Cooperation between Dutch parliamentary research and information services

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Descriptive summary of Dutch politics (1)

- Parliamentary democracy
  - Elections every four years

- House of Representatives: 150 seats, direct elections
  - checks the government
  - co-legislator
  - representative of the people

- Senate: 75 seats, indirect elections by the Provincial Councils
  - Approves/rejects legislation from the House of Representatives. No right of amendment.
Descriptive summary of Dutch politics (2)

- In the House of Representatives:
  - 11 parties: majority from the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Labour Party (PvdA): 79 seats (coalition)
  - Nine opposition parties
  - Smallest party: 2 seats

- 5 elections in the past 10 years

- Parliamentary groups and support for MPs
Functioning of the House’s administration within a multi-party system

- Under the supervision of the Secretary-General
- Supports MPs and political processes
- 600 civil servants
- Rules of Procedure
- Neutral and non-partisan
- No political ties
- Roles:
  - Individual support (Central Information Desk)
  - Support for each committee
  - Institutional memory
Department of Information Services

- Founded in 1815, 65 fte
- Provides information services to MPs, parliamentary groups, committees, and administrative offices, as well as to journalists, government organizations and citizens
- Selects, acquires and supplements parliamentary and contextual information and connects this information to each other
- Creates and delivers information products and services (including answering questions; supporting parliamentary inquiries; providing information through the intranet and websites; and ensuring the availability of many sources of internal and external information)
- Manages the Central Parliamentary Archives: the memory of the House of Representatives
- Develops and manages information systems, including search and language technology
Information architecture

- Secretariat and Committee staff
- Parlis
- Information services
- VIP
- Parliamentary reporters
- VLOS
- Staten-Generaal Digitaal 1814-1995

API Data warehouse
www.tweedekamer.nl
Parliamentary Information Portal

Audio Video

Data warehouse
Audio Video Storage

www.tweedekamer.nl
Parliamentary Information Portal
Parliamentary Bureau for Research and Public Expenditure

- Founded in 1999, 12 fte
- Provides support to parliamentary standing committees by analyzing government documents, including budgets and annual reports; policy memorandums and evaluations; and progress reports (memorandums) on ‘Major Projects’
- Provides support for parliamentary investigation committees (coordinating substantive research) and parliamentary inquiries
- Incorporates scientific knowledge to benefit political debate through cooperation with universities, assessment agencies and other knowledge centres.
Cooperation

- Between Research department, staff of committees and Department of information services
- Need for more research products is recognized
- Information specialists not fully equipped yet
- Service level agreement in 2007 and liaison officers appointed
- In 2009: start of the Research Agenda (4 large projects per year)
- Information specialists trained in analyzing, making abstracts and formulating unbiased opinions
- Cooperation is highly valued by both departments and also by MP’s
Conclusions

• The cooperation worked out well because there was benefit for both departments
• Both departments still have their own specialties and expertise and maintain these
• The products are complementary
• Good contacts and willingness to cooperate by department heads and senior staff
• Fits in the Dutch custom of the ‘Polder Model’ (focus on consensus)
The next step?

- Stay separate or integrate into one department?
- Stay information specialist and researcher or become hybrid?
- The difficulties of unbiased information and research
- Role of social media (public opinion) in research?