What Makes for Successful Citizens’ Initiatives?¹

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Throughout the Western industrialized world the current economic crisis has contributed to a reconsideration of the balance between state and society. Perhaps this is most strikingly illustrated by the “Big Society” catch-phrase that the British Conservative Party started using during the run up to the 2010 UK general elections. The Conservative party leader David Cameron in his speeches emphasized the need to “say goodbye to big government and welcome instead the active citizen” (Cameron, 2009). In such a vision citizens’ initiatives (CIs) can contribute to a “post-bureaucratic age” in which power from the central state will be redistributed to “individuals, families and local communities” (Cameron, 2010). CIs – in which people in communities collectively engage in the provision of collective or quasi-collective goods and services – are considered as an attractive alternative for big government. This is not only the case in the UK. In the Netherlands for example three major advisory boards of the national government in 2011/2012 published reports about the promises of CIs (WRR, 2012; Boer & Lans, 2011; ROB, 2012). And in 2013 the new Dutch King, on behalf of the current coalition government of prime-minister Mark Rutte, in his first speech from the throne expressed trust in the capacity of active citizens’ to take responsibility for their own fate and for the future of their communities. Citizens, individually or collectively, should be entrusted with the responsibility for their own future and be allowed to make decisions about their own life and their living environment.

Little is known however, about the viability of CIs as a mode of community self-governance: are such initiatives likely to fulfil their promises? There are at least two issues that are relevant when we consider the potential success of CIs. The first issue pertains to the willingness of citizens to engage in

¹ This paper was also presented at the 2014 EURA Conference in Paris. The title of this paper differs somewhat from the paper proposed for the current ECPR workshop but is substantively identical to the version presented in Paris. The papers are based on two empirical studies of CI’s in the Dutch province of Overijssel. This province has kindly allowed us to use their CI survey and funded the data-collection for the CI initiator study. The results of this study are reported in Denters et al. (2013).

1 Work in progress. Please do not quote without permission of the first author
such initiatives. If (virtually) no one would be willing to become active to address community issues, the promises of CIs will not be fulfilled, because there would be no CIs in the first place. So, how eager are citizens to participate in such initiatives? And, who are the people that are active in these initiatives? Do the activists belong to the “class of usual suspects” (e.g. men; higher educated people; white, higher educated men) or are they also recruited from other social strata? The second issue relates to the actual success of CI’s. Even if there are plenty of people willing to engage themselves (cf. the first issue), their efforts may or may not be successful in achieving the activists’ common goals. Initiating civic action is one thing, them being successful may be quite another thing. What are the chances of success of initiatives? And what factors influence the chances of success of CIs? Of course there may be any number of factors affecting the success of these initiatives. But here we are primarily interested in the effect of efforts made by governments and third sector professional organisations to “facilitate” citizens initiatives. To what extent is CI success affected, for example, by the support they may receive from such official organisations. Can citizens be left on their own devices, or can they only “get by with (a little) help of such friends”?

Against this backdrop this paper will address two questions:

1. To what extent are citizens willing to engage in citizens’ initiatives and if so: who are these activists?

2. How do personal factors (motives and resources) and the support that initiatives may have received from governments and professional third sector organisations affect the success of CIs?

We will answer these questions on the basis of a study conducted in the Dutch province of Overijssel. Before we describe the design of our research, we will first discuss the theoretical framework with which we will answer the two above research questions.

**Theoretical considerations**

Citizens’ initiatives can be conceived of as a form of civic engagement or citizen participation. For an understanding of the involvement of citizens in this type of activity and the success of such activities it is therefore natural to connect to the extensive literature on determinants of civic engagement. The Civic Voluntarism Model developed by Sidney Verba and his associates (1995), which provides an elegant synthesis between different approaches to the explanation of citizen participation, seems to be a good starting point for such an analysis. In this model the question whether or not a person...
will become actively involved in a particular civic activity is dependent on three key factors: motivations (do people want to participate?), resources (are they able to participate? Do they possess the various forms of capital that may be required: financial, human and social) and mobilization (were they invited /persuaded to participate?). Based on this and inspired by subsequent work of Vivien Lowndes c.s. (2006) we have developed the ACTIE framework (Denters et al. 2013).

Table 1: The ACTIE framework as basis for explanation and for mobilization and facilitation in the context of participation policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Explanatory factor</th>
<th>Mobilization and Facilitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aims and ambitions</strong></td>
<td>The motives of participants, why do they want to participate.</td>
<td>Appeals to motives (e.g. to sense of community or civic duty), emphasizing “what is in it” for participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contacts</strong></td>
<td>The social capital (contacts and networks) of citizens, these can pertain to social contacts and “political” contacts (with officials and institutions) of citizens</td>
<td>Establishing contacts and links with relevant people, building social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talents and time</strong></td>
<td>The human capital (knowledge, skills, and subjective competence), financial capital (income) of citizens and availability of time.</td>
<td>Providing, information, advice, and training and providing monetary or in kind support (free use of facilities and equipment), making participation and access more convenient and less time-consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutionalisation</strong></td>
<td>Structural conditions for effective participation: the availability of accessible participatory channels and procedures that guarantee that inputs from determine the extent to which that participation (structural conditions)</td>
<td>Designing appropriate institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empathy</strong></td>
<td>Cultural conditions for effective participation: (a) politicians, administrators etc. have to understand and be willing to take citizens seriously and on (b) the basis of this citizens have to be convinced that their inputs will be seriously considered</td>
<td>a) Stimulating understanding and responsiveness amongst political and administrative officials b)This idea may be strengthened by a proper institutional design and adequate understanding and responsiveness of officials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACTIE (the Dutch word for “action”) is an acronym. It stands for five major factors that on the one hand explain why some people are more inclined to participate than others. The first three factors in the ACTIE framework pertain to characteristics of the individual: the motives and resources of citizens. The fourth and fifth factor, on the other hand, relate to the structural and cultural aspects of the political opportunities that allow for or obstruct citizen participation. Governments and public sector organisations can thus provide support in two basic forms: by providing effective opportunities for participation and by stimulating citizens to use these opportunities.

The ACTIE model was originally developed as a tool for understanding why people are or are not involved in one or another form of civic participation and thinking systematically about how to stimulate civic participation. In this paper we will consider to what extent the ACTIE factors also have an impact on the chances of success of a particular form of civic engagement, viz. citizen’s initiatives.

**Methods and data**

Before we turn to such questions, however, we first will turn to the methods and data used for answering our questions. Data for this study were collected in a number of different ways. First, we have used secondary data collected in the spring of 2013 through a province-wide internet survey amongst 1079 citizens of the province of Overijssel. This survey was commissioned by the province of Overijssel (for details about the survey, see: Provincie Overijssel 2013). The sample for this survey was selected from the country-wide TNS NIPO database and provides results that are representative for the population of Overijssel in terms of e.g. age, gender, urbanisation and region. Second, we have collected additional for 134 CIs in 22 of the 25 municipalities in Overijssel. Unfortunately three municipalities were unwilling to cooperate. In the other municipalities we collected three types of data:

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2 The ACTIE framework builds on both Verba c.s. (1995) and Lowndes c.s. (2006). The person-oriented factors A, C and T relate to a person’s motives (LIKE) and resources (CAN) in the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM), whereas I and E may be seen as elements of the political system’s efforts at mobilization. In the CVM model the emphasis is on human and financial capital (Talents) as resources. Social capital is not included. Just like Lowndes (who pointed to the relevance of civic networks and organizations) we included this relational form of capital as an additional category of resources. As is implied in Lowndes’ work participation by governments and other public sector organizations, may take two forms (see third column in table 1). First, creating opportunities for effective participation (last two rows in the table). In our model we propose to distinguish a structural and a cultural component in the creation of such opportunities. But in addition to creating opportunities, activities might also be aimed at increasing the likelihood that citizens might want to and/or can use these opportunities (first three rows in the table).
1. Information from a municipal contact person (this person was a municipal officer who at our request was named for this task by his employer). These contact persons were not only asked to provide details about municipal policies facilitate and support CIs, but were also asked to provide us with the names of about 10 local community informants; i.e. persons in the local community (preferably not local politicians and officers) who were locally well connected and well informed about the local community. Together with the contact person the community informants formed a local panel.

2. The members of the 22 municipal panels were asked to provide information (both factual and evaluative) on the municipality and CIs in their community. The single most important question we asked to all members of these panels was to provide us with a few examples of CIs in their municipality and contact information of a key person in this initiative. In this question we explicitly asked our informants not only to mention successful CIs but also less successful and failed initiatives.

3. On this basis we compiled a list of 213 names of key persons in local CIs (henceforth referred to as CI initiators). These CI initiators were then asked to complete an internet survey about their CI, its objectives, participants, goal attainment and the support received by governments and third sector organisations. A total of 108 of the CI initiators (response rate of 51 percent) completed our questionnaire, this resulted in information about 134 CIs. The number of CIs exceeded the number of initiators because in a number of cases an initiator was involved in more than one initiative and was hence asked to complete more than one questionnaire.

**Involvement in citizens’ initiatives**

CIs are related to what others (Crenson, 1983; Lelieveldt, 2004) have called informal governance. In CIs citizens’ activities are not primarily aimed at the expression of needs or on voicing demands in order to influence political decision-making or public service delivery. Rather, CIs are a form of self-organised collective action, in which the citizens themselves determine the aims and its ways and means and are also actively engaged in “producing the goods” (Bakker, Denters, Oude Vrielink, & Klok, 2012). CIs comprise a wide range of various projects: for example playgrounds, community art, maintenance of public green and the collective purchasing of solar panels.

It is widely acknowledged that citizens’ participation in political activities is highly selective (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). With the exception of general elections, only small numbers of citizens participate and these individuals are by no means a random sample of the population of adult citizens. Participants – in all sorts of political activities – typically belong to specific social strata and in terms of their social background unrepresentative for the citizenry at large. Men, higher educated people, the middle-aged and higher income citizens are usually
overrepresented. Our first question is aimed at determining whether such patterns of selectivity in terms of political engagement are also reproduced in CIs.

**Volume and selectiveness of participation in CIs**

In this section we deal with the first research question: “to what extent are citizens (a) willing to engage in citizens’ initiatives and if so, who are these activists?

First, we will look into the actual and future willingness of citizens to participate in CIs. In the survey there are two potential measures to assess the inclination of people to involve themselves in such initiatives: the *actual participation* in CIs and the future willingness to get involved. In terms of actual involvement about 16 percent of the respondents indicated that *in the last two years* they have been actively involved in one or more CIs (see Figure 1A). The active involvement in CIs is considerable. For example, it is relatively high when compared to active political engagement through modes of non-electoral participation. In the Dutch National Election Study 2006 (DNES 2006) citizens were asked whether *in the last five years* they had undertaken a number of activities to influence a political decision: and although the time period indicated in the question was more than two times longer, the two most frequently mentioned modes of political participation (“contacting a politician or civil servant” and “attending a meeting organised by a government”) were both mentioned by only 10 percent of the respondents.

![Figure 1A: Actual participation in CI during the last two years (below)](image)

![Figure 1B: Likelihood of future willingness to participate in CI (to the right)](image)

**Figure 1:** Actual participation and future willingness (in % of population) to participate in CIs in Overijssel (N=1079)
The expressed willingness of citizens to engage in such initiatives may be even somewhat higher. In the survey it was also asked how likely people thought it would be that they would participate in a CI in the future. Here about 12 percent of the respondents stated that they would certainly participate in such initiatives in the future. An additional 55 percent stated that it was likely that they would participate in such an initiative (see Figure 1B).

Both actual participation and the future willingness to participate in CIs are positively related to the normative ideas of citizens about CIs. In the survey people were asked to state their agreement or disagreement with the following statement: “Through participation in CIs people should take a greater responsibility for their neighbourhood, village or town”. A vast majority of the Overijssel respondents stated either agreement (60 percent) or strong agreement (14 percent) with the view that citizens should take a greater responsibility for their immediate living environment. These people were also found to be substantially more likely to have actively participated in CIs in the past (19 percent, versus 7 percent for the respondents that did not agree with the statement) and also were found to be more likely to become active in CIs in the future (79 percent versus 37 percent for those that disagreed). This indicates the importance of a sense of civic duty as an important motive for people to become active in citizens’ initiatives (cf. the A-factor of the ACTIE-framework).

The second issue in this section pertains to how CI activists compare to the population at large. Even though the actual participation of citizens in CIs may be high as compared to political participation, only a minority of citizens is engaged in such initiatives. On the basis of previous participation research we may assume that the command over relevant resources (cf. the C and T factor in the ACTIE framework). As Verba c.s. have argued the command over resources is linked to people’s social backgrounds (e.g. gender, age and education). Because of such differences activists in many forms of civic engagement are not representativeness for the population at large. There may be two (related) reasons why people might be concerned about this. First, selective participation could be seen as an infringement on the norm of equality of participatory opportunities. To the extent that such inequalities in participation would be the result of e.g. lack of resources and barriers for participation for particular social strata this might be considered as problematic. Second, lack of representativeness might also negatively affect the quality of life of particular social strata. If in a political system communities – under the Big Society Banner – are left to their own devices, the community’s capacity for self-governance will become an important determinant of the quality of life of its members. From this perspective inequalities in CI participation may be considered as
problematic, because they could result in inequalities in social outcomes. Therefore it will be interesting to look at the actual occurrence of the social representativeness of CI participation.

In Table 2 a comparison of participants and non-participants in terms of their social backgrounds is presented. In the table we find some evidence of selective participation. In terms of both actual participation and future willingness, for example, younger people are less likely to be involved in CIs, just like in most other forms of (political) participation. But amongst the actual participants and the future willingness to become active there are no biases in terms of gender. With regard to education we find no effect on actual participation. This is surprising. In the light of the overrepresentation of highly educated citizens amongst the activists for many forms of political participation some analysts have coined the term “diploma democracy” (Bovens & Wille, 2009 and 2011). But for CI participation formal education apparently is not as important as it has shown to be for many forms of political activism. For the willingness to participate there appears to be a rather weak, but statistically significant “diploma-effect”. From a normative point of view these results may be reassuring, both from the perspective of equal opportunities for participation and from the perspective of social equality (in terms of consequences for the social distribution of life chances).

**Table 2:** Comparison of social backgrounds between actual and possible future participants and non-participants in CIs (shaded cells indicate statistically significant differences between participants and non-participants) in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ACTUAL PARTICIPATION</th>
<th>FUTURE WILLINGNESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: male</td>
<td>49,5</td>
<td>51,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: female</td>
<td>50,5</td>
<td>48,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 18-34</td>
<td>31,9</td>
<td>18,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 35-54</td>
<td>35,8</td>
<td>41,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 55+</td>
<td>32,3</td>
<td>40,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: low</td>
<td>20,4</td>
<td>19,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: medium</td>
<td>53,7</td>
<td>56,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: high</td>
<td>25,9</td>
<td>24,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (100%)</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our survey amongst the initiators of CI’s in Overijssel (N=134) provides additional evidence on the issue of representativeness. In this survey we asked whether according to our respondents in the core group of people who ran the initiative particular categories of the population (e.g. men, higher incomes, higher educated, older people, employed) were overrepresented. In terms of income (87 percent), education (80 percent) and age (69 percent) two thirds or more of the respondents indicated no major imbalances (see figure 3). For gender and employment status our respondents report imbalances more frequently. In the case of gender about half of the initiatives are well balanced (53 percent), and there are both situations where men (34 percent) and women (13 percent) dominate. In terms of employment status too in most cases (43 percent) CI core groups are well balanced, but in several groups we see either an overrepresentation of people who currently do not have paid employment (34 percent), whereas in other case the employed dominate (23 percent).

In general we can conclude that in most instances CI core groups are more or less well balanced. This is not to say, however, that all groups are well balanced. When we encounter imbalances these oftentimes may reflect differences in the availability of personal resources (like knowledge and skills) for people belonging to a particular category of the population (e.g. the higher educated).

**Figure 3: Over- and underrepresentation of different social categories amongst the members of CI core groups in Overijssel (N= 134; in %)**
But this should not distract from the general picture of a relatively balanced participation of different social groups in CIs. This is also demonstrated by the fact that on the level of CI collectives there appear to be only occasional problems with the availability of resources like time, skills, knowledge and contacts that oftentimes hamper participation of individuals are not considered by CI initiators as major obstacles for the success of their CI. For the vast majority of CIs the availability of such resources are not bottlenecks for the organisation of CIs (see figure 4).

**Figure 4: CIs for which a lack of resources was reported as a bottleneck (N=132; in percentages).**

![Bar chart showing resources as bottlenecks](chart)

Against the backdrop of earlier findings (e.g. Verba c.s. 1995; Bovens and Wille 2011) in the literature on individual political participation it is especially striking that the education level and the knowledge and skills of participants do not appear to be a major impediment. Other findings from our surveys confirm this: 82 percent of the municipal contact persons (N=17) and 75 percent of the local informants (N=134) state that CI activists generally have sufficient knowledge and skills to participate in CIs.

**Success of CIs**

Now that we have seen that many citizens are engaged in or would be willing to participate in CIs it is also interesting to learn more about the impact of these initiatives. To what extent are these initiatives successful and what factors affect the success of such initiatives (research question 2)? Before we can answer this question we have to define the success of CIs. Obviously there are many standards that might be used for assessing the success of these CIs. In this study we have defined the success of a CI in terms of the standards of the active citizens. A CI is successful to the extent that the
activist him/herself considers it a success. We have data on two types of activists. First, the respondents in the general survey who have in one way or another participated in CIs in the past two years (N=172) and second, the 134 initiators of CIs. In the eyes of both groups CIs are highly successful. The answers are presented in figure 4.

**Figure 5: Success of CI according to CI activists (N=172) and CI initiators (N=134); in percentages**

![Success of CI according to CI activists (N=172) and CI initiators (N=134); in percentages](image)

Both the vast majority of the activists and the initiators are positive about the success of their initiative. Amongst the CI activists about one quarter rated their initiative as very successful and 55 percent indicated their project as successful. Only 18 percent of these respondents was less positive of which 5 percent was outright negative. The success evaluations amongst the 134 selected CIs were even more positive, presumably as a result of the selection procedure.³

**Towards an explanation of CI success**

It is interesting to determine which factors determine the success of such initiatives. In explaining CI success it is helpful to start from the assumption that the success of CIs might be influenced by the same factors that determine citizens’ participation in such initiatives or in other forms of political or

³ Although we explicitly asked our local informants not only to provide names of successful CIs but also provide contact information for less successful examples, the local informants may well have over reported cases of relatively successful CIs. The results of the general survey, however, indicate that the reported successfulness of CIs is probably not completely the result of the selection procedures used in the CI initiator survey.
social participation. In our theoretical model we have emphasized that citizens’ participation in CIs is dependent on their motives (aims and ambitions), on their resources (contacts and talents) and on the politico-administrative context in which these initiatives are taken (institutionalization and empathy). In this paper we will use the same factors in an effort to explain the success of CI’s.

First, we will consider the influence of the ambitions and aspirations of the CI activists. CI’s are very diverse in the aims and ambitions of their initiators, and some of these may be more difficult to achieve than others. From this perspective we will investigate whether some types of substantive initiatives are more likely to succeed than others. In previous work we have distinguished different types of CIs based on their substantive goals (Denters et al. 2013). In our analysis we will see whether two of the most common types of initiatives (social initiatives and initiatives aimed at improving physical aspects of the living environment) are more or less likely to succeed than other CIs.

Second, initiatives may also differ in terms of the resources available to the activists. The more resourceful the group of CI activists involved in a project are, the more likely it is that their effort will be successful. We have two indicators for resourcefulness of groups. Groups are considered to be more resourceful if amongst their membership (a) highly educated citizens or (b) high income people are overrepresented. Moreover, groups may or may not experience problems in available resources (i.e. in terms of time, contacts and knowledge / skills). Previously we have seen that such shortages are not very frequent, but it is interesting to see what the impact of any such problems is on the chances for success of initiative. Finally, we might also expect that the size of the group may have an impact on the likelihood of its success. On the one hand, all other things equal, the larger a group is, the greater the total volume of its resource will be. On the other hand, size might also make it more difficult to successfully engage in collective action (Buchanan & Tullock 1965; Olson 1971).

Third, in our theoretical model we have also pointed to the relevance of political mobilization (see also Verba c.s. 1995; Rosenstone & Hansen 1993). First, the formal rules and procedures (institutional CI openness) of governments and other formal organisations may hinder or block the development of CIs, or the people working in these organisations, may be unresponsive to the CI initiators (CI empathy). Second, these organisations may also actively stimulate CIs by funding or

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4 We operationalized CI openness through a scale with three items about the CI initiator reporting no problems with long procedures, unnecessary rules, and internal communication within local government. The Cronbach alfa for this three-item scale was 0.68. CI empathy was also measured with a three item scales where on the basis of their experiences CI initiators were asked to express their agreement to three statements about their willingness to listen to the CI initiators, their enthusiasm and commitment vis-à-vis the CI, and their willingness
support in kind (e.g. by offering them the free or cheap use of facilities) and by providing them with information and advice. In our analyses we will also see how these mobilisation factors affect the success of CIs.

**Determinants of CI success: empirical results**

Now we will turn to an analysis of the factors that affect CI success. On the basis of our data we analysed the hypotheses based on our theoretical model on data for CI activists (N=172) and CI initiators (N=134). Because the questionnaires for the two surveys were not identical the models for the analyses are somewhat different, and therefore the results are not completely comparable. In the paper we will focus on the results from the CI initiator survey. We do this for two main reasons. First, in this survey we were able to include a more comprehensive set of relevant variables, covering all major factors in our theoretical model. Second, because CI initiators, as compared with other participants, are more intensively involved in CIs they can provide more accurate information on CIs and their facilitation. Nevertheless, it makes sense to compare the results of both datasets, to bring out possible differences between the two categories of CI participants. Therefore, in the presentation of the results from the CI initiator study we will whenever this is possible refer to findings from comparable analyses of the CI activist data.

In our analysis we have analysed a series of ever more complicated models. We began with a simple model that only included the types of ambitions of the initiators. Then we added the resources of CIs (model 2). Subsequently, the factors institutionalisation and empathy were entered (model 3), and finally we introduced support / facilitation factors. In doing the latter, we first entered one general factor: whether there was any form of support by a municipality (model 4), another government or a formal organisation. In model 5 rather than this general support factor we looked into possible effects of three specific forms support. The results of the various analyses are presented in Table 3. The results in the table lead to a number of conclusions.
Table 3: Explanations of CI success based on ACTIE framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M1</th>
<th>M2</th>
<th>M3</th>
<th>M4</th>
<th>M5</th>
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<td>.16</td>
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<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.12</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.04</td>
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</tr>
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<td>-.33</td>
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<td>Contact other citizens</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group size</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional CI openness</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>CI Empathy</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Support (general)</td>
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<td>XX</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Support: in kind</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support: advice</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-.14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R square</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R square (adjusted)</td>
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<td>.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (valid)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only coefficients in shaded cells are statistically significant. Light grey cells: significant at 10 percent; Dark grey cells: significant at 5 percent. All tests were one-sided except for social cohesion, physical environment and size where no sign was predicted.

On the basis of model 1 the chances of success for social CIs are somewhat higher than the odds for other CIs. But this difference is not statistically significant. In our analyses of the CI activists we did find some weak effects for CIs with social aims and for CIs aimed at improving the physical environment. As yet we do not have a plausible interpretation for the differences in these findings and we can only conclude that there is no unambiguous support for an effect of the type of CI on the chances for success of an initiative.
In the domain of resources we find groups that have a relatively high number of either highly educated or high income participants are not more likely to be successful than less resourceful groups. On this basis there is no evidence that CIs are a domain where the adage “Big Mouth Strikes Again” applies. This is not to say however that resources do not matter. Before we have observed that CI initiators do not frequently report problems in their CI regarding the availability of resources (like time, contacts, skills and knowledge). The results in Table 3, however, demonstrate that – at least for problems with the availability of time and in relations to other citizens and groups in the local community – once such problems are reported, these do have a substantial and significant negative effect on CI success. It is remarkable that this effect does not occur for establishing contacts with officials and formal organisations and for knowledge and skills.

In the domain of resources we also find a consistent weak positive effect of CI group size. Theoretically there were two plausible hypotheses. Either group size might have a negative effect because it may be more difficult to make decisions in larger groups and there may also be other problems of developing decisive collective action in such groups (Buchanan & Tullock 1965; Olson 1971). On the other hand group size might also have positive effects because larger groups through their more numerous membership also have more resources available. Our evidence points out that the latter effect prevails.\(^5\)

A third group of factors relates to institutional openness and the empathy of officials towards CIs. On the basis of our results we can safely conclude that these factors do not prevent CIs from being successful. Neither of the two factors have a statistically significant effect on success. On this basis we should, however, not infer that CIs do not experience any problems in this regard. As Figure 6 demonstrates initiators more or less frequently report problems with regard to the institutional openness (first three item) and empathy (the last three item) towards CIs. We conclude from this that although CI initiators more or less regularly encounter institutional barriers and are confronting officials who lack empathy for the need of CIs, such problems in the end do not affect the chances of CI success. CIs are apparently able to deal with pretty strong and probably unpleasant politico-administrative headwinds.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) In the CI activists survey comparable questions were not included and therefore we are not able to compare these findings with the other data.

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Figure 6: Institutional openness and empathy as reported by CI initiators (N=134); in percentages

Notwithstanding these occasional headwinds CI initiators indicate that they frequently get various kinds of support from their local government and from other governmental and non-governmental. In both our surveys we found that CI participants (either activists or initiators) reported official support and assistance. In the CI initiator survey 84 percent of the initiators reported having received support from their municipality or another (local) organisation. Amongst the activists this percentage was lower (62 percent; N=252). Both these findings from previous research that have shown that CIs more often than not receive support from governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Citizens take the lead, but in many cases develop their initiative in more or less close collaborate with professional organisations in the public domain (Hurenkamp, Tonkens, & Duyvendak, 2006).

The question then is does all this support help. The evidence in Table 3 is mixed. In very general terms model 4 demonstrates that support per se does not make a difference. Although there is a small positive difference between supported and unsupported initiatives, this result is not

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7 This difference on the one hand might reflect an underestimation of support amongst the activists, who are not always as heavily involved in their initiatives as the initiators are, and may therefore be less well-informed. On the other hand, however, this difference might also be an overestimation, due to the selection procedure of the CI initiators. Subsidized and otherwise supported initiatives may be more visible to outside observers and were therefore perhaps more likely to be named by the members of our panels of informants.
statistically significant. In a subsequent more detailed analysis (model 5) this conclusion has to be differentiated. There we find that the chances of success are positively affected by financial subsidies. The success rate is higher amongst the 80 percent of the CIs who received financial support, than amongst the remaining 20 percent of the CIs (N=133). But a similar effect was not found for in kind support (e.g. in the form of the free or cheap use of facilities; received by 79 percent of the CIs) and for information and advice (received by 67% of the CIs). In the latter case there we even find a negative difference (although this result is not statistically significant). In the CI activists survey we find a more or less similar pattern of findings, in which subsidies were the only effective form of CI facilitation.

In part these not very impressive facilitation effects may be the result of mismatch between the demand and the supply for CI support. Our CI initiator survey lends some support to the idea that in relatively many instances support provided to CIs is not considered as adequate by the CI initiators. Figure 7 provides evidence on this issue.

Figure 7: Adequacy of received support for CIs as reported by CI initiators.

In our survey we first asked the initiators whether their initiative at one stage or another would have needed a particular form of support, followed by a question about the types of support they actually received. On the basis of a cross-tabulation of the answers to these questions we have defined three situations:
Undersupply: support was needed but was not provided

Oversupply: support was provided but was not needed

Adequate supply: where there was either a need for support that was met, or no need where no support was given

In this sense support was adequate in between two thirds and three quarters of the cases. Of course one might consider this as a pretty good result. But at the same time it also true that in every third or fourth case support may be deemed as inadequate. What is the nature of these inadequacies? For all three forms of support it is striking that oversupply is more frequent than undersupply. This probably reflects an eagerness of officials to stimulate CIs. In the cases of financial and in kind support CI initiators may not mind very much about such oversupply. As most other people they may for example think that some extra money, even if it is not strictly needed, is nice. But from a societal perspective, one might conceive of this as a waste of public money. This is also the case for an oversupply of information and advice. But this type of oversupply may even be annoying or counter-productive for the CI: as unsolicited advice may be considered as paternalistic and might reduce the autonomy of the CI participants and even poses a threat to the chances of CI success (cf. the negative sign of the non-significant coefficient for the advice factor).

In all our results indicate that CI’s – with a wink to the Beatles – “can get by with a little help from friends”, as long as the help comes in the form of financial support. But we should add that, however helpful, even this type of support is by no means always crucial. For support in general and for non-financial facilitation we find no statistically significant effects. This suggests that overall the impact of facilitation appears not to be vital for success. With the exception of subsidies, different forms of facilitation do not systematically contribute to the success of CIs. Moreover, there are also indications of oversupply of support. These findings are perhaps somewhat surprising. After all, our CI activist survey shows that more than two thirds of the respondents (68 per cent amongst activists and 67 per cent amongst non-participants in CIs) are of the opinion that governments should actively support CIs. In our conclusions we will provide some reflection on these findings with regard to the impact of facilitation.

Conclusions

This paper presents first results from a larger project on the success of CIs in the Dutch province Overijssel. This project is funded by the province of Overijssel. This paper uses two sets of data collected as part of this project. First we were allowed to use a province-wide representative population survey commissioned by Overijssel. Second Overijssel funded a specifically designed
survey amongst CI initiators. In this paper we have answered our research questions with the help of these data.

Our first question deals with the willingness of citizens to engage themselves in citizens’ initiatives. How many people are involved in such initiatives or are likely to become active in the future? And who are those activists? With regard to these questions we concluded that one out of every six citizens have recently been involved in CIs. The future willingness of citizens to join such initiatives is even higher.

Moreover, we also found that amongst CI activists well-known forms of under- and overrepresentation of social strata amongst political activists (reported e.g. in Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993) are not found. Except for the underrepresentation of young people (18-35 years) amongst the participants, there are no major participatory biases: women and people with a low level of formal education are not underrepresented amongst CI activists. Participation in community actions appears to be less elitist than various modes of non-electoral participation. This is confirmed by the results from our CI initiator survey. From a normative point of view these conclusions are reassuring, and may be seen as good news because there are no apparent barriers that prevent particular social strata from joining such initiatives. This might be also valued because, to the extent that such initiatives will provide people with collective goods and public services, there is no clear risk that some (e.g. underprivileged) social strata may not be able to mobilize and help themselves.

The second question in our analysis was aimed at exploring factors that might affect the success of CIs. In this part of the paper we primarily relied on the data form our CI initiator survey. But the most important findings from this source were corroborated by a somewhat similar analysis of data from the CI activists study. A first observation is that large majorities in both surveys evaluate their CI as a more or less big success. In our analysis, based on the ACTIE framework that builds on previous work by Verba cs. (1995) and Lowndes et al. (2006), we have considered the role of five factors that might have an impact on CI success. First, we considered whether different aims (A-factor) of projects. Here we compared CIs aimed at improving social relation, with CI with regard to the physical environment and with other initiatives (the latter as a reference category) made a difference for their success. On the basis of the evidence of our two surveys we did not find consistent evidence of a sizable, statistically significant effect of these motivations on the success of CIs. Second we looked at the role of various types of resources. These resources may be personal (talents: money, skills and knowledge; and the availability of time) or social (community contacts
and contacts with officials). Our analyses clearly demonstrated that – as was theoretically expected - at least some of these resources matter. But there were also a number of unexpected results. In the latter category for example we found that groups with relatively many high income or highly educated members are not significantly more successful than other groups. We also asked whether CIs experienced problems regarding the availability of contacts (the C-factor) skills/knowledge and knowledge (together with money the T-factor). We found that the vast majority of CIs did not encounter any such problems. But at the same time we also found that if there are such problems these may have a considerable negative effect on CI success. This proved to be the case for problems with the availability of time and for community contacts. Unexpectedly there was not such a negative effects for official contacts and skills/knowledge. Finally, we also found that larger groups (that command more resources) are somewhat more likely to be successful than smaller groups. Our analysis also showed that CIs frequently encounter problems because of institutional rigidities (I-factor) and a lack of responsiveness, open-mindedness and commitment of officials (E-factor). Although these forms of politico-administrative “headwind” may be annoying for CI participants, there is no evidence that they have a sizable negative impact on CI success. Finally, we have also analysed how efforts of CI facilitation may affect CI success. Except for a positive effect of financial support on CI success the other forms of facilitation (in kind support and advice) we did not find any such effects. The findings about facilitation effects based on the CI initiator survey were mirrored in the CI activist study results.

Theoretically, we should be careful in interpreting these results. On the basis of our findings one might be inclined to jump to the conclusion that, with the exception of financial support, facilitation would be ineffective per se. Our results however merely shows – that on the basis of the current data – there are no strong, consistent general effects of facilitation. This implies that there are no general recipes for facilitation, e.g. indicating that one type of support (e.g. advice) is necessary for success for each and every CI. Some additional results from our study underline the importance of this point. On the one hand, we have reported that there are many cases in which support is inadequate (typically in the form of oversupply: the provision of unnecessary support). Therefore, it would be advisable for facilitators not to provide CIs with support more or less by default. On the other hand, we should also not jump to the conclusion that CIs are best left to their own devices. In specific cases CIs may face problems where facilitators can help (e.g. in case of problems with community contacts or the availability of time). Here particular forms of facilitation (or a specific combination of supportive measures) can have a positive effect on the success of such an initiative.
In fact, our current findings (at best relatively weak effects of facilitation) confirm the tentative results of recent qualitative research on CI’s (e.g. Denters, Tonkens, Bakker & Verhoeven 2013).

REFERENCES


