Strategies of citizens’ initiatives in the Netherlands: connecting people and institutions

Rosalie van Dam; Researcher Public Administration; Wageningen University and Research Centre; Email: Rosalie.vanDam@wur.nl
Roel During; Researcher Cultural heritage and Spatial Planning; Wageningen University and Research Centre
Irini Salverda; Researcher Cultural Planning; Wageningen University and Research Centre

Summary
In the current social and governance context, individual responsibility and active citizenship are promoted as democratic innovations by politicians. Citizens indeed are inclined to develop initiatives that aim to improve their living environment and social conditions. Governments however, have not found adequate manners to deal with them. Difficulties and close cooperation alternatively take precedence in the interaction. In this article, we will focus on the strategies of citizen initiatives in achieving their goals and the interaction with other (institutional) actors. This focus on strategies helps to clarify the positioning of and interaction between citizens and governmental organizations. A theoretical framework is provided that puts strategy in an action oriented understanding of an informal and transitional way of organizing a citizens’ initiative in a governance context. Two cases of citizens’ initiatives will be discussed. The practice of citizens’ initiatives will show how strategy, informal and formal organizational aspects and trust in a governance environment are interwoven. This leads to the conclusion that citizens’ initiatives deploy different strategies that reflect their internal process and that make them fluid, unpredictable, impalpable and sometimes very powerful. There is no “one size fits all” answer for them in democracy.

Key words:
Citizens’ initiative, strategies, governance, institutions, trust, formal, informal

1. Introduction
In the current social and governance context, individual responsibility and active citizenship are playing an ever more important role. Many western governments, including the Dutch government, are more and more eager to stimulate active citizenship (Sørensen and Triantafillou, 2009). They say they want to make society stronger by getting more people working together and putting more power and responsibility into the hands of families, groups, networks, neighbourhoods and locally-based communities. The aim is to generate more community organisers, neighbourhood groups, volunteers, social enterprises and small businesses. On the one hand, there is the long-term and widely acknowledged trend of ‘citizens’ participation’ in which governments and other organizations seek to involve citizens (Bevir et al, 2003; Edelenbos, 2005; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). On the other hand, we see a
rising development towards ‘citizens’ initiatives’, in which assertive citizens go into action either individually or as communities in a range of fields (Bovaird, 2007; Humphrey, 2001).

Many examples of citizens’ initiatives can be found in practice. As such, citizens’ initiatives are both an empirical reality and a normative ideal. Although the field of citizens initiatives in recent years has gained popularity in policy, much is in development and is still unclear. In research concerning deliberative politics, participatory democracy and performative governance, much attention goes out to the perspective from within government looking outward towards the public. Consequently the activities of civil society actors ‘where much of the transmission happens about boundaries between civil society and the state’ are often overlooked (Dodge, 2010; Van der Arend and Behamel, 2011). Generally, the activities and practices of civil society actors such as citizens are only moderately discussed (Newman, 2001; Newman, 2005; Barnes et al, 2007). In this paper, we try to address this point by focussing on citizens’ initiatives and the roads they actually take. Analysing strategies of citizens helps clarifying the positioning of and interaction between citizens and governmental organizations. As such, this paper aims to explain which strategies citizens’ initiatives use and why and how these strategies reflect in the interaction with other actors.

Two citizens’ initiatives in the Netherlands are investigated: Boermarke Essen en Aa’s¹ [Collective Farmers of Essen and Aa’s] in the municipality Stadskanaal and Natuurlijk Grasweggebied [Natural Area Grasweg] in the municipality of Hellevoetsluis. Boermarke Essen en Aa’s aims to involve and activate the residents of three hamlets in restoring and managing the cultural heritage values in the surrounding landscape. The residents of Natuurlijk Grasweggebied have taken the initiative to develop and to manage an ecological corridor. They both go about this in different ways. Explanations and conclusions are drawn in the light of bonding processes between citizens and between citizens and governmental institutions.

2. Theory

Changing relations between government and citizens

The term ‘government’ usually refers to the formal institutions of the state and their monopoly of legitimate coercive power. It refers to the state’s ability to make decisions and to enforce them. The use of the term ‘governance’ signifies ‘a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed’ (Rhodes, 1996: 652-3). The changes in the position of governmental organizations can be seen as a transition, often referred to as the shift from government to governance (Kooiman & Van Vliet, 1993; Rhodes, 1996). Although the shift has been described in various ways, it is often characterized by the diminishing importance of the national government as the centre of society (Ansell, 2000; Buchs, 2009; Salamon, 2001). The transition from government to governance manifests itself in changing roles of citizens within policy processes and efforts to determine which responsibilities should be public and which should be private. The changing relationship between government and citizens puts the latter in a position in which they are expected to organize certain (public) matters for themselves (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Woods et al., 2007). Currently these initiatives are

¹ The historical Boermarke is a collective of medieval larger farmers who jointly manage and use their common land. The word marke (literally border or separation) is also used to indicate the fields that belong to a village. ‘Essen’ refers to the land that used to be common land. ‘Aa’s’ refers to the three rivers that surround the hamlets.
organised around multiple sources of power replacing monolithic state power, based on both symbolic and material resources (Armstrong, 2008).

Policy analysis in general is moving towards decentralized models, from government to governance (Bevir 2003). The overall understanding is that centralized steering mechanisms rarely work, and that governmental and non-governmental actors at several levels need to be taken into account in this analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2001). These recent angles in policy studies facilitate a better and more detailed understanding of interactions, steering mechanisms and policy-formation in civil society. Recent governance theories recognize that practices don’t necessarily have to be seen as the result of deliberate governing (Turnhout et al, 2010). Sometimes practices occur spontaneously in a context of governance (Aarts and During, 2006; Aarts, During and Van der Jagt 2006; Van Dam et al. 2005; Van Dam, During and Othengrafen 2008; Duineveld, Beunen and During 2007; Neuvel 2009). One can observe a trend in policy analysis towards more discursive and cultural concepts (Bang 2004; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1988, Armstrong, 2008). These authors go beyond the traditional horizon of politics and administration, by focussing on the rapidly growing interest in empowering layman.

Citizens’ initiatives and their logic of practice
In citizens’ initiatives, the lead and main contribution comes from citizens, businesses, local clubs, farmers, small NGOs and small self-employed professionals. Citizens’ initiatives drive on self-organization. Citizens’ initiatives are by their great diversity and fluid forms difficult to understand in their relationships with governments and civil society (Dam, During and Salverda, 2008; Salverda and Dam, 2008). In this paper, citizens’ initiatives are addressed, being groups of citizens organizing and managing their own environment. In understanding the motivations of the persons involved in citizens’ initiatives, a connection can be made with the concept of ‘life politics’ (Giddens, 1991). Life politics refers to people linking political and social aims with the ‘project of their own lives’ and the lifestyle that goes with them. Personal choices are interwoven with ethical goals and global themes. Social and political engagement no longer always takes the form of membership of large political emancipation movements, but also expresses itself in involvement in ethical issues and social relationships which are strongly focused on self-realization and on the single issues which are highly relevant in everyday life.

In alignment to our governance perspective, in our analysis we have been interested in an anti-essentialist perspective on ways of organizing between citizens (Grillo, 2003; Fuchs, 2001). This implies that we paid attention to both the informalities and to the formal aspects of their organisation, which can be complementary to each other (Salverda, Van Assche and Duineveld (in preparation)). Organising as such has been understood as the process of institutionalising modes of internal and external cooperation. This view on organising relates to the work of Bourdieu (1990), Putnam (1993), Scott (1998) and Giddens (1991). It presupposes culture to emerge as a binding force in the organisation, producing self-images and identity (Seidl, 2005). With Seidl, we see the process of self-transformation as a key factor to understand strategies of self-efficacy. Within the organisation, there is diversity and complexity and decisions may be taken without consensus of the organisation as a whole. Some citizens may be experienced with addressing politicians or applying regulations; others may be primarily interested in team- or community building aspects. This interior complexity makes the citizens’ initiatives unpredictable and impalpable, much to the detriment of a standardised way of dealing with them in a governance context. But it makes them interesting, because its inherent diversity can be used as a resource for deploying a wide array of strategies that may become very effective (Van Dam, During and Salverda, 2008; Salverda and Van Dam, 2008).
Strategy and self-transformation
Classical strategy theories account for the achievement of an advanced position of an actor with regard to his competitors (Porter, 1985; Mintzberg, 1990). Here there are no competitors but citizens’ initiatives do deploy strategies. In our analysis, strategies have been theorized as the contingent product of a self-transforming organisation, that relates its interior process to the outside world. With Seidl (2005) and Luhmann (1995), we presuppose a process of self-referencing to be active in which images of the environment are produced in an internal discourse. As a result of cooperation, deliberation, action and discussing the outside world, a specific organisational culture emerges shaping the conditions for further actions (Swidler, 2004). This culture can be based either on traditions and common sense, or on ideology. Swidler theorizes the first to provide resources for proven cultures and the latter to yield new strategies of action. In our research, we have assumed both categories to be present in citizens’ initiatives as a potential for action. Moreover, we assume that different or even competing strategies can be deployed simultaneously by different actors in an initiative which contains dissensus. Citizens’ initiatives that are characterized by strategy pluralism are difficult to relate to. Achieving mutual trust is difficult, because of its unpredictability.

Strategy and trust
If citizens’ initiatives want to become successful they have to achieve a certain level of trust with its governance environment. Trust can be built by opening up, for example by providing relevant and accurate information (Giddens, 1984, McAllister, 1985). The most used terms in social scientific literature are ‘social trust’ and ‘institutional trust’. Social trust refers to trust between people; institutional trust concerns confidence in the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of a society (Giddens, 1990, Granovetter, 1985, Luhmann, 1995). This distinction bring us back to the issue of formal and informal organisational practices. In practice, both forms are related to each other and can reinforce each other: A citizens’ initiative can start a formal conflict and simultaneously establish good working relations with a politician that is responsible by using its informal networks. A trust strategy may be to adjust the initiative to the formal requirements of its governance environment. This would result in a process of institutionalising towards formal settings. But also the opposite may happen, that would stress the informalities of its organisation and conveying a picture of the active involvement of a whole community.

Strategy and action
Whereas strategies, as frameworks of actions, can be divers, a further distinction on three types of strategies is provided, based on Luhmann (1995). These are:

1. The fundamental strategies, which corresponds with the core of the citizens’ initiative and functions as a kind of ‘head direction’. These strategies are the basic ideas of the initiators the citizen initiative and arise from how they look at and meet themselves and the outside world. These strategies correspond with the main objectives and the achievement of the main objectives.

2. Interactive strategies, which arise over time and in interaction with surrounding actors such as local residents and institutional actors. These strategies can be unconscious and intuitive and are frequently updated, based on action and reaction. These strategies are about ways of building trust and connectedness.

3. Operational strategies are those strategies which are always useful to undertake. They are not connected to a special group of actors, but merely aim at a broad range. These strategies aim for putting the initiative ‘on the map’ but also on obtaining reactions as they function as a social antenna. These strategies contain a broad
range of activities, focussing on making the initiative known or important and on the building and probing an image.

This theoretical account provides the tools to study the practice of citizens’ initiatives: how strategy, informal and formal organisational aspects and trust in a governance environment are interwoven.

3. Methodology

In this study we are interested in the culture and practices of a group of people. As such, these practices as defined by the persons directly or indirectly involved in the citizens’ initiatives, define the boundaries of investigation. As the practices, activities and strategies of the citizens are not always planned and evolve uncontrolled, we have chosen for a iterative research approach, valued by various interpretative policy researchers (Maxwell 2005; Glynos and Howarth 2007).

We used a comparative case study approach, in which two contrasting cases of citizens’ initiatives in the Netherlands are analyzed: Stichting Boermarke Essen en Aa’s in Stadskanaal and Stichting Grasweg Natuurlijk in Hellevoetsluis. After an exploration phase, the cases were selected based on several indicators. As this research was part of an contract-research project of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation, more specific the department of landscape and nature, the cases are related to the domain of environment, nature and landscape. Moreover, the initiatives are mature to a certain extent because ideally some strategies had been developed and tested. In order to allow statements about the process of an initiative and the strategies employed, there is some degree of development of the initiative.

The study is conducted using a qualitative method because this method enables us to have a deeper understanding about daily practices and relations. Information gathering is conducted openly and flexible and is based on semi-structured interviews. 25 Respondents have been interviewed and also several casual conversations took place. Respondents were not directly asked which strategies they 'used', but were stimulated to talk about their emotional involvement, their daily activities, their contacts, their experiences and perceptions. The interviews are recorded and transcripted literally. To get an idea of daily activities, the researchers also time spent at various places relevant to the initiative, notably at a book presentation on the Geselberg [Scourge Mountain] of Boermeke Essen en Aa’s and during a tour in the Grasweg area. Secondary materials were studied such as websites, (policy) documents and scientific reports.

Because this study involves strategies of citizens’ initiatives, the emphasis is on the perspective and actions of the initiators. Yet, the perspectives and actions of surrounding actors are to some extent included when relevant for the conduct of the initiators and the success of the strategies. As the interviews focused on everyday meaning and everyday relationships between phenomena manifesting themselves in ordinary use of language, some quotes are used in the analysis for illustration.

4. Two cases of citizens’ initiatives
**Natuurlijk Grasweggebied [Natural Area Grasweg]**

In 2007, a few residents of the Grasweg in Hellevoetsluis have taken the initiative to develop and to manage an ecological corridor. The ecological area will be 7 to 8 hectares and will connect two small forests. The area is located on the eastern edge of Hellevoetsluis, a city in the southwest of the Netherlands. For the residents of the Grasweg, this area is almost literally their backyard.

The realization of the ecological corridor is laid down in the structural plan of the municipality Hellevoetsluis. In June 2005, the municipality decided to explore the costs of such an ecological corridor. For this purpose four variants were outlined. In the recommended variant, written down in a municipal advisory document, housing would partially finance the construction of the ecological corridor.

‘One of the things discussed, was the financing of the ecological corridor with housing. This has shaken the residents. Green yes, but we do not want it financed with housing, there must be another way (...) Natuurlijk Grasweggebied has said, we can fix that without housing (respondent municipality Hellevoetsluis).

The residents consulted with each other and came up with a draft plan for a fifth variant. In this variant, housing is left out. The residents have chosen for a maximum wet-variant to achieve a high ecological value. In addition, the area will serve as water storage. The reasons for their initiative resulting in this fifth variant are a combination of self-interest and interest in ecology and value of wildlife. The choice for a maximum wet variant and water logging is remarkable, because generally citizens appreciate ‘ecological value’ less than for example recreational opportunities and they would have been inclined to propose a park-variant.

The initiative is now in a stage that the plans are implemented and the area is mostly developed. The residents will take the organization and vegetation of the area and a large part of the future maintenance for their account. The land is made available by the municipality Hellevoetsluis, who remains the owner. The construction of the natural and water storage area is taken on by water board Hollandse Delta. This meant that the water board had to excavate approximately 70,000 m³ for water storage. In the future, they will manage the water system. Another, more institutional landscape organisation, Stichting Zuid Hollands Landschap [Foundation Landscape South Holland], guarantees continuity in the event Natuurlijk Grasweggebied in the future for whatever reason, no longer can assume the management of the area (eg. Cancellation of foundation, moving of local residents, etc.). The South Holland Landscape has developed a long-term lease contract with the municipality of Hellevoetsluis.

**Organisation**

The initiators, two persons with also actively involved partners, of Natuurlijk Grasweggebied work together informally. As they are a small group and close neighbours, it is not necessary or logical to approach each other in a formal way. The informal cooperation is largely based on the skills and knowledge that are at one’s disposal. The surrounding parties recognize that within the initiative each has its own responsibilities in response to what they do best:

*D. [Chair Natuurlijk Grasweggebied] is more a person who works the alderman, and who gives a presentation about their plans for the whole council, who is more focussed on lobbying, collecting money and making sure things are formally arranged. And S. [Secretary Natuurlijk Grasweggebied] is more focussed on keeping people together, making sure thing happen and boosting activities and relations (respondent Water Board Hollandse Delta).*
In the process of self-transformation, however, the initiators also established a foundation. The initiators find it useful presenting themselves as a legal entity, because then they are taken more seriously. In some situations, such as applying for grants, it is even a necessary condition. In the process of self-transformation, the initiators have also tried to involve local residents. But because cooperation with institutional partners was the main strategy, the initiators put more energy in the relations with the institutional partners. Another reason was that they received little response from their direct neighbours, which of course is also connected to the energy they've put in to organize local support.

Contact with the other actors varied in terms of formality. They had a very informal contact with the person of the water board, who came by their house several times and who was and still is actively involved, putting also in ‘personal time’. The contact with the municipality Hellevoetsluis is far more formal and was coloured by formal meetings, presentations and project plans. The same goes for Stichting Zuid Hollands Landschap, but since their part is merely functioning as a back-up, the communication and relation with them was logically less substantial. The cooperation between Natuurlijk Grasweggebied and the three institutional partners has been cast in a contract.

**Strategies**

In the initial phase of the initiative, in which the initiators had to convince the municipality of their fifth variant, they lobbied strongly. They attended information and participation evenings, they've given presentations at meetings of several political parties, they contacted councillors individually, etc. In relation to the various stakeholders of the municipality, the initiators have been very tenacious. That also meant they passed the civil servants when they felt they were an inhibiting factor, and went straight to the alderman, which is not the ‘official’ way of addressing the municipality.

The initiators have tried to involve local residents. They organized various information and consultation evenings with local residents, and also send newsletters. Most of the residents are green-minded, so they consent with the ideas of the initiators. Yet the energy that the other residents put in and the feedback they give, are in shrill contrast with the energy the initiators put in.

The initiators of Natuurlijk Grasweggebied opt for relationships and cooperation with ‘large and robust parties’, that each provide for one aspect or condition in realizing the ecological corridor. Without the cooperation of these parties, it would have been difficult, or rather impossible to realize the ecological corridor in the way the initiators preferred. The municipality Hellevoetsluis is the owner of the area and as a consequence their permission was crucial. In addition, the cooperation of the Water Board Hollandse Delta was particularly important because of the initiators’ preference for the maximun wet-variant, which after deliberation with the water board developed into water storage. The cooperation with another institution, the South Holland landscape Foundation, is related to the condition of the municipality to ensure continuity, in case the Foundation Grasweg Natural Area for whatever reason, in the future no longer can assume the management of the area (eg. cancellation of foundation, moving of local residents, etc.). The South Holland Landscape has developed a long-term lease contract with the municipality of Hellevoetsluis.

Another strategy was the formalization of the organization of the initiative. Establishing a foundation in March 2007 was considered important towards the outside world and seen as a good stroke towards professionalization. Other professionalization activities included hiring an accountant.
Another important strategy is raising money for realizing the ecological corridor. The initiators have successfully applied for various grants, both for themselves and for other involved organizations such as Foundation South Holland Landscape. They have also participated in various competitions and make actively use of sponsorship. Companies can sponsor all sorts of things: the tools, a bench, a certain spot in the area.

Moreover, the initiators of Natuurlijk Grasweggebied are very aware of the value of good public relations (PR). They have ‘actively selected and contacted’ media such as the national Sunday morning radio program ‘Vroege Vogels’ [Early Birds]², and certain newspapers. It turned out that if you get a national radio program interested in your initiative, the alderman is also easy to poke. In addition, sending newsletters, creating and maintaining a fairly extensive website and giving presentations is part of their PR. They also think of other forms of PR: They made an advertising and information board for a presentation for the council committee and left it afterwards in the city hall. For months, the board was standing right by the entrance of the city hall for everyone to see. Moreover, they have a mascot and a logo.

Besides having a great deal of perseverance, the initiators can adroitly anticipate to random events. For example, they convinced a councilman, after accidently giving him a lift. Also not all strategies are deliberate. Some of them come up during the process or in interaction with others, as evidenced by the following quotation:

Like the bats bunker, that idea was brought up by J. [person from the Water Board Hollandse Delta]. The idea was just slid in. And with this addition, you have a whole new target group on top. And in this way every time, something or someone gets attached (respondent Natuurlijk Grasweggebied).

In short, Natuurlijk Grasweggebied creates its own alternative for the natural corridor. In developing this natural area, they cooperate with several robust institutional partners and search for funding.

**Boermarke Essen en Aa’s [Collective Farmers of Essen and Aa’s]**

In 2006, residents of Wessinghuizen, and Höfte Weele, hamlets in the north east of Holland (East Groningen) established the Foundation Boermarke Essen en Aa’s. Their objective is to have more influence on the policy and management of the landscape in their direct surroundings. Already in 2005, the residents drew up a ‘Markeplan’, addressing their ideas about the restoration and management of cultural heritage values in the landscape. This plan has been implemented by the residents.

By now, the residents organized in the Boermarke Essen en Aa’s have succeeded in restoring old lanes, rebuilding an old ‘heubrugge’ [haybridge], realized a work of art annex meeting place and clearing historical elements and new footpaths in the landscape. At this time, new ideas have been thought up such as facilities for communal sustainable energy.

**Organisation**

Although a foundation is established, the residents involved in the initiative cooperate and organize themselves in a mainly informal way. The local community in which the initiative is embedded, is the basis of the informal organisation form. Their process of self-transformation is very much aimed at getting more local residents involved in the initiative, expanding the

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² Vroege Vogels [Early Birds] is a moderately famous radio program on Dutch national radio. Is broadcasted since 30 years on Sunday morning and addresses nature, landscape and environmental themes.
shell of people who feel part of the Boermarke. Still, the key figures in the organisation are the members of the board. At first sight, formal structures (the statutes of the foundation) appear to dominate the decision-making. In practice, as a complement to the formal structures and sometimes as a replacement for it, the members of the board can build on existing informal networks and frequent social interactions to prepare decisions, and, if necessary, suspend, circumvent, or ignore formal rules, to make decisions more effective, to avoid conflict or to improve the cohesion of the community organization. It is understood that social cohesion is a prerequisite to realize their goal. In using informal modes to generate togetherness and to avoid and calm down conflict, the members of the board create space for alternative decision-making, where in practice different rules apply for a while, to allow for a return to original principles. Some members of the board even see the formal organization form (the foundation and its statutes) only as back-up strategy when problems might occur (in the informal mode). Informal modes of decision-making are therefore seen as more 'real' than formal ones.

**Strategies**

In this initiative residents explicitly want to execute activities by themselves as a community. Paramount in this are voluntariness, friendliness and individual responsibility. Opportunities are seized to organize festive gatherings and almost all residents in the three hamlets in one way or another take part in the joint activities. This has created an active and vibrant community, which in addition to improving the living environment is also an important goal of the foundation. The initiators have created much support and togetherness with the other residents by communicating extensively and informally and by asking them about their wishes and ideas. Illustrative are the series of kitchen table conversations prior to the Markeplan in which the residents’ ideas and wishes were collected with help of old and current maps of the area. There were no set ideas of the founders beforehand. Moreover, it was made sure that all ‘groups’ of residents were represented well. As a result the board of the foundation consists of people representing farmers, people who already live in the hamlets for generations and people who only live in the hamlets for some time. Togetherness was stimulated by choosing and undertaking only those activities which were supported by the residents. With important or emotionally charged topics, binding votes are held among the residents to let them co-decide. By delegating certain activities to groups of residents, they are made jointly responsible. Residents are asked for specific and concrete contributions that match their skills and affinity. The initiators’ commitment and enthusiasm helps to motivate others. Also successes are celebrated extensively with all residents and many social activities are organized which function as meeting places.

The initiators have generated great faith with residents by coherently formulating activities and presenting them well in the Markeplan. By establishing a foundation and arranging financial support from governmental and landscape organisations, residents see that the initiative is handled professionally. Establishing a foundation shows commitment, and gives clarity about the status of the initiative to institutions but also to the other residents.

The residents of Boermarke Essen en Aa’s consciously take on a constructive attitude. They position themselves as complementary to governmental organizations, not as offensive and reproachful. Some members of the foundation have good informal contact with ‘strategical’ persons at local and regional governmental organizations and landscape organizations. They know the routes to funding, because they are familiar to the governmental system either from their current profession or their previous employment. The two initiators are also known at the authorities for their knowledge of content, technical skills and network. Above all, confidence at governmental organizations have been raised because the initiators were able to mobilize
a lot of the residents of the hamlets. The efforts of the many volunteers (the self-motivation of the residents) is explicitly emphasized.

The initiative works together with independent experts regarding the history of the landscape and the region. This cooperation is also clearly communicated towards governments and grants.

The initiative pays much attention to the communication and presentation of ideas, activities and achievements towards governments and other organizations. The residents, for example, have festively presented the Markeplan to the mayors of the municipalities Bellingwedde, Vlagtwedde and Stadskanaal and to a deputy of the province of Groningen. Results are communicated in the form of good looking publications based on well-organized playful events, such as the opening of the Heubrugge (old haybridge) and book presentation at the Geselberg [Scourge Mountain].

They also try to receive media attention, mostly from local and regional media. The book launch of "In the Shadow of the Geselberg", for example, was accompanied by a radio appearance, announcements in the local newspaper and a preview of a few stories from the book in the journal ‘Noorderland’.

In short, Boermarke Essen en Aa’s focuses on creating a local sense of community and self-activation in order to bring back cultural historical landscape. In doing so, they have an informal approach of social gatherings.

5. Comparing cases

After addressing the main activities and strategies of the citizens’ initiatives, we now want to compare the initiatives. The cases show that initiators use different, in abstraction level varying, strategies next to each other. A combination of strategies is executed, which are not always intentional or planned, but often unintentional, intuitive, part of the culture within the initiative, flexible, erratic and pragmatic.

In interaction with others, which can be other local residents, but also institutional actors, the initiators are, and have to be, very tenacious. The initiators are the ones that have to raise the alarm, over and over again. The initiative will not proceed when the initiators leave things be. The initiators emulate an ideal and refer to passion, inspiration and youth memories and their personal and emotional attachment enables them to put in so much effort. In practice, they have to walk a thin line, because the tenacity also arouses irritation with the persons and institutions involved. If this irritation exceeds a certain level, it would only work backwards. In both cases the interaction is not without annoyance, but in retrospective both initiators and surroundings actors understand each other’s attitude and are also aware that it is an important factor in the activation of others, which most of the times is essential for the success of the initiative.

The citizens’ initiatives differ in focus on the involvement of the immediate environment and fellow residents. For Boermarke Essen en Aa’s, it is an explicit goal to get local residents involved. Social trust, i.e. trust between citizens, plays a very important role. They want to stimulate the sense of community and want to undertake all kind of collective activities necessary to improve and maintain the cultural historical landscape as a community. The initiators have generated much support, trust and active engagement with local residents through kitchen table conversations and by delegating work to groups of residents.
Furthermore, the initiators themselves showed much dedication and enthusiasm which motivated others also to contribute. Setting a good example, makes followers (follow by example). Institutions such as the municipalities and province, played a less important role, although they were not absent. They supported in the form of grants.

The citizens’ initiative Natuurlijk Grasweggebied is much more focussed on a cooperation with institutional partners, such as the municipality and the water board. Institutional trust, i.e. trust between citizens and institutions, was of vital importance in this case. In this case, these institutional partners were essential in realizing the initiative and, also in this case, in the end all put in extra effort than their formal role. The local residents, other than the two initiators and their partners, didn’t show much enthusiasm in contributing themselves, they merely consented.

The cases also differ in their general approach in terms of formal and informal organization. Roughly speaking, Boermarke Essen en Aa’s very much emphasizes on informal interaction, whereas Natuurlijk Grasweggebied takes on a more formal approach. Boermarke Essen en Aa’s did a series of kitchen table conversations, organized several festivities annex informal meetings and even approached the formal system of the municipality by using informal contacts with certain civil servants. Natuurlijk Grasweggebied organizes their initiative with drawing up a contract between the three institutional partners and themselves. However, this general approach should be nuanced and can be explained. In case of Boermarke Essen en Aa’s there are also several examples of formal approaches, such as establishing a foundation. Mostly these activities and strategies were aimed at getting trust and support of local actors (social trust). The accomplishment of local trust and support is then put forward to gain the trust of institutional actors. So there is a interrelation between social and institutional trust. In case of Natuurlijk Grasweggebied, the same connection between social and institutional trust can be made. One part of the difficulties along the way between the initiative and the municipality, was the question that remained with the municipality Hellevoetsluis whether the initiative was genuinely supported by a larger group of residents of the Grasweg. In this case, the institutional trust was low and has been compensated by strategies of professionalization and institutionalization, resulting in a contract between the initiatives and the three institutional partners. Moreover, the involvement of one of these partners, Stichting Zuid Hollands Landschap [Foundation Landscape South Holland] is meant as a back-up plan, in case the initiators couldn’t live up to their promises in the future.

The strategies of both citizens’ initiatives are summarized in a table, following the distinction of fundamental, interactive and operation, based on Luhmann (1995):

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<tr>
<th>Boermarke Essen en Aa’s</th>
<th>Natuurlijk Grasweggebied</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fundamental strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Developing own alternative for developing natural corridor without housing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating sense of community and self-actualization with residents to bring back cultural historical landscape.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeking for local support and consent (focus on residents but also on landowner)</td>
<td>Seeking for institutional support, allies and consent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conducting constructively and not as an ‘action group’</td>
<td>Searching for funding for developing natural area</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conducting constructively and not as an action group</td>
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**Interactive strategies**

- Collective activities and social gatherings with residents and other local actors
- Making and presenting plan
- Informal lobby with governmental organizations
- Cooperation with experts and professionals

**Operational strategies**

- Website, playful activities, seeking for media attention.
- Website, excursions, presentations, seeking media attention, organizing gatherings

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### 6. Organisation, self-transformation and strategy

In the studied citizens' initiatives, a small amount of people is really active, that can be labelled as the 'hard core'. Around this 'hard core', there is a shell of people that are quite active and then there is a larger shell of people around who are involved actively from time to time. So people are attached in various intensities, at various times, resulting in fluid layers of connectedness.

Generally, the professionalization of the initiative is seen as a condition to be taken seriously and to be able to take 'formal routes'. But it can also help to facilitate the flow of the internal organization, especially as it becomes more complex. Too much formalization, however, and the initiative ends up in abstract discussions about what needs to be formalized and drifts away from real action. Besides a professional organization, the initiators themselves are usually very competent, administratively, and in terms of environmental expertise and social skills. In both cases their professional work corresponds to the work they do for the initiative.

Both the initiatives choose to institutionalize themselves by establishing a foundation. Institutionalizing helps to be taking more seriously by surrounding actors. Furthermore, becoming a person is a necessary condition to be eligible for subsidy and grants from institutional actors. Because of their environment, in particular the institutional environment, the initiators are trying to bridge the gap between the informal and formal world. One way is getting acquainted with formal procedures and regulations. Another way is developing good (informal) relationships with people who operate in the formal world. Preliminary discussions with policy makers play an important role in exploring possible grant of permission or within certain policy and legal frameworks. Also inviting civil servants and accepting invitations from initiatives to festive occasions have a positive effect in bridging the gap between the different worlds.

Our analysis shows how both initiatives achieved success in a different way of mobilising their resources. Natuurlijk Grasweggebied has chosen a formal way of organizing their initiative. It almost became a governmental institute, representing the opinions of the inhabitants of their neighbourhood. Being professional, acquiring official recognition and funding has been their overall strategy. Boermarke Essen en Aa's however has chosen another way. They have chosen a path that leads to community embedding, in which volunteers were sought and welcomed and in which private action became their symbolic resource. The informalities of
local cooperation were more important than their formal institutional setting and when relating to their governance environment an informal path was preferred. In Natuurlijk Grasweggebied this was different. For a government, the Grasweg initiative is more easy to relate to, but the Boermarke initiative is what politicians really dream about.

7. Conclusions and discussion

In this paper we wanted to show actual activities, strategies and practices of citizens in the initiatives they undertake and to explain how and why these strategies reflect in the interaction with other actors.

Citizens’ initiatives go through a process of self-transformation, in which connects various people in various intensities to the initiative. The layers of connectedness can be linked to different sort of strategies, such as fundamental strategies, interactive strategies and operational strategies. In the process of self-transformation, the initiators need to have a great deal of perseverance. Their personal and emotional attachment, enables them to put in so much energy and effort.

The process of connecting other actors, such as governmental organizations doesn’t always go smoothly. The culture of a citizens’ initiatives is much more informal than the culture of an governmental organization, which has to deal with accounting for their activities, control and democratic legitimacy. There are also differences in use of time and focus, pointing to decisiveness in the short term versus public support in the long term. The differences in goals, motivations and way of working between the informal world of the citizens’ initiative and the formal world of the institutional actors, can be bridged by strategies. Examples to create more trust between the two worlds are professionalization, institutionalization and formalization. But also by creating informal relations with strategic persons within the governmental organization. Generally spoken, the easiest and smoothest cooperation was informal, which is also connected to the degree of trust.

Although the cases at first hand seem similar - residents take action to develop, restore and manage their direct surroundings – when looking more closely a great variety shows itself. The two initiatives vary in objectives, in approach, in organization form and in interaction with other actors. Natuurlijk Grasweggebied choses a formal way, involving robust institutional parties and Boermarke Essen en Aa’s focuses on informally involving the local community. Citizens’ initiatives in practice are fluid, unpredictable and impalpable, influenced by the process of action and reaction with other actors, which makes it difficult to interpret citizens’ initiatives in terms of governance and steering. From a democratic point of view, citizens’ initiatives’ are problematic because they are by no means representative. Yet they fulfil an important need of both citizens and governmental organizations. Generally spoken, or maybe at least in the Netherlands, the initiatives encounter a great deal of difficulties and opposition when dealing with the institutional world. Opening up to citizens’ initiatives and providing them with more space would be a profitable direction. This process of opening up should be monitored critically and closely, because with extra rights come along extra responsibilities.

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