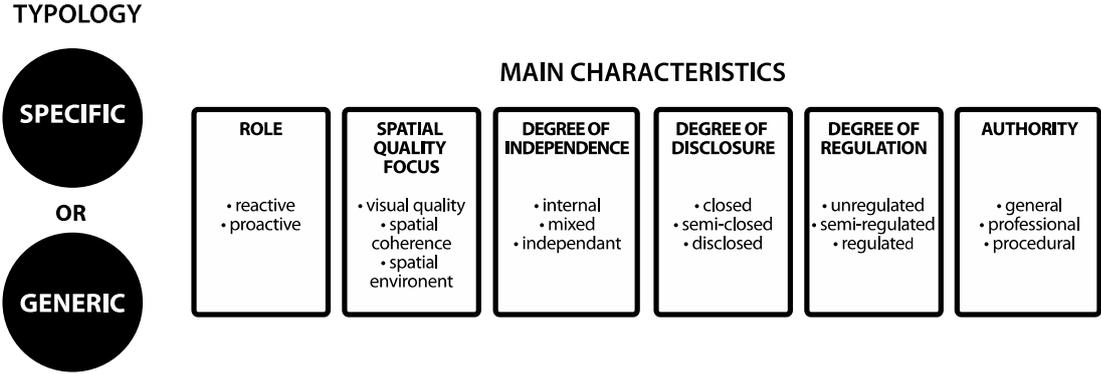
TYPOLOGY

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

ROLE	SPATIAL QUALITY FOCUS	DEGREE OF INDEPENDENCE	DEGREE OF DISCLOSURE	DEGREE OF REGULATION	AUTHORITY
• reactive • proactive	• visual quality • spatial coherence • spatial environent	• internal • mixed • independant	• closed • semi-closed • disclosed	• unregulated • semi-regulated • regulated	• general • professional • procedural

SPECIFIC

OR

GENERIC

Figure 1: Q-team typology and characteristics

The *flexibility* of the q-team dialogue (Fig. 2), has added new instruments to the existing systems of aesthetic control. The less-statutory position allows q-teams to have an open dialogue and co-creative arrangements with actors involved. This creates room for face-to-face encounters and can open "a human channel into the state, as opposed to just the bureaucratic machinery" (Healey, 2017, p. 337). Again, these positions are not static. Q-teams can determine their position on the spectrum depending on circumstances, place and time.

COLLABORATIVE DIALOGUE   INTERPRETIVE DIALOGUE   CONTROL DIALOGUE

Figure 2: Spectrum of collaboration, interpretation and control

Assessing the impact of the spatial quality advisory practices

Assessing the impact of q-teams means that both performance and conformance (Faludi, 1973, 1987, 2000; Faludi & Altes, 1994) have to be taken into consideration. We conclude that performance refers to how spatial quality advisory practices generate valid arguments for decisions on spatial quality and improve the quality of these decisions. Conformance refers to how spatial quality advisory practices generate valid arguments for design choices and improve the spatial quality of the design object. This approach implies that we have to take into account the whole advisory process and the balance between commission, context and creativity of design, what we call 'the Q-factor'.

We found that research on the impact of q-teams cannot be limited to the tangible advices (the 'things'). Therefore, examination of the entire *advisory process* is a prerequisite (Fig. 3). This process can be conceptualized with the use of the systems model developed in public management (Noordegraaf, 2015). Certain things go in (input), like planning concepts, spatial questions, spatial designs, spatial quality regulations, policy, interests. The q-team processes this 'material' with its

specific professional frames, knowledge, experience and dialogue (throughput) resulting in a verbal, visualized or written advice on the perceived question (output). The advice can have broader societal influence on decisions, views, ambitions, policy or public debate related to spatial quality (outcome). The outcome can have influence on the next input (feedback).
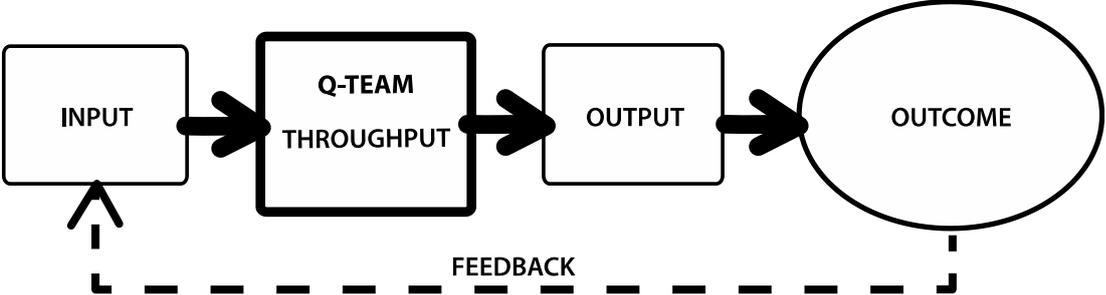

Figure 3: Conceptualization of the advisory process

The *balance between commission, context and creativity of design* indicates what we previously called the 'Q-factor' (Fig. 4). Spatial quality advisory practices are not directly 'producing' spatial quality but are supposed to improve decisions and designs related to spatial quality. We can, at most, conduct research into the extent to which a team succeeds in ensuring that its advices influence decisions and designs. Assessing the impact of the spatial quality advisory practices requires insight into the creativity, design skills and territorial knowledge of the q-team as well as into the societal and political sensitivity and sense of operational feasibility of the teams.
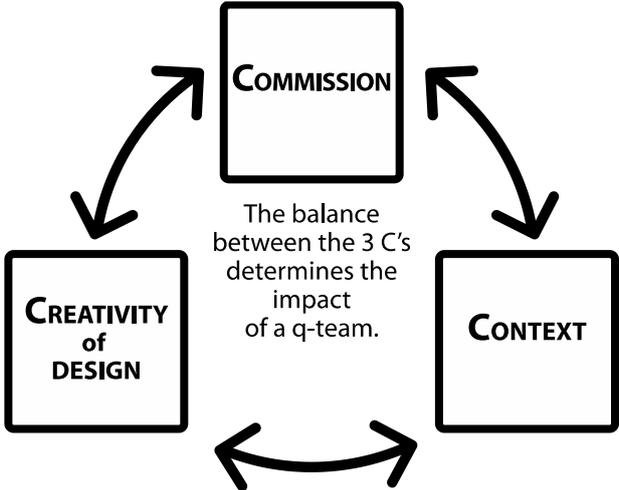

Figure 4: The Q-factor of spatial quality advisory practices

Research agenda

The answers to the research questions open up a variety of follow up questions and avenues for further research. We propose five challenging perspectives.

(1) Further development of a theoretical framework to assess the performance and conformance of q-teams. In this paper, we proposed theoretical notions to explain several q-team phenomena, starting with Faludi's theory on conformance and performance (1973, 1987, 2000; Faludi & Altes, 1994) The proposed process approach is a starting point to

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oversee the whole playing field and evaluate the impact of q-teams. In working towards a coherent theoretical framework several notions may be included, such as: public value (Bozeman, 2007; Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; Moore, 1995), design expertise (Lawson & Dorst, 2009), design rationality (Schön, 1983; Schön & Rein, 1994), design thinking (Cross, 2011), teamwork (Beech & Crane, 1999; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003; Wenger et al., 2002), dramaturgical theory (Hajer, 2005; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003), legality and legitimacy (Cohn, 2001; De Somer, 2017; Hajer, Feddes, & Sijmons, 2006), decision making in spatial processes (Faludi, 1986, 1987; Friend & Jessop, 1969; Van Buuren, 2006). This theoretical framework can be informed by existing and new empirical research, both quantitative and qualitative. This framework might clarify the assumed synthesis between typology, characteristics and dialogue spectrum.

(2) The public value of q-teams. Q-teams may be considered to operate in the public interest, even if they consist entirely of independent professionals and often have a considerable autonomy to create their own ways of working. They are inherently established to represent the public interest and create public value (Moore, 1995). As all public service bodies, q-teams deal with unique individual cases on the base of more general policies and public and professional norms. Their work is "at the same time both individual and societal" (Noordegraaf, 2015, p. 114). Spatial quality advice has an inherently discretionary character. Indicative planning gives authorities greater scope for consideration. Spatial quality advice can be used to underpin decision-making. Legality and the way in which the q team perceives and utilizes its leeway, will influence the impact.

(3) The role of expertise in q-teams. Q-teams are largely composed of spatial designers and professionals in diverse sectoral spatial planning issues. They possess knowledge, professional frames, experience, skills and attitudes. Multidisciplinarity is an important feature, as the general pattern is that "team task-related diversity is related to higher-quality team decision making" (Gruenfeld, 1995; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003, p. 74). Urban design and planning are inherently drawing on a number of disciplines (Khan, Moulaert, Schreurs, & Miciukiewicz, 2014). The feature of multidisciplinarity acknowledges the need for "plural imagination in rethinking spatial qualities" (ibid., p. 398). Consequently, the spectrum extends twofold: It relates to the amount of different disciplines in a team, but it also refers to the inter- or transdisciplinary way of working. Both are connected to the emerging complexity of questions and problems that teams are faced with.

(4) Spatial quality advisory practices as a bridge between planning and design. This offers a wide spectrum of plannerly and designerly ways of thinking and their interaction. For further research we propose parallel research in the fields of spatial planning and design. Designerly research questions are for example: 1) What are the factual and perceived influence of q-teams on the spatial design object and process? 2) What is the influence of teamwork (methods, expertise, cognition) on the spatial design object and process? and 3) What is the innovation potential of q-teams? Plannerly research questions are for example: 1) What is the influence of legality and legitimacy on the impact of q-teams? 2) What is the contribution of knowledge to spatial questions and solutions and to planning and design processes? 3) What is the influence on subsequent actions and decisions of relevant actors in relation to spatial quality?

(5) International comparison. International comparison may reveal whether the characteristics of spatial quality advisory practices and impact indicators are recognizable and transferable to other countries.

Conclusions

Spatial quality teams are a relatively new phenomenon within the Dutch planning culture. There's a wide variety of q-teams, no two q-teams are exactly alike. Our analysis revealed a typology of specific and generic q-teams and six main characteristics that contribute to the profile of a q-team. The plurality of q-team profiles and the flexibility within the nature of the dialogue, are determining characteristics. An adequate profile is nevertheless important for every individual team. The flexibility of q-teams moving between collaboration, interpretation and control, has added new repertoires to the existing system of aesthetic control.

For the assessment of the impact of spatial quality advisory practices, research into the effectiveness of aesthetic control committees is of limited use. Q-teams have a broader scope and more discretionary space. Assessing the impact of q-teams means that both performance and conformance have to be taken into consideration. The impact of q-teams depends on the extent to which they put forward (1) valid arguments for decisions on spatial quality and improve the quality of these decisions and (2) design expertise to improve the spatial quality of the design object. This approach implies that assessment has to take into account the entire advisory process and the balance between commission, context and creativity of design, what we call 'the Q-factor'.

This research presents the first step of a larger research project. The answers to the research questions in this paper open up a variety of follow up questions and avenues for further research in the fields of spatial planning and design.

Glossary

English	Dutch	Brief description	Source
aesthetic control	welstandszorg	control on the appearance of building works	(Needham, 2007; Nelissen & De Vocht, 1991)
aesthetic control committee	welstandscommissie	aesthetics committee to judge the appearance of proposed building works	(Needham, 2007; Nelissen & De Vocht, 1991)
aesthetic policy document	welstandsnota	policy document which contains the rules for subjecting building applications to 'the aesthetic test'	(Van Assen & Van Campen, 2018)
spatial environment quality	omgevingskwaliteit	comprehensive physical environment (not: environmental quality, interpreted as milieu, ecology, habitat, climate)	(Van Assen & Van Campen, 2018)
spatial quality control committee	commissie ruimtelijke kwaliteit	committee reviewing the appearance and context of building works, interventions in cultural heritage and public space, at times also urban design proposals and spatial policy documents.	(Van Assen & Van Campen, 2018)
spatial quality team (q-team)	ruimtelijkkwaliteitsteam (q-team)	a multidisciplinary team of experts that advises on matters of spatial quality in spatial assignments	(Van Assen & Van Campen, 2014)
visual quality plan	beeldkwaliteitsplan	policy document for a specific (re)development area which contains the rules for subjecting building applications to 'the aesthetic test'	("Dictionary for Urbanists Dutch-English," 2011)

Acknowledgements

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