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Erasmus University Rotterdam
Making Minds Matter

Collective action by citizens' initiatives: citizens' initiatives as reflections of the capacity for collective action and a civil society

Steven Nathaniël Blok

Colofon

Collective Action by Citizens' Initiatives: Citizens' initiatives as reflections of the capacity for collective action and a civil society

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Collective Action by Citizens' Initiatives:
Citizens' initiatives as reflections of the capacity for collective action and a civil society

Collectieve actie door burgerinitiatieven:
burgerinitiatieven als afspiegeling van het vermogen tot collectieve actie en een burgermaatschappij

Thesis

to obtain the degree of Doctor from the
Erasmus University Rotterdam
by command of the
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Prof.dr. A.L. Bredenoord

and in accordance with the decision of the Doctorate Board.
The public defence shall be held on

Thursday 6 June 2024 at 10:30 hrs
by

Steven Nathaniël Blok
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Imagine a large green space in a newly developed neighborhood. The space is completely empty and of little use to the surrounding residents. But then a small group of residents decides to do something with it. They adopt some trees from a nearby municipality, build a small toolshed, and create certain spaces where biodiversity can flourish. After some time, the orchard has taken shape. The group of residents organizes various events in the neighborhood, children play in the orchard, and much of the harvest is used to distill liquor and sold to local organizations. The group spends ample time in the orchard; some even prefer working in the orchard to their office jobs. The improvement from the previous empty green space to the current orchard is huge.

However, as the initiators begin to realize, the orchard is open to all. Anyone can pick apples, gather berries, or use the playground equipment without investing time and effort in the orchard. The initiators must maintain the orchard in some way and break even on their costs. In addition, having received some financial help from the municipality and other organizations to start the orchard, they now must provide some form of accountability. How will the group of residents handle these issues? Will the orchard continue to exist? At this point, there is no tragedy, but something has definitely changed.

Citizens' initiatives, as described in the introduction, are groups of people who address any issue they feel is important enough to act upon (Bakker, Denters, Oude Vrielink & Klok, 2012; Van Dam, Duineveld & During, 2015). This phenomenon has existed for many years (de Moor, 2015) and is known by many different labels: community enterprises (Bailey, 2012), civil society enterprises (Healey, 2015), self-organization (Nederhand, Bekkers & Voorberg, 2016; Uitermark, 2015), grassroots initiatives (Ornetzeder & Rohracher, 2013) or social enterprises (Teasdale, 2012). They all have one thing in common: they are forms of collective action because they involve citizens accomplishing something together.

When people collaborate, they must face a famous challenge. This challenge is famously illustrated in Garett Hardin's (1968) *The Tragedy of the Commons*, a variant of which is illustrated by the orchard dilemma above. (This dissertation

opens with a variant of Hardin's tragedy.) The essence of the "tragedy," or the collective action problem, comprises the following aspects (Olson, 1965):

- individuals discover that taking more than one is supposed to increases utility, or
- individuals discover that withholding resources or not taking part in producing a good increases utility.
- Therefore, *every* individual's sensible course is to take more and/or produce less.

The collective action problem presumes that individuals are selfish and focused on maximal utility and short-term benefits. Because individuals are *homo economicus* (Brennan & Buchanan, 2008), they cannot work together without "suckering" one another for their own benefit (Wade, 1987; Bowles, 2008, p. 1609). Individuals cannot cooperate unless they profit "enough" or are coerced to do so (Olson, 1965). This "grim" presumption of individuals inspires most policies and governmental instruments, such as rules, subsidies, and fines aimed at disciplining behavior (Ostrom, 2000b; 2005; Bowles 2016; Bowles & Polania-Reyes, 2012). The conventional presumption about collective action declares that citizens' initiatives should neither exist nor function well.

However, there are numerous examples of instances that show that collective action is possible even in the worst conditions. Ostrom, Gardner, & Walker (1994) provide diverse evidence of common-pool resources that do not turn into tragedies, but instead are managed well. Nowadays, the stack of evidence is increasing, with many examples such as energy or care cooperatives, ad hoc volunteering, and various citizens' initiatives, both temporal and structural. Nevertheless, the way in which collectives and individuals are viewed by and disciplined through policy instruments still represents the earlier "grim" presumption about their failing capacity for collective action (Ostrom, 2000b; 2005; Bowles 2016; Bowles & Polania-Reyes, 2012).

This situation is strange, not because Hardin and Olson are wrong, but because their core views of human cooperative behavior still inspire and shape most

public policies and instruments, even while opposing evidence is present. According to broadly accepted presumptions, citizens' initiatives are unlikely to exist, and yet they do. Their existence makes it all the more interesting that contemporary policy still invokes Olsonian presumptions about individuals' capacity to cooperate. This dissertation explores this tension by examining the collective action capacity of citizens' initiatives.

When citizens collaborate, they also become attractive to governments for many reasons. Governments view active citizenship as beneficial (Tonkens, 2006, p. 9; Van Dam et al., 2015, pp. 165 & 175; Kleistra, 2019; van Rooij, van Wessel & Aarts, 2019) because citizens' initiatives fit well in governmental views on how citizens should typically behave in public life (The Ministry of General Affairs 2007, in Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p. 101; Kisby, 2010; Healey, 2014; Edelenbos, van Meerkerk & Schenk; 2018). Moreover, the government needs citizens to address contemporary societal problems (Brandsen, Trommel & Verschuere, 2017, p. 677; Voorberg, Jilke, Tummers & Bekkers, 2018). Finally, governments value active citizenship because of dominant policy ideas that citizens should be self-sufficient, self-serving, and personally responsible for their own lives in terms of employability and independence from the welfare state (Borgi & van Berkel, 2007, p. 413; Eriksson, 2012; WRR, 2017). For better or for worse, a governmental agenda envisions the "right behavior" and projects certain values on citizens' initiatives.

Because governments are fond of citizens' initiatives, they are likely to get involved—for example, to pursue goals such as making citizens' initiatives function properly (Seixas & Berkes, 2009; Nederhand et al., 2016), making them perform better (Igalla, Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2020), or making them durable (Edelenbos et al., 2018).

Concepts like the Dutch Participation Society, the British Big Society, or the Do-Democracy all illustrate that governments want something from or with citizens (Kisby, 2010; Corbett & Walker, 2012; van de Wijdeven, 2012; Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2013, 2020; Fenger & Broekema, 2019). These labels describe—but also, more importantly, prescribe—an active relationship between citizens and governments (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013; Aiken & Taylor,

2019, p. 16). Many other examples also show how one tries to make sense of this relationship: concepts such as neighborhood governance (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008) and 'Invitational Governance' (van Buuren, 2017), as well as various efforts by the Dutch government—such as 'Into Action With citizens' (Van Dam, Duineveld and During, 2015, p. 164) or, more recently, 'Democracy in Action' (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijkrelaties 2018). Finding the "right" relationship between governments and active, participating citizens is a quest that takes many shapes.

In summary, I see two puzzles about citizens' initiatives. One concerns the collective action of citizens' initiatives, and the other concerns their tensive and shifting relationship with governments. These puzzles have led to two research goals:

1. The first goal is to advance knowledge about the collective action capacity of citizens' initiatives. How does this capacity develop, and how is it maintained? This knowledge is important given the apparent contradiction that theory predicts that citizens' initiatives are unlikely to function, yet ample evidence simultaneously shows that they can.
2. This research also aims to untangle the tense relationship between citizens' initiatives and well-intentioned governments that expect—possibly based on misunderstandings—many of those initiatives. Untangling this relationship is important because governments' apparently good intentions and high expectations make them eager to interfere, creating possible negative external effects.

Considering these goals, the general research question asks, *How can the collective action of self-organizing citizens' initiatives in their relationship with governments be better understood?*

Citizens' initiatives in society

Before outlining what is necessary to answer the research question and achieve the research goals, I'll provide a short introduction to the phenomenon of citizens'

initiatives. These collectives are part of broader developments in public participation (Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker, 2001; Bryson, Quick, Slotterback & Crosby, 2013; Brandsen et al., 2017) and are captured by aforementioned terms such as the Participation Society or the Big Society. They are also becoming increasingly important in executing public policy, creating public goods and services, and addressing important societal questions (Tonkens, 2006; Uitermark, 2015).

These initiatives are increasingly gaining attention not only in society but also in academia. There are roughly two categories of reasons for this growing awareness, which can be referred to as the push and the pull. Both reasons concern the spheres of the state, community, and market "producing a form of social order" (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985). Analyses and distinctions of how these actors are involved and related in this social order are often portrayed in a triangle (Figure 1.1).

The *push* can be understood as the movement of (groups of organized) citizens moving more into the triangle. Whereas previously the state, market, and community (mostly perceived as households and family) were seen as major actors in the production of social order, other forms like collectives, such as voluntary associations (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985), co-operatives, non-governmental organizations, and nonprofits (Pestoff, 1992) now play their part as well. Citizens' initiatives fit in that list and have received greater attention for their role. The *push* also entails the narrative of citizens wanting to express themselves and to have a greater influence on their direct habitat. This narrative is exemplified by the statement "the citizen has become more assertive" and is described as the third wave of public participants (Kennisbank Openbaar Bestuur, 2022). Examples of this assertiveness are citizens adopting a piece of land to create a butterfly garden that contributes to biodiversity, citizens creating a playground for their children (both cases described in this dissertation), or citizens creating their own optical fiber internet network (Buitengewoon Bereikbaar, 2022). These forms of self-organization vary from more mundane expressions (Hurenkamp, Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2006, p. 25) that address practical issues to more systemic ambitions (Igalla & van Meerkerk, 2015) that address problems of energy or health. Where this push originates is out of the scope of this dissertation, but either way, the

core of the *push* is that more citizens—mostly as collectives—are accomplishing more in the public domain.

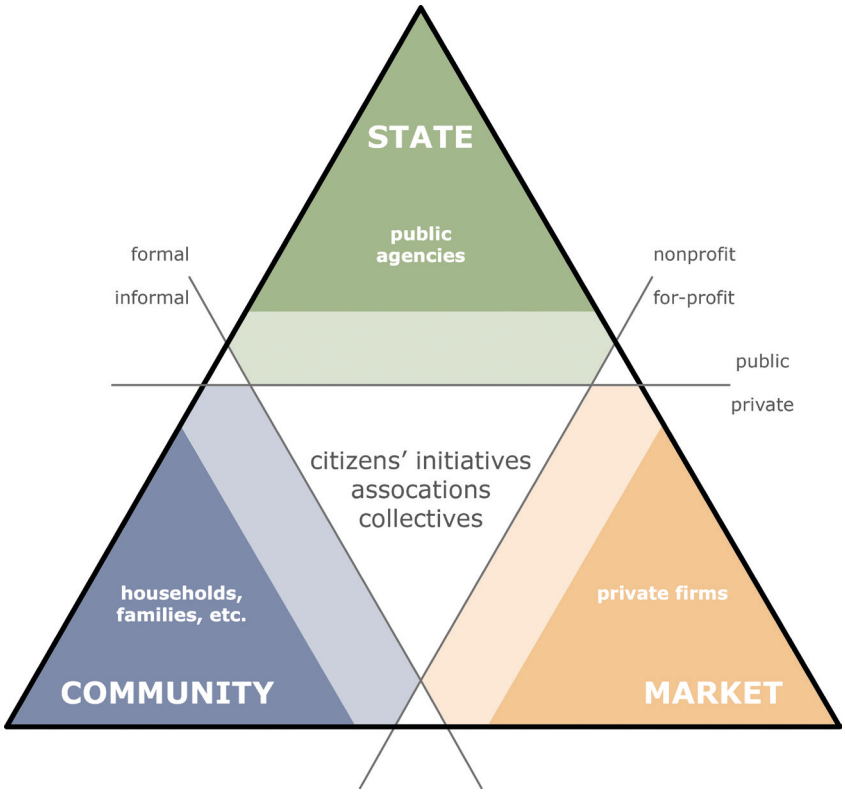


Figure 1.1: the spheres of social order

The *pull* can be understood as efforts—mostly by governments—to draw groups of citizens into the public domain. This can be the result of more general changes in perspectives in public administration (Osborne, 2006; Stoker, 2006; Brandsen et al., 2017). This change ranges from classical (Weberian) public administration via new public management (Hood, 1991) to something that is often labeled as public value management or public value governance (Stoker, 2006; Bryson, Crosby & Bloomberg, 2014). Public value management deems it important to "do things" in co-production with markets, states, citizens, and the third sector. As such, citizens are more often asked by governments to get involved in the creation

and execution of policies (Lowndes et al., 2001; Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker, 2006; van Dalfsen, Wesseling & Blok, 2021).

The *pull* also relates to retracting governments (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013) from the public domain, not in the least because of financial strains (Yerkes & van der Veen, 2011; Bakker et al., 2012, p. 395; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013, p. 419; Healey, 2015, p. 109; Uitermark, 2015, pp. 2304 & 2308-2309). Note that this is different from actively pulling in citizens into the public domain. Removing government from the public domain has not only pragmatic but also normative roots. These roots are, among others, found in *The Quest for Community* by Robert Nisbet (2014 [1953]). Nisbet's work revolved around the struggle for people to form relationships when bureaucracies interfere. *The Quest for Community* has been influential among "new" and "modern" conservatives who advocate for smaller governments, which has resulted in concepts like Cameron's Big Society (Sennett, 2012, pp. 252). There are risks to this influence, to cite Richard Sennett (2012, p. 250):

> *What is called in Britain today "modern conservatism" dwells on the virtues of local life, the poor in communities being supported by volunteers rather than by welfare-state bureaucrats; this localism the Prime Minister David Cameron calls the 'Big Society', by which he means big in heart, though short of state funding.*

The retracting government also illustrates how citizens' initiatives are part of a political ideal where active citizens take responsibility for and create value in public life (Uitermark, 2015; Fenger & Broekema, 2019; Aiken & Taylor, 2019). Note that the *pull* does not only come from states; important Advisory Councils in the Netherlands also "believe that active citizens will be increasingly important in the future." The essence of the *pull* is that active citizens are drawn towards activity by governments. Governments achieve this by stepping back, by asking citizens to partake, and by highlighting the virtue of citizens being active.

Understanding citizens' initiatives

To answer the research question—how to understand citizens' initiatives—and to address the research goals—the collective action and expectations of citizens' initiatives—it is not necessary to start from scratch. A few bodies of literature provide a starting point:

- Collective action theory is used to describe the profound problems that collectives face, such as "free riding." The theoretical body also provides some possible solutions to the collective action problems.
- Civil society literature helps to define the range of what can be valued about citizens' initiatives. Three arguments for why citizens' initiatives are valuable are derived from the civil society literature.
- Public value literature helps elucidate why governments are so fond of citizens' initiatives. Governments desperately need a collective of citizens to define public value. Considering civil society and public value literature, it should no longer be a surprise that governments want to get involved. However, there are major risks to getting involved: *crowding effects*.
- Crowding theory is used to explain that external interventions influence the collective action capacity of (groups of) individuals. Interventions can strengthen people's motivation to work together, but they can also *crowd out* this motivation to detrimental effect.

Collective action capacity: problems and solutions

To understand collective action problems, one must take a step back and consider the core of this theory. Collective action generally starts by distinguishing types of goods based on two properties. The first is subtractability or rivalry. Subtractability means that one beneficiary's use of the good limits its use by others. The second property is exclusion or, more specifically, how easy it is to exclude other beneficiaries from using the good. Approaching these concepts in a two-by-two way leads to four types of goods (Ostrom et al., 1994); see Figure 1.2.

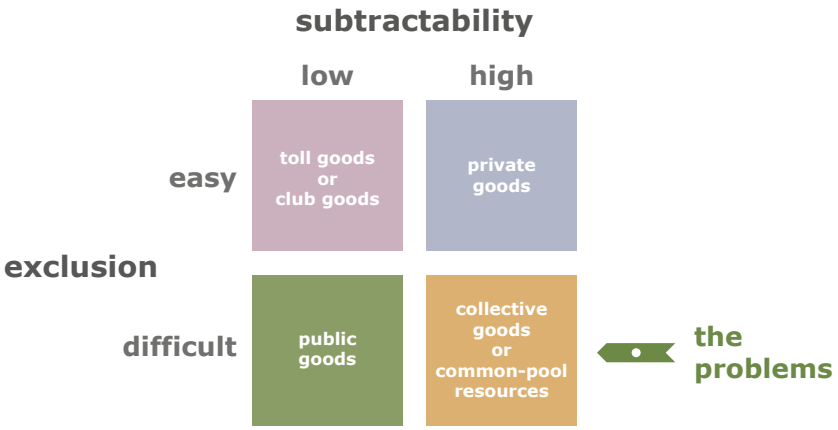


Figure 1.2: four commonly known types of goods

Collective action problems mainly take place in the lower half of the quadrant. Public goods often have a production problem. A dike is one example: once it is in place, it is impossible to exclude people from its protection. Everyone is equally protected by the dike. One user's protection does not come at the expense of others' protection. In other words, the subtractability is low. Clearly, the main problem is who is going to pay for and build the dike. As everyone involved knows they will be protected either way when the dike is built, there is no particular incentive to contribute (Olson, 1965; Wade, 1987) because everyone needs the dike and someone will eventually build it. Why pay for a dike's protections when it could be free? Other examples of public goods are livability, clean air, defense, lighthouses, and many others.

Collective goods and common-pool resources [CPRs] experience an appropriation or consumption problem (Ostrom et al., 1994). Users are "equally" hard to exclude as for public goods, but a CPR is subtractable: "Your use of the good restricts my use." Fisheries, pieces of land, or crops are all examples of this type of good. Appropriators, in cases of CPRs, can virtually take all they want and thereby limit others' use of the goods. In the end, over-appropriation has grave negative effects: The goods are overused and destroyed, and some users are withheld from taking enough (Ostrom, 1999, p. 498).

Fortunately, collective action problems have solutions. Robert Axelrod's (1984, p. 3) *The Evolution of Cooperation,* arguably one of the most famous studies in cooperation, found three conclusions:

- Cooperation can take flight when a small group of individuals is willing to reciprocate cooperation.
- The "shadow of the future" (the prospects that individuals must cooperate later in the future as well) must be "important enough" to maintain reciprocity.
- The small group must not necessarily be dominant; even when the groups are small, they can do well together.

Years of lab experiments and field research on collective action (Ostrom et al., 1994; Fehr-Duda & Duda, 2016) have shown that—dependent upon the specific circumstances—cooperation is possible. Many individuals do not show utterly rational, profit-maximizing behavior. Individuals are often, but conditionally, cooperative, and there are multiple explanations for why and how. Face-to-face communication (Ostrom et al.,1994, pp. 198–199), strong institutions (Cook, Hardin & Levi, 2005; Raymond, 2006, this follows Olson's arguments), preferences for fairness and equity (Fischbacher, Gächter and Fehr, 2001; Falk, Fehr & Fischbacher, 2002), motivation (Alford, 2014), and rules (Dietz, Ostrom & Stern, 2003; Ostrom et al., 1994) are all associated with enhancing collective action. Additionally, many contextual factors have been pinpointed to influence collective action as well (Cárdenas & Ostrom, 2004; Hayo & Vollan, 2012; Ostrom, 2014 [2000]).

Civil society: the possible value of citizens' initiatives

Civil society literature provides a lens through which to inquire what makes citizens' initiatives valuable. Within the social argument, it is valuable that citizens solve collective action problems. Within the political argument, it is valuable that citizens are involved with their direct habitat. Finally, deliberation is valuable through the lens of the democratic argument.

Citizens' initiatives are often mentioned in the same breath as civil society (Bakker et al., 2012; van Dam, Salverda & During, 2014; Magnani & Osti, 2016;

Rijksoverheid, n.d.; VNG Magazine, 2023, World Economic Forum, n.d.). Civil society is becoming increasingly popular among scientists, journalists, and political actors (Keane & Merkel, 2019, p. 369), not in the least because public value managers explicitly need civil society actors (but more on that in the next section). The concept, however, "has become a notoriously slippery concept, used to justify radically different ideological agendas, supported by deeply ambiguous evidence, and suffused with many questionable assumptions" (Edwards, 2009, p. vi). Civil society risks being too much: the problem, the explanation, the ideal outcome, and the solution.

How citizens' initiatives contribute to "the civil society" suffers the same problems. It is unclear how that contribution is supposed to work. It is best understood by Walzer's (1991, p. 11) description of civil society as a "project of projects." Multiple *smaller projects* contribute to *the bigger project*. Associations, clubs, citizens' initiatives, healthy markets, and states all contribute their parts. Citizens' initiatives are one of those projects.

What, then, is the content of the contributions of citizens' initiatives to civil society? There are roughly three arguments for the virtues of civil society. First on the list is the political argument. This basically argues that civil society is the place where citizens perform "daily politics" about their own lives and living environments (see Giddens, 2013; Kennedy, Johnston & Parkins, 2018). Then there is a democratic argument stating that civil society is the space citizens can use to deliberate, interpret interests as a collective (rather than as an individual), and fulfill fuller, more self-determined forms of citizenship (Warren, 1992; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). Finally, there is the social argument that civil society is an important breeding ground for "habits of the heart," best understood as civilized social relations. Examples of these habits are attitudes and values like cooperation, trust, reciprocity, tolerance, solidarity, and nonviolence (Foley & Edwards, 1996, p. 41; Edwards, 2009, p. vii; Newton, 2001, pp. 202 & 206). In the social argument, civil society is the space where individuals continuously play and practice collective action dilemmas (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 13) and, consequently, learn how to solve those dilemmas.

When citizens organize themselves in collectives, they practice "the art of associating" (Tocqueville, 1998 [1835], p. 219). They continuously interact with one another in a social, political, and democratic context. They must practice repetitive cooperation, like the "best" strategy that Axelrod (1984) found in his studies. Therefore, in a more specific sense, citizens constantly solving smaller collective action problems strengthens civil society. By deliberating, acting, and working together, individuals make, shape, and maintain cooperative norms. It is now becoming clearer how these specific visions of value and collective action literature overlap. Citizens' initiatives are forms of collective action, and they must address their problems. When they do, they fulfill many of the arguments as developed in the civil society literature.

Public value: citizens' initiatives as ideal vehicles

Public value management is mostly seen as a reaction to the "narrowly utilitarian character of new public management" (Stoker, 2006, p. 42). While new public management was mostly concerned with increasing the efficiency of public services, public value management tries to combine the goods of efficiency and effectiveness with the virtues of trust and legitimacy (Talbot, 2011).

The public value literature is likely to appreciate citizens' initiatives because they are a (self)-created public that values something. This public is the necessary vehicle, according to public value theory, and is needed by governments that are chasing (the creation of) public value. The reason why public value theory appreciates citizens' initiatives is intimately related to the democratic arguments of civil society literature: defining public value requires the citizens to interpret problems and interests from a collective, public point of view and requires them to deliberate.

The actions of citizens' initiatives are already labeled by many as public value (see Bryson et al., 2013, p. 25; Brandsen et al., 2017, p. 682; Duijn & van Popering-Verkerk, 2018; Igalla et al., 2020), a term mostly known and "brought to the broader audience" by Moore's work (1995).

"The thing" about public value is not so much "what is valuable" but rather "who does the valuing" (Bryson et al., 2014, p., 453). Some argue this is the case because public value must be valuable to those who consume it (Alford & Hughes, 2008; Hartley, Alford, Knies & Douglas; 2017). However, if value to those who consume it is the core of public value, citizen-consumers need only have opinions about whether something is valuable. It is a rather passive position that does not align with the more active, democratic arguments relating to civil society previously discussed.

Moving beyond this consumerist position, Moore argues that public value must encapsulate some form of trust and legitimacy (e.g., Benington, 2009; Moore, 2003). This is achieved in the following way:

> *"The very act of obtaining consent improves public value. The more people participate in framing public action, the more they value the resulting action even if it was not their personal preference. But as their preferences will change over time, so [sic] public activities have to constantly adapt and seek re-legitimization and renewed trust" (Talbot, 2011, p. 28).*

The quote implies that the process of defining public value with others might be valuable in itself (see also Osborne, 2006; Stoker, 2006). The last part of the quote also calls for acclimating to the continuous act of defining public value. This connects perfectly to the arguments of civil society above: Continuous practice makes people better at democratic activities such as reaching agreements based on deliberation.

Within the public value literature, getting persuading a group of people to engage in the process of defining public value is referred to as recognizing a public (Warren, 2017, p. 47), creating a public (Benington, 2009), or calling the public into existence (Meynhardt & Bartholomes, 2011, p. 286; Prebble, 2018). Of note, the emphasis here is not on *the* public as a whole (e.g., Hartley et al., 2017, p. 672). Creating *a* public may sound cryptic, but it essentially means organizing a process with various actors to achieve the act of valuing. In this process, deliberation

happens based on competing perspectives and interests (Benington 2009, p. 232; note how this, again, touches upon the civil society arguments).

Valuing is a highly experiential or subjective activity. This subjectivity is especially true for public value because some people perceive it as valuable. As the value does not exist outside the subjective relationship (Meynhardt, 2015, p. 151), public value is only defined by creating it. Such a public is needed by governments and public managers.

Citizens' initiatives are the ideal *public* for valuing ideas, opinions, and definitions. They are a self-created collective that acts because they find something worth acting for. In other words, they think something is valuable. The bonus feature of citizens' initiatives is that they often *do* something to pursue what they find valuable.

Crowding theory: the risks of interference

Crowding theory describes the notorious crowding out effect. This is the "theoretical possibility that intrinsic motivation may be negatively affected when a previously non-monetary relationship is transformed into an explicitly monetary one" (Frey & Jegen, 2001, p. 590). This effect is known by remarkable experimental findings; I give two examples.

Frey and Oberholzer-Gee (1997) conducted an experiment where they asked citizens if they would welcome a nuclear waste repository in their community. They found that 50.8% of the respondents would have voted in favor of the waste repository. When offered compensation for the placement of the waste repository, acceptance rates dropped to 24.6 %.

Another study by Gneezy and Rustichini (2000) showed a crowding out effect by incentivizing parents to pick up their children on time from daycares. They found two specific effects (p. 8):

- The effect of introducing a fine significantly increased the number of late-coming parents.

- Removing the fine afterwards did not affect the increased number of late-coming parents. In other words, the effect stuck.

What makes the crowding theory so pressing for collective action of citizens' initiatives is that, on the one hand, incentives might be necessary to get people to cooperate (Olson, 1965; Sandler, 1992, pp. 58–59) and to help citizens' initiatives flourish (Tonkens, 2006). When governments support citizens' initiatives, their performance has been found to increase (Igalla et al., 2020). On the other hand, incentives may assume the agent to be unwilling or unable to show the "right" behavior without the deployed incentives by the principal (see Ostrom, 1990, p. 25). However, this assumption does not always hold up, as it is known that people are willing and motivated to cooperate voluntarily and risk-takingly (Axelrod, 1984; Fischbacher et al., 2001; Falk et al., 2002; Alford, 2014). What is more, when people are already motivated, well-intended incentives may crowd out this motivation.

Aside from crowding out motivations, support from governments can have other adverse effects. Governments can take over initiatives in a way that is no longer *self*-organization (Brandsen et al., 2017, p. 676). It is also possible that governments—having controlling and "steering" tendencies (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985; Frissen, 2007)—discipline initiatives in a way that leads to negative external effects. Such effects could include, for example, extra work for initiators or a lack of provided space for initiatives to take responsibility—while that responsibility is requested by governments themselves (Alford, 2002, p. 43; Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 107; van Straalen, Witte & Buitelaar, 2017, pp. 5-7).

Because governments like citizens' initiatives, they want to motivate, kickstart, and support them. Such efforts are, naturally, achieved through policy instruments to stimulate the right behavior (Vollan, 2008). This eagerness is not ill-intended, but the well-intended support by governments may miss the mark or create the opposite effect of what they intended. Additionally, these effects can persist, even in the long term (Bowles, 2016).

These various bodies of literature—collective action theory, civil society literature, public value literature, and crowding theory—are all important building blocks in creating a better understanding of citizens' initiatives. In the remainder of this dissertation, they are often combined and sometimes used separately to answer a specific research question.

Research questions and methods

The general question of *How can the collective action of self-organizing citizens' initiatives in their relationship with governments be better understood?* is answered through four specific research questions. Answering each of these questions is done by using one or more of the theoretical bodies.

Chapter 2 theorizes, based on collective action theory, that citizens' initiatives benefit from exclusivity. If this is indeed the case, the tendency towards exclusivity has important implications for what citizens' initiatives are valued for. This chapter uses method theory refinement to answer the following research question: How does exclusivity by boundary rules influence the ability of citizen's initiatives to overcome problems of collective action?

Chapter 3 addresses the second question, exploring the motivation of initiators and the possible crowding effects that arise when governments engage with subsidies. Unpacking the crowding effect, this chapter uses case studies to answer the question: To what extent and under what conditions do financial incentives by local governments aimed at citizens' initiatives crowd out motivations of the initiators of these citizens' initiatives?

The civil society and public value theories directly inspire the third research question in this dissertation, outlined in Chapter 4: To what extent do ideas of the public value(s) of citizens' initiatives differ between the initiators and participants of citizens' initiatives and local governments? This chapter aims to explore how civil servants, local politicians, and societal actors (i.e., different publics) view the public value of citizens' initiatives. This chapter also interfaces with

Chapter 2 with its focus on exclusivity, which can, of course, conflict with the perceptions of the value of citizens' initiatives.

The fourth research question asks how willing individuals find one another and—again—inquires into the incentives that can create crowding effects. Chapter 5 tests the conventional collective action and crowding hypotheses with new experimental vignettes. This chapter answers the following research question: How do individuals solve the collective action problem of the neighborhood garden? The neighborhood garden is, in this case, a specific experimental vignette that was developed for this research. Chapter 5 explores how individuals create an environment wherein they can cooperate, which strongly relates to the aforementioned social arguments of civil society. Chapter 5 is somewhat different than the other empirical chapters (2 - 4), being a full-fledged chapter from the beginning to the end. After the introduction and theoretical framework, Chapter 5 presents three stages of experimental research and the development of a web application to enable part of the experiment.

An overview of the research chapters, methodology, and publication status is presented in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Overview chapters, research questions and methods

Ch.	Question	Method	Status
2	How does exclusivity by boundary rules influence the ability of citizens' initiatives to overcome problems of collective action?	Theory refinement/ plausibility probe with case studies	Published in the *Journal of Civil Society*
3	To what extent and under what conditions do financial incentives by local governments aimed at citizens' initiatives crowd out motivations of the initiators of these citizens' initiatives?	Deductive case studies	Published in *Local Government Studies*

Table 1.1: *Continued.*

Ch.	Question	Method	Status
4	To what extent do ideas of the public value(s) of citizens' initiatives differ between local politicians, civil servants and societal actors?	Q methodology with structurally devised and checked with experts and *scraped* coalition agreements	Published in *The American Review of Public Administration*
5	How do individuals solve the collective action problem of the neighborhood garden?	Multiple experiments: real-life experiments with mayors, digital experiments with students	A part of this chapter has been submitted to an international academic journal

In general, this dissertation is an exploration that mostly follows deductive logic from various theories. For example, I rely heavily on collective action theory, a field with strong distinctions and predictions. However, this field does not use only numbers to compare predictions, calculate Nash equilibria, and measure social optima. The field is also rich in case studies. The combination of robust theory and qualitative and quantitative research provides the ideal setting for this dissertation. No single theory inspired the research in the next few chapters. Rather, I attempt to combine multiple methods—such as in-depth case studies, factor analysis, and experimental designs—with various theories to understand the collective action of citizens' initiatives.

Scientific relevance

By answering the above research questions, this dissertation contributes scientifically to various theoretical bodies in multiple ways. First, the field does not fully agree on crowding theory and the exact influence of incentives on citizens' initiatives or coproduction agreements (e.g., Voorberg et al., 2018). The research in this dissertation expands the understanding of crowding theory by unpacking the crowding effect, applying it specifically to citizens' initiatives, and considering different interventions in an experimental setting. Second, this dissertation enriches the existing knowledge about the properties of exclusivity (a non-static property) for the collective action of citizens' initiatives, an under-researched

issue. Third, this dissertation makes two further contributions to the understanding of collective action theory:

- knowledge of how individual collaborators find one another
- insight into how communication influences collective action.

One of the specific inquiries provides detailed insight into how actors believe citizens' initiatives contribute to civil society. It addresses a specific way in which the public value literature hypothesizes that public value creation should work (creating a public and letting it deliberate in some way about what is valuable). At the same time, this dissertation contributes to the public value debate by providing empirical research in this area as well as a recommendation for future research by Hartley *et al.* (2017).

Finally, the combination of applying collective action to the phenomenon of citizens' initiatives leads to new insights into both collective action (in the specific context of voluntary, civic activities) and citizens' initiatives (how they solve their free-rider problems). The four bodies of literature, some of which are highly theoretical in nature, are condensed and are applied to mundane phenomena: ordinary citizens who find each other and act on an issue because they find it important enough.

Societal relevance

Collective action problems are weighty: It is estimated that "the global ocean has lost more than 90% of large predatory fishes," with an 80% decline typically occurring "within 15 years of industrialized exploitation" (Dietz et al., 2003). Other climate-related problems that humanity faces are also, in a sense, collective action problems because the atmosphere is truly a commons (Karl & Trenberth, 2003, p. 1719). The social aspects of these problems—that is, they cannot be solved through technical means alone—are pertinent (Folke, Hahn, Olsson & Norberg, 2005; The Consilience Project, 2021; Sparkman, Geiger & Weber, 2022).

Whether collective action problems exist on a small scale in maintaining gardens or creating safer neighborhoods or on a large scale in producing clean air or preserving landscapes, waters, and livestock, the essence of the problem remains essentially the same. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to better understand collective action problems, intrinsic motivation, expectations of self-organizing initiatives, and public value creation. Communities and governments need the knowledge and the capacity to devise the right structures and arrangements to tackle those major problems.

In addition, this dissertation provides four specific societal contributions.

First, a mismatch between how collective action really works and how it is incentivized, steered, and governed could have grave consequences for how communities, governments and private actors organize society, public life, and public questions. Wrongly deployed incentives and interventions may have adverse effects. This dissertation contributes to the knowledge of how self-organizing collectives solve collective action problems and the consequences of those solutions. This dissertation also provides practical knowledge about how policy instruments influence self-organizing initiatives by testing and unraveling the effects of subsidies and, by (further) testing the effects of fines.

Second, a better understanding of the value of citizens' initiatives prevents them from being seen as some form of *Atlantis of democracy* (Gopnik, 2022) or as some magic bullet (Edwards, 2009). This research thereby functions as a reality check, providing distinctive perspectives and language to start healthy relationships between citizens' initiatives and governments based on fair expectations. This reality check prevents potential mismatches, which can leave initiators, local politicians, and policymakers highly disappointed.

Third, citizens' initiatives have different guiding principles and logics for action than other social actors. Therefore, it is sometimes hard to understand one another. However, governments—and their employees—must act in some way towards citizens' initiatives. That means governments must make decisions about their perspectives, positions, and policies towards citizens' initiatives. It is not

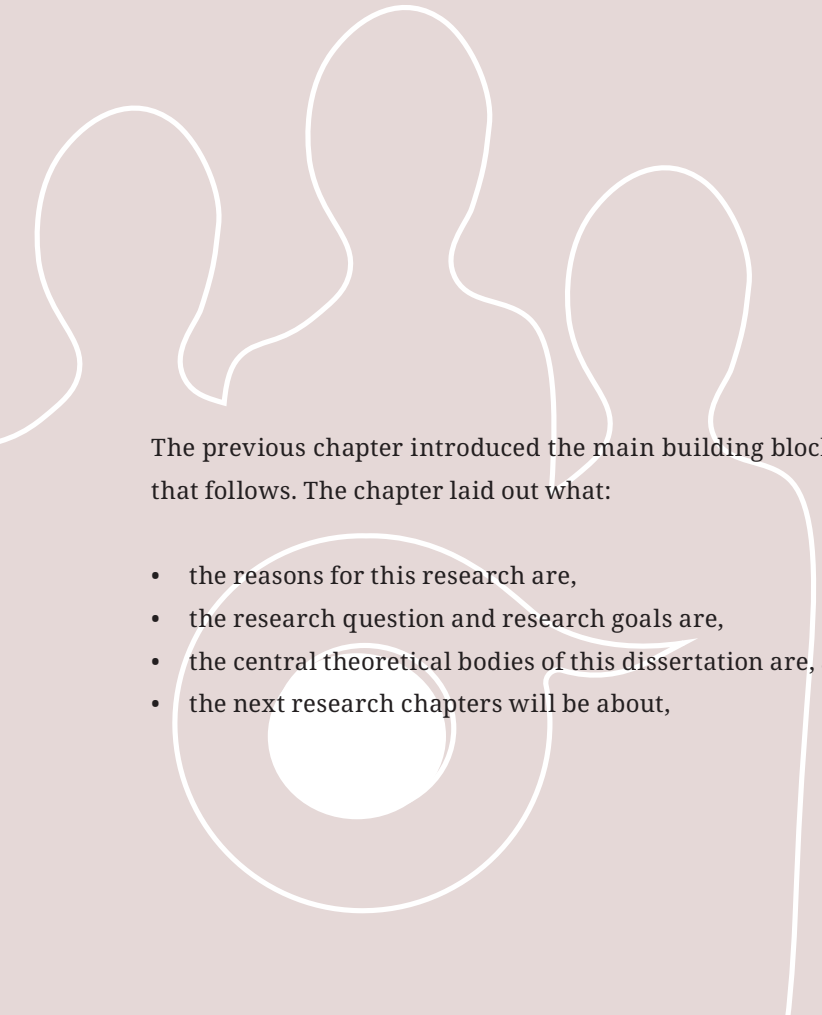
difficult to imagine that these decisions should be made on well-informed foundations. The research of this dissertation provides these foundations. It shows the virtues—and vices—of self-organization, citizens' initiatives, and collective action, as well as knowledge about collective action and insight about policy instruments. Local politicians and policymakers can use these insights to create the right environments for citizens' initiatives to prosper and enact the right measures to ensure that other citizens don't fall by the wayside when they get excluded.

The final contribution of this dissertation is better collaborative arrangements between governments and citizens' initiatives. Currently, the United Kingdom has had the *right to challenge* (a policy instrument) embedded in law since 2011 (Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG], 2011; The National Archives, 2011), but at the time of writing this introduction in '22-'23, the discussion about this *right* is as urgent as ever in the Netherlands. The government proposed to "anchor" the right to challenge in municipal laws (Rijksoverheid, 2022),[1] meaning that citizens' initiatives could challenge their municipalities for the execution of public tasks.

Ensuring the effectiveness of invitations, incentives, and interventions is important. However, preventing some instruments from doing the wrong thing is equally important. Interventions and incentives may create the opposite effect of what was intended. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between policy instruments and citizens' initiatives, which contain highly motivated citizens. In current times where governments are constantly seeking democratic innovations, one must examine these innovations and know what they do, both in the short and long term. The insights provided by this research should be considered before rigorously deploying one instrument across countries.

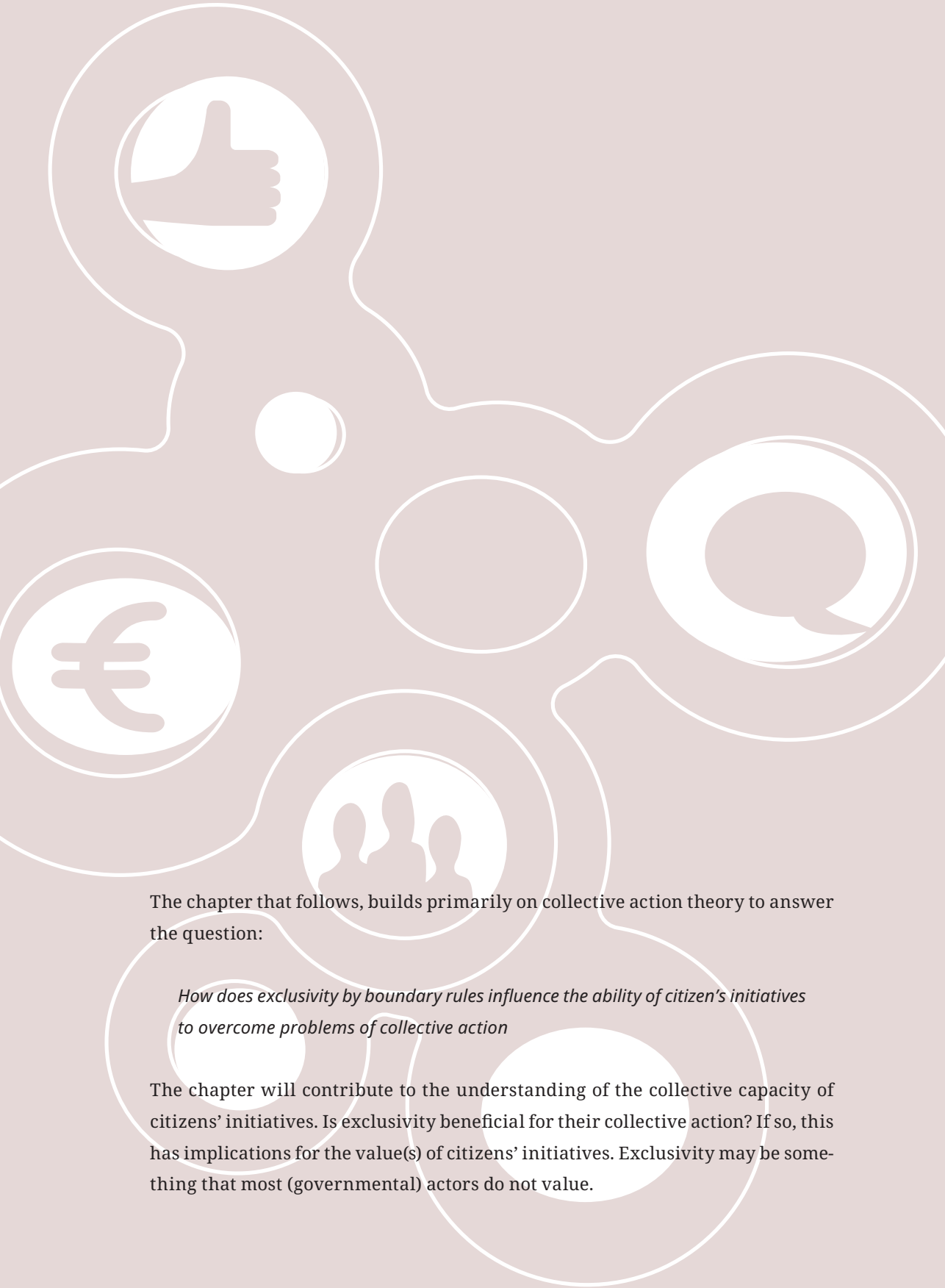
1 Whether it truly concerns "anchoring" is up for debate. Scholars argue that it is already possible to challenge local governments and that, therefore, the bill is unnecessary.

Intermezzo 1



The previous chapter introduced the main building blocks for all the research that follows. The chapter laid out what:

- the reasons for this research are,
- the research question and research goals are,
- the central theoretical bodies of this dissertation are, and
- the next research chapters will be about,



The chapter that follows, builds primarily on collective action theory to answer the question:

> *How does exclusivity by boundary rules influence the ability of citizen's initiatives to overcome problems of collective action*

The chapter will contribute to the understanding of the collective capacity of citizens' initiatives. Is exclusivity beneficial for their collective action? If so, this has implications for the value(s) of citizens' initiatives. Exclusivity may be something that most (governmental) actors do not value.

Chapter 2

Exclusivity of citizens' initiatives: Fuel for collective action?

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Abstract

Self-organized citizens' initiatives are a form of collective action and contribute to society through the production of public goods and services. Traditional collective action theory predicts that such initiatives are near impossible because of the persistent problems of free-riding. Citizens' initiatives however do exist and function properly, and their numbers seem to be increasing in countries such as the Netherlands. This article argues that free-riding problems can be overcome when some form of exclusivity is arranged in citizens' initiatives. We assume that citizens' initiatives use active and/or passive strategies to limit free-riding behaviour. Using three illustrative cases, our research shows that position rules, boundary rules, and authority rules are used in a subtle and often implicit way to differentiate the level of influence and authority between the more and the less committed members, enabling collective action. Such rules, though advantageous, may be paradoxical to the goals of the citizens' initiatives and can undermine the virtues associated with them.

Introduction: the unlikeliness of citizens' initiatives

Increasingly these days, citizens are either assumed and even expected to take initiative in developing public and social policies, or they are invited by local governments to join in decision-making, participate in activities, or solve social problems (Bailey, 2012; Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Dekker & Uslaner, 2003; Healey, 2015; Lowndes et al., 2001; Steffek et al., 2007; Van de Wijdeven, 2012). Different labels are used to describe and study active citizens and their organizations, such as community enterprises (Bailey, 2012), civil society enterprises (Healey, 2015), self-organization (Nederhand et al., 2016; Uitermark, 2015), or citizens' initiatives (Bakker et al., 2012; Van Dam et al., 2015). Whether citizens' initiatives are mundane expressions (Hurenkamp et al., 2006, p. 25), durable ambitions (Igalla & van Meerkerk, 2015), or results of a retracting government (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013), an increase has been noted both in practice and in academic scholarship (see for example the systematic review of Igalla et al., in press). The United Kingdom's 'Big Society' (Corbett & Walker, 2012; Kisby, 2010) and the Dutch 'Participation Society' are illustrative examples of how citizens' initiatives are part of a political ideal where active citizens take responsibility for and create value in public life (Fenger & Broekema, 2019; Uitermark, 2015).

Citizens' initiatives are forms of collective action: they produce a public good (a community policing initiative or a neighborhood care project) or use a collective good (crops from an urban garden). A problem prevalent among citizens' initiatives is therefore how to overcome the problem of collective action (Ostrom, 1990, p. 27). The collective action problem is based on the assumption that individuals are selfish and mainly focus on short-term benefits (Hardin, 1968; Ostrom et al., 1999, p. 279). Self-interested individuals thus tend to free-ride: they withhold their resources, hope that the contributions of others are sufficient to produce the goods, and prefer to receive benefits from the goods without contributing to their production (Frohlich & Oppenheimer, 1970, p. 105). Or they take too much from the common good, resulting in depletion. Ostrom et al. (1994, p. 301) concluded that despite the problem of collective action, there are many communities that successfully organize common-pool resources (CPRs). They argue that boundary rules, authority rules, active forms of monitoring and sanctioning, and an ab-

sence of 'grim trigger' strategies (i.e. sanctions aimed at retaliation) are necessary conditions for sustainably managing CPRs.

Boundary rules have proven to be a powerful mechanism to counter the problem of free-riding (Ostrom et al., 1994) as they specify who is allowed to enter or leave the collective action situation. Boundary rules determine who is allowed to join and who is not (ibid., p. 41). Moreover, boundary rules are the inception of other rules. Authority rules—rules that determine who is allowed to do certain activities—function on the presupposition that one knows who is involved and who is not. The same applies to monitoring and sanctioning. Boundary rules are thus, by definition, a measure of exclusivity. As Ostrom and her colleagues (1994) found boundary rules in all instances of successful CPRs, there is reason to expect that this could also be the case for citizens' initiatives as well. In other words, we can expect that citizens' initiatives tend towards exclusivity by defining and using boundary rules to enable collective action. Yet, while increasing attention is paid to citizens' initiatives, the role of boundary rules and exclusivity specifically applied to citizens' initiatives remains an underexposed research area. This underexposure seems paradoxical since citizens' initiatives are becoming increasingly significant in today's society. The proven importance of exclusivity within CPRs and the increase of citizens' initiatives in society give rise to the question of what the role of boundary rules is in the emergence and functioning of citizens' initiatives. This leads us to the following research question: **How does exclusivity by boundary rules influence the ability of citizens' initiatives to overcome problems of collective action?**

The answer to this question not only fills an important gap when it comes to our understanding of the functioning of community-based initiatives. It is also highly relevant for policy-makers and politicians struggling with the problem often mentioned in the public debate about these initiatives: the problem of exclusion (Adger, 2003; Bowles & Gintis, 2002, pp. F247–F248; Healey, 2015, p. 117). As citizens' initiatives tend to be homogenous, the 'outsiders'—often more vulnerable and less homogenous—are disadvantaged when it comes to exclusion. By understanding the dynamics that lead to exclusivity, we can also think about possible measures to mitigate the undesirable consequences of exclusion.

We first discuss the issue of collective action in citizens' initiatives. We then elaborate on the role of exclusivity for collective action in citizens' initiatives. Next, we discuss the drivers and mechanisms for exclusion in more detail. After that, three empirical examples are presented to illustrate and refine the arguments in this research piece. Finally, in conclusion, the implications of exclusivity for citizens' initiatives are discussed.

A theoretical argument: the tendency towards exclusivity

Mancur Olson's (1965) '*The Logic of Collective Action*' and Garett Hardin's (1968) '*Tragedy of the Commons*' both represent a rational perspective on group behavior. The rational individual, or the *homo economicus* (Brennan & Buchanan, 2008), concludes that taking more than one is supposed to increases positive utility. Accordingly, as every individual's sensible course is to take more, the goods in question are depleted. Rational theoretical expectations 'allows a very rich way of analyzing what will happen in a specific strategic context', and its main assumption, rationality, is generally considered a strong predictor (Axelrod, 2000, pp. 131–132). It is, however, at odds with the idea that individuals with a shared goal should voluntarily act together to realize their goal (Ostrom, 1990, p. 5).

Connecting citizen's initiatives to this rational theoretical expectation leads to the prediction that they should not be able to exist. But there is overwhelming evidence that citizens' initiatives exist and that many of them are quite successful in organizing collective goods and services (Bollier & Helfrich, 2014; Healey, 2015; Hurenkamp et al., 2006). Collective action is sometimes possible and various theories explain this possibility differently. Face-to-face communication (Ostrom et al., 1994, pp. 198–199), strong institutions (Cook et al., 2005; Raymond, 2006), 'context' (Cárdenas & Ostrom, 2004; Hayo & Vollan, 2012; Ostrom, 2014), and rules (Dietz et al., 2003; Ostrom et al., 1994) are all associated with enhancing collective action. Olson (1965, p. 2) suggested that 'unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests'.

There has to be a reassurance that individuals will not get 'suckered' by the free riders (Bowles, 2008, p. 1609; Wade, 1987, p. 10). Here, we show the importance of one particular type of device to provide such a reassurance: exclusionary rules.

Four types of goods

To understand why there are collective action problems in general, it is necessary to establish what collective action is about. The analysis of collective action can have different subjects, for example, how social movements come about (Tilly, 1978) or if the production of public goods is possible (Wade, 1987). In this inquiry, the subject of collective action is the production of public goods or 'collective consumption goods'. The question is whether self-interested individuals voluntarily produce public goods when other individuals do not join in the production of those goods and yet still enjoy their benefits (Olson, 1965; Sandler, 1992). Four types of goods can be distinguished based on the principles of subtractability of use and the possibility of the exclusion of beneficiaries (Ostrom, 2005, p. 24). Subtractability (also referred to as rivalry) refers to situations in which one beneficiary's use of the public good limits the use by other beneficiaries. Exclusion is about the relative ease of excluding other beneficiaries. A distinction between low and high subtractability and easiness or difficulty of exclusion can be visualized in a table, leading to the commonly known types of goods (Figure 2.1):

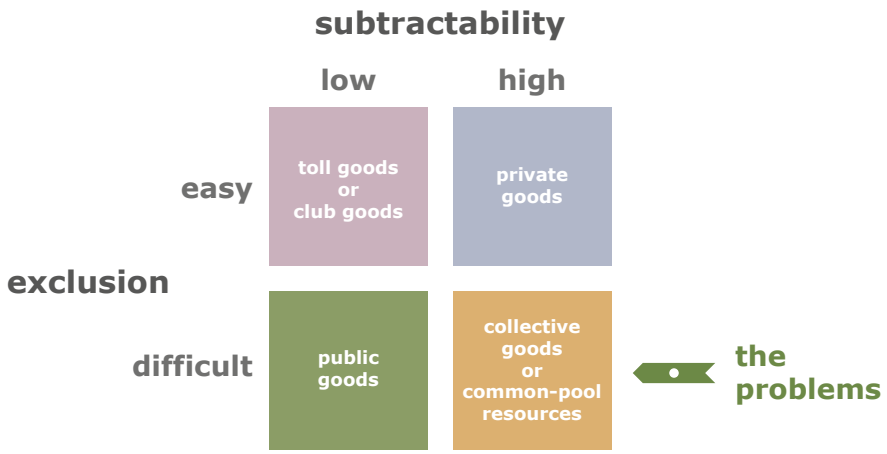

Figure 2.1. four commonly known types of goods

This research focuses on the lower half of the table. Two problems are related to this part of the table: the appropriation problem and the production problem. The appropriation problem emerges because appropriators cannot easily be excluded. They virtually take 'all they want' and thereby limit others' use of the goods, and ultimately the goods are overused and destroyed (Ostrom, 1999, p. 498). Closely related is the production problem of public goods, which focuses on whether the creation of public goods is possible when no one has the incentive to contribute (Olson, 1965; Wade, 1987), As shown by Ostrom et al. (1994), collective action is not impossible, and its problems can be mitigated and dealt with by having adequate boundary rules, authority rules, and active forms of monitoring and sanctioning. Boundary rules were adopted in all of the organized CPRs that they studied (ibid., p. 302).

Boundary rules describe how participants enter or leave positions available for holding within a certain setting (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 41). Boundary rules affect the action arena by specifying how someone enters the arena in general, what the specific qualifications are for entering a certain position, e.g., a board member, and by specifying the conditions under which individuals can or have to leave a position. In an overview detailing more than a decade of research on CPRs, Ostrom (1999, p. 510) shows 27 boundary rules designated by case studies. Most of the CPRs in the case studies used multiple boundary rules in combinations (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 302).

Applying a boundary rule to a public or common good changes the status of its non-exclusive characteristic, even if the rule is relatively 'small' or 'subtle': it turns a collective good a bit more into a private good, and a public good a bit more into a club good (see figure 2.2, the colored arrows indicate the tendency towards exclusivity).

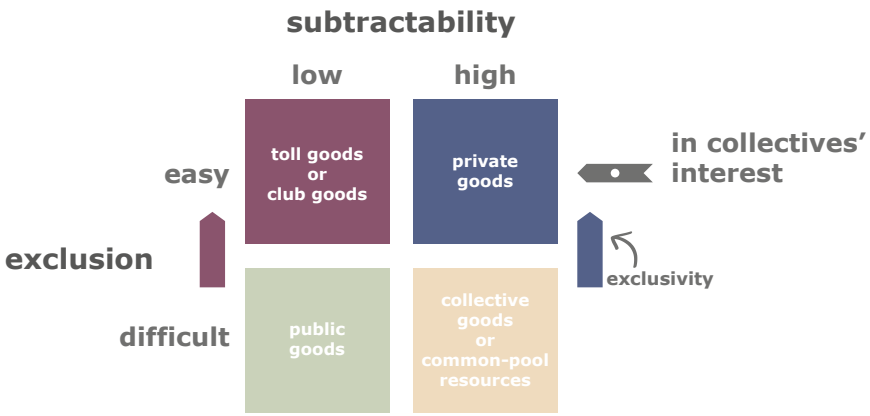

Figure 2.2: types of goods and the effect of boundary rules

One might argue that the adoption of boundary rules is contradictory for collective and public goods, as the characteristic feature of these goods is the difficulty of exclusion from them, whereas boundary rules are by definition exclusionary. Ostrom et al. (1994) and Wade (1987) have shown that the goods in question were certainly common-pool resources and that boundary rules were present in all of the examples that were seen as successful. We have two explanations for this ostensible paradox.

First, based on what Ostrom et al. (1994) found, the problem of collective action is to some extent, actually, the problem of exclusivity. Which, although difficult to achieve (see also Olson, 1965, p. 14), is associated with success. For the second explanation, two other rules, 'position rules' and 'authority rules', must be invoked. An example of position rules is a group of 'farmers who constitute an irrigation association [and] designate positions such as member, water distributor, [or] guard' (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 41). Where boundary rules specify how participants enter or leave available positions, position rules are defined as 'the various roles that individuals may hold' within a collective action setting (ibid), and authority rules 'specify which set of actions is assigned to which position' (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 42). Position and authority rules may be important in relation to public and collective goods because it may be impossible to withhold from the non-producers the good or stop over-appropriators through boundary

rules. A dike, for example, is non-exclusive in its protection once it is in place. The free rider still enjoys protection offered by the dike, but is refrained from any rights that relate to other positions: actions such as decision-making, grazing, or building on the dike. This relates to a solution that Olson (1965, pp. 133–134) had in mind to overcome collective action problems: tying other benefits to the production of public goods (Sandler, 1992, pp. 58–59).

Exclusivity can be an important asset for citizens' initiatives to enhance collective action and it may be construed through the formulation of boundary rules, position rules, and authority rules. It is in the interest of collectives to devise some form of exclusivity. But how does this work? The next section focuses on the drivers and mechanisms through which exclusivity is created.

The utility of exclusivity

The question remains why exclusivity is favorable for the collective action of citizens' initiatives. Several theories on group activities and behavior illuminate this question. 'Fairness preferences', characteristics such as altruism, inequity aversion, reciprocity, solidarity, and trust, are said to enhance cooperation in collective action situations (Falk et al., 2002; Fischbacher et al., 2001). Solidarity and trust, to take the latter ones, are generally stronger in 'tight' groups than in loose associations. Likewise, in smaller groups, it is more convenient to form strong bonds that enable reciprocity. In Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2001, p. 22), he makes a distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. Without arguing that one or the other is better, Putnam states that they both relate to different qualities. Bonding social capital reinforces exclusive identities and homogenous groups in that 'it constitutes a kind of sociological superglue', whereas bridging social capital crosses various social cleavages and 'provides a sociological WD-40' (ibid., p. 23). Small groups—characterized by bonding social capital rather than bridging social capital, enhance trust—'undergirds specific reciprocity and mobiliz[es] social capital' (ibid., p. 22). A strong ingroup with considerable bonding social capital is characterized by having a high degree of trust which is seen as one of the benefits of group membership itself (e.g., Abrams et al., 2004, p. 138),

and, furthermore, is seen as empowering group members in acting collectively (Kahan, 2003).[2]

Ostrom (1999, p. 526) formulated a strong recommendation to overcome the tragedy of the commons: it is important to 'include trustworthy participants' and thereby exclude non-trustworthy participants, the free riders. Ultimately, exclusion, through boundary and position rules, can effectuate this inclusion of trustworthy participants and thus drives the tendency towards exclusivity.

Another argument that possibly explains why exclusionary rules are advantageous is about organizing the group. Marwell and Ames (1979, p. 1339) question Olson's statements on the production of goods and group size, in which he stated that public as well as collective goods are produced because the interest of one member exceeds the costs of this same member. If this is the case, the individual 'carries' the production of the goods, even if others free ride on their contribution (Olson, 1965, p. 44; Wade, 1987, p. 15). The larger the group, however, the more the individual has to produce. Therefore, individuals are likely to have to provide a larger share of the goods in larger groups to reach a threshold where the return is worth the investment. This driver, which we label 'organizability', and refers to how exclusive groups are more organizable than non-exclusive groups. It is easier to carry an exclusive and smaller group.

The last driver is based on the conclusion that monitoring and sanctioning are necessary to overcome collective action problems (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 314). When access conditions are specified and the group or good is exclusive, monitoring and sanctioning are more practical: one knows who to monitor and who not.

2 It should be noted that not all authors agree on the necessity of trust for collective action, see for example, *Cooperation without trust?* (Cook et al., 2005). They define trust as 'to encapsulate our interest' trust is more a matter of sharing the same outcomes or interests. If one defines trust as 'expected reciprocity' (Ebenhöh & Pahl-Wostl, 2008; Ostrom, 2009), it is more a fairness preference not directly related to someone interested in the *same outcome* as oneself.

In sum, the benefit of rules that enhance exclusivity is, first of all, that trust fares well within well-defined groups (Abrams et al., 2004; North & Fiske, 2013; Putnam, 2001). Therefore, letting trust flourish, thereby enhancing cooperative collective action, means setting boundaries on entrance to the group. Second, it is relatively easier to include trustworthy individuals (Ostrom, 1999) and thus to repel free riders (Olson, 1965). Third, well-defined groups (see Tilly, 1978, pp. 1-10–1-12; see also Wade, 1987, p. 21) are associated with enhancing the organization of its collective action. And lastly, it is more practical to monitor and sanction in delineated settings than in open settings.

To conclude, exclusivity is beneficial to overcome collective action problems. Citizens' initiatives can become more exclusive in two ways: through active and through passive exclusivity (Sen, 2000, pp. 14–15). Active exclusivity becomes manifest through rules, such as boundary rules (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 302). Passive exclusivity by citizens' initiatives could be realized by constricting or by thickening the groups. Such a process may develop, for example, through repeated interaction between participants. Passive exclusivity can also create conditions that make it harder to access the goods, discouraging 'untrustworthy participants'. The expectation here is that citizens' initiatives have rules of exclusivity that may either be passive or active in their form. Moreover, the rules are in place because of one (or more) of the drivers formulated earlier in this section. Two questions emerge based on the theory discussed here: first, are rules of exclusivity present in citizens' initiatives? and second, which drivers matter in the tendency towards exclusivity? In the next chapter, we explore these questions empirically.

How exclusivity is shaped: results of three case studies

In this section, we present three examples to explore the value of our theoretical arguments in real-life. As such, this effort can be understood as being situated between theory generating and theory testing (Gerring, 2006, p. 39). Because theory plays a major role in this research, 'theory refinement' as defined in Dubois

and Gadde's (2002) approach on systematic combining or 'a plausibility probe' (Levy, 2008, p. 3) are fitting labels to describe this research. The first aim of our empirical illustration is to find out whether citizens' initiatives have effectuated exclusivity and, if so, how it was done. The second aim is to establish why these initiatives have effectuated exclusivity.

Cases were selected by using MAEX[3] to search for initiatives in the researchers' geographical proximity to ensure access. The three cases occupy common domains of citizens' initiatives: livability, solidarity, social cohesion, and public greens (Aalvanger & Beunen, 2014, p. 32; Hurenkamp et al., 2006, p. 20). The cases were all relatively recent, the oldest stemming from 2014, and located in the same neighborhood, which is known as a disadvantaged neighborhood, in the same Dutch city. The cases, however, differ in the precise activity they pursue, and thus the goods that they produce and appropriate vary. Furthermore, the cases all show some organizational presence as all of them have a webpage, have made the local news and blogs, and are present on popular social media. Most importantly, however, the cases differed in their results. One of the initiatives still exists but is no longer active, whereas the other two are active and one of them has recently even expanded its activities.

Semi-structured interviews (Gabrielian et al., 2008) were held with core group members of initiatives based on different themes. As exclusivity may manifest in subtle forms, we conducted the interviews following the protocol of first having the members tell their story about how the citizens' initiatives originated and what it means to be in the middle of the reality of these citizens' initiatives as opposed to observing them from afar (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 132–133; 2006, p. 223). The second theme was about the challenges that the initiatives faced and how they dealt with these challenges. Thirdly, respondents were asked to comment on 'how things were organized'. If the four drivers were not mentioned, a question was directly asked about them; e.g., 'to what extent is trust important for you and this initiative?' or 'how do you organize your core activities?' Interviews were

3 MAEX is a social ('Maatschappelijke') adaption on the AEX (the Dutch stock market index) and aims to make citizens' initiatives and social enterprises visible.

transcribed, and any response relating to the four drivers or exclusivity is taken into account in this theory refinement.

Case descriptions

The first case is a local 'food garden' that grows biological and sustainable produce. Physically, the initiative is composed of two gardens in a city park, one of which opened in 2015 and the other in 2017. The initiative is seen as successful because the garden regularly makes the news and has won multiple prizes, e.g., a prize for local initiatives contributing to 17 Sustainable Development Goals and an 'accessibility award'. Aside from gardening and producing crops, the initiative organizes other activities that are free for the 'gardeners' and are accessible for non-gardeners at a small fee, exemplifying the tying of benefits to the production of public goods (Sandler, 1992, pp. 58–59). In this specific case, the organization is structured by means of a core team, multiple coordinators who oversee the gardens, and local citizens who meet up and garden for a part of the day. Collective action problems for this initiative are twofold. The first problem is a production problem: how to make certain there are enough gardeners to weed, harvest, and do other chores. Appropriation of crops is the second problem: how to ensure that everyone takes what they are supposed to take.

The second case is an initiative that organizes free meals. With the commitment to reduce food waste and connecting citizens, they collect residual products from local stores and prepare meals with them. This citizens' initiative uses a concept that is present in another city as well, so the involved participants can benefit from the knowledge of other like-minded initiatives. It is organized by having a core team that directs the activities, recruits volunteers, and collects food. Volunteers can register and prepare the meals, and local citizens can enjoy the meals. The initiative started at the beginning of 2018 after completing fundraisers, making the news, and organizing food pickup deals with local supermarkets, greengrocers and other partners. Collective action problems for this initiative are, again, twofold. The first problem is a production problem of having enough volunteers to pick up the food, cook, and clean the venue. There is also an appropriation problem by making sure that guests do not eat too much and do not take too many leftovers at the end of the day.

The third case is an initiative that aimed to address health and societal problems and to enhance social well-being (from here on called 'social initiative'). The initiative is no longer active. The participants of the initiative wanted to revitalize the discussion on how 'experiential experts' have trouble dealing with the workings and procedures of local governments and agencies concerning social benefits and mental health. In the Dutch context, the concept 'experiential expert' is used to denote citizens who have lived through certain conditions and 'know how it is'. The social initiative started as a group of neighbors helping each other, but later, over time, the initiative developed into the state as reflected upon in this research, characterized by a 'core group' that aimed to produce the goods of social well-being and to tackle social problems for their constituents. The main collective action problem, in this case, is a production problem: how to make sure that everyone in the group contributes their part so that the public goods are produced. This production problem was substantive for the initiative because keeping everyone in the core group committed seemed to be problematic. The goods that this initiative produces are, in terms of Wade (1987, p. 21), not clearly defined, which makes it theoretically more difficult to be exclusive. In Table 2.1 the relevant characteristics of the three cases are presented.

Table 2.1: case characteristics

	Food garden	**Free meals-initiative**	**Social initiative**
Case characteristics			
Age	2 years	0.5 years	4 years
Size total	Differs (30+)	Differs (30+)	Differs (30+)
Size core group	5	5	9
Made local news	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online presence	Yes	Yes	Yes
Registered at an online platform	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2.1: *Continued.*

	Food garden	**Free meals-initiative**	**Social initiative**
Goal	Growing and distributing locally grown food	Cooking free meals, stopping food waste, getting people to eat together	Addressing social and (mental) health problems in relation to local agencies
Domain	Social cohesion, green, food	Social cohesion, food	Social cohesion, livability
Interviewee	Coordinator	Core group member	Core group member
Collective action characteristics			
Type of good	Collective good	Collective good	Public good
Positions	Board (core group), coordinators, gardeners, consumers	Core group, volunteers, beneficiaries	Core group and 'the neighbors': local residents
Type of collective action problem	Appropriation and production problem	Appropriation and production problem	Production problem

In the next sections, first, the different drivers, trust, organizability, monitoring and sanctioning, and the inclusion of trustworthy participants, are highlighted. We present how the four drivers push citizens' initiatives towards exclusivity. An overview of how the drivers influence exclusivity is shown in Table 2.2. We then proceed with an analysis of the exclusivity of citizens' initiatives.

Below in subsections, the cases are analyzed per driver. After the four drivers have been discussed, two concluding sections first highlight how these citizens' initiatives are exclusive and then explore what drives them towards exclusivity.

Table 2.2: drivers of exclusivity per case

	Food garden	Free meals	Social well-being initiative
Enhancing trust	Through repeated presence, gardeners can develop relationships of trust	Actively pursued by and in the core group. Irrelevant for volunteers and beneficiaries	Not particularly important
Organizability	Core group and other position rules associated with different responsibilities and tasks Organizing production was not seen as a problem Organizing appropriation based on the position 'gardener'	Core group and other position rules associated with different responsibilities and tasks Organizing production dealt with by the core group Organizing appropriation dealt with by being able to control appropriation	A core group was established that decided upon and organized certain activities. Organizing the production of the good was seen as problematic
Monitoring and sanctioning	Gardeners monitor and sanction each other. Coordinators are like a night watch: able to intervene	Monitoring within the core group, potential problems are dealt with internally Core group is like a night watch: able to intervene	Important consideration, not able to deal with it
Inclusion of trustworthy participants	Creating and preserving a social balance without a majority	Important for the core team: creating a trustworthy team Less important for the position volunteers Less important for the position beneficiaries	Creating a balance in the core team between experiential experts and individuals with necessary capacities

Enhancing trust

According to our interviewees, trust was not an important driver in the social initiative and the food garden as effectuating their goals did not necessarily require trust in the collective action situation. It turned out, however, that the gardeners in the food garden participated repeatedly, leading to a structuration of trust or bonding social capital. Repeated participation is not an active measure that creates exclusivity; however, such a passive enhancement of trust could also passively lead to exclusivity through constriction. In other words, it becomes difficult to join the already tight group of gardeners as an outsider. In the free meal initiative, trust was an important driver for the core group and functions as 'bonding social capital'. Trust was seen as important because a certain connection needed to be present in the core group so that they could rely on each other to organize their core activities. In contrast, enhancing trust on the level of volunteers or beneficiaries was not a driver mentioned in the interview.

Organizability

In the food garden, position rules to enhance organizability define four positions: the core team, the coordinators, the gardeners, and the consumers of the harvest. The coordinators have the obligation to put in extra effort when there are too few gardeners and when production is not sufficient. But this has not been put into practice because there is usually enough manpower. Authorities and positions are also used to deal with the appropriation problem, and this is explicitly mentioned: the harvest is, in the first instance, for the gardeners 'who produce', and what is left is sold to consumers at a local store in the park. The question of when someone can be considered a gardener needs to be answered. In this case, a gardener is someone who 'regularly' helps in the garden and thus has the first right to appropriate the collective good. On a daily basis, it is the coordinator's authority to decide who is a gardener and who is not.

In the free meal initiative, position rules were in effect distinguishing between the core team, the volunteers, and the beneficiaries. There is however a production problem with regard to the volunteers—making sure that they produce enough meals—and also an appropriation problem with regard to the beneficiaries—making sure that they do not take too much food. The core team, acting

in pairs, is often present in preparing meals, and is (if necessary) able to intervene and put in extra effort. As such, they could partly mitigate the production problem of volunteers. In terms of appropriation, food is served by members of the core group and the volunteers, thereby making it relatively easier to control appropriation. When, at the end of the dinner, there is a surplus of food, residents can take some home. But the organizers realized that this process is prone to over-appropriation, and, therefore, they do not allow residents to freely take all that they desire. Ultimately, authorities are divided in such a way that volunteers cook and may eat, beneficiaries only eat, and the core group members decide how the authorities of other positions are allocated. The core team is responsible for and in charge of all the activities.

The social initiative has a distinction between two positions: the original involved neighbors and the core group that was formed later. This initiative tried to solve the production problem by establishing a core group to produce the goods for the constituents/neighbors. In the interview, it was emphasized that the relation between these different positions was absolutely equivalent. The core group, however, authorized itself for activities such as developing mission and goal statements or agenda-setting, whereas the 'non-core-group' did not have this authority. The core group authorized itself to more efficiently produce social well-being and tackle the social problems. But ultimately, this measure of creating different positions did not solve their production problem.

All the cases are characterized by a core team that directs activities or partially produces the goods. Having a core team increases organizability as it demarcates positions and the authorities and responsibilities of those positions. Setting a core team is thus a measure of exclusivity, not necessarily of the good itself, but of rights and competencies. Based on the cases included here, organizability is an important driver that fuels the striving for some form of exclusivity. Although the members of the core team were purposefully selected, there was, however, no explicit mention of actively excluding certain individuals.

Monitoring and sanctioning

In the food garden, monitoring and sanctioning were relevant in relation to producing and appropriating the goods; for example, there have been times when people took full bags of harvest, over-appropriating the good. In such instances, the gardeners themselves intervene. Knowing who helped to produce during the daily activity also helps to keep tabs on who appropriates at the end of the day. Moreover, the loyal, frequent gardeners know that the garden needs some leftover harvest to sell and thus limit their appropriation. The coordinators themselves do not have to intervene in over-appropriation, although they have the authority to do so.

The core group in the free meal initiative dealt with monitoring and sanctioning in three ways. First, they regulated serving the meals and controlled the distribution of leftovers appropriated by residents. Leftovers after the meal were, in the beginning, laid out at the venue, but the core team noticed that people appropriated the goods disproportionally. Currently, the members of the core team distribute the leftover food amongst the beneficiaries; thus, they are now able to monitor appropriately. Secondly, within the core team itself, each member's function is supervised by the other members, thereby creating a form of light internal monitoring. If something goes wrong, the core group addresses the issue internally. Trust plays an important role within the core group, especially in relation to watching out for each other and addressing issues when necessary. Lastly, volunteers are instructed and monitored by the core group during the daily activities; nevertheless, even though the core group is able to sanction, no examples of sanctions were mentioned by the respondent.

In the social initiative, monitoring and sanctioning were not relevant in relation to who appropriates the goods. Monitoring was however an important consideration and a challenge within the core group. The social initiative required sufficient effort from its core group members to produce social welfare and solve social problems. Specific responsibilities, authorities and actions of contributions were however ambiguous within the core group. Even though the core group knew whom to monitor and sanction, it had no established ways of doing so since authorities and actions were not clearly defined within the core group.

Inclusion of Trustworthy Participants

This last driver, the inclusion of trustworthy participants, is an important consideration in coming to collective action for the initiatives. In the food garden, including the right participants was of paramount importance. First of all, inclusion was a key ambition of the initiative. The coordinators saw inclusion as an important task: to make everyone feel at home in the garden. Secondly, a balance is important. An example was given where ten or more people of the same group, for example, refugees, could possibly join the garden. However, while refugees are more than welcome, ten was too many as other gardeners would be 'snowed under'. It was important to the interviewee to be determined on this principle of balance: to show that certain groups, such as cliques, are unable to claim the garden. Fulfilling the goals of the initiative and being inclusive were prime drivers, but this required a solid social balance, which means setting boundaries when the balance gets disturbed. The boundary rule here was a conditional one: limiting access to the garden to individuals if they form too large a subgroup in the garden. The coordinators effectuate this social balance between types of individuals.

This driver for regulating inclusion and exclusion was not so much explicit in the free meal initiative as compared to the others. But selecting the right participants was an important consideration for the core team. This driver was visible through the structure of the three positions: the core group selects the volunteers, possibly including or excluding certain individuals when deemed appropriate by the core group. The core team, consisting of five, was fixed at the time of this research. The boundary rule for the core group, in this case, restricts individuals from entering the core group, and, accordingly, no volunteers or consumers are present in the core team. On the other hand, everyone is welcome as a guest, so including or excluding from being a beneficiary is not relevant to the free meal initiative.

In the social initiative, this driver mainly manifested in seeking 'a balance'. It was crucial that there were experiential experts—the heart of the story—and 'capable' citizens involved in the initiative. Even though including the right participants and a balance of types of participants were important considerations,

there were no indications of actively excluding members. The development of this initiative is characterized by the realization of the initiator that to evolve and bring the initiative to the next level, knowledge and capacities were necessary. A core group was established by including certain types of participants to effectuate this evolvement and to create a balance between the experiential experts and citizens with certain organizational capacities. The boundary rule allowed individuals to enter if other members of the core group believed that they were able to contribute to the group.

Analysis: to what extent is there a tendency towards exclusivity?

Our cases show that a certain degree of exclusivity is indeed deemed necessary to organize citizen initiatives successfully. Interestingly, it is not the boundary rules that are used to realize this exclusivity, but it is the combination of position rules and authority rules that makes the structure of the initiative restrictive. Position rules allow a distinction between 'core members' and others and distribute roles and rights differently between groups. The core group directs the activities and stipulates what participants in other positions can do. They decide how the goods are produced and how they are appropriated. Appropriation of the goods is connected to positions such as volunteers and gardeners, and these rules strengthen 'successful' collective action: one can appropriate crops if one is a gardener and contributes to the production of the garden. The initiatives that are able to solve production and appropriation problems simultaneously with a smart combination of boundary, position and authority rules, such as the food garden and the free meal initiatives, were better able to organize their collective action. On the other hand, the social initiative aimed to produce a public good was not able to settle any other rules for other non-core groups. It might, therefore, be more difficult for citizens' initiatives to come to collective action when their initiative is concerned with non-excludable goods. In Table 2.3, the results of the empirical examples are presented.

Table 2.3: presence and type of exclusivity

	Social initiative	Food garden	Free meal
Is there exclusivity?	**Yes:** the core group decided and directed the goals and the course of the initiative	**Yes:** the core group select coordinators who direct activities, guard the balance of the garden, and oversee production and appropriation of the (non-) gardeners **To some extent:** applicable to the gardeners through constriction	**Yes:** the core group directs the goals and the activities of the initiative, recruits and selects the volunteers and manages handing out and appropriation of the food
Type of exclusivity	**Active:** participants of the core group were purposefully selected	**Active:** participants of the core group and the coordinators were purposefully selected. **Passive:** the same gardeners repeatedly participate	**Active:** participants of the core group were purposefully selected

Synthesis: what drives citizens' initiatives towards exclusivity

We theoretically identified four drivers for exclusivity in citizens' initiatives. In our cases, some drivers were found to be stronger than others. Enhancing trust did not seem to be a prime driver for citizens' initiatives to become exclusive. It could be expected that trust increases within the core group or among the gardeners and volunteers by frequent participation. In contrast, organizability and including the right participants were stronger drivers. Participants for core groups were purposefully selected based on certain capacities or tasks. This shows that specific boundary rules for positions matter. The core group itself is exclusive, and the core group influences the degree of exclusivity of other positions and activities. The core group is able to direct the activities: they set the goals, appoint coordinators with certain authorities, and decide who the gardeners and the volunteers are. They make it easier to monitor, to help and, if necessary, to put in extra effort to produce the goods. Additionally, the core

group is able to regulate appropriation by the other positions. Organizability and monitoring and sanctioning are related through the combination of position rules, boundary rules, and authority rules.

The inclusion of the right participants is an important consideration in the cases cited here. The social balance of the food garden is one such example in which the core group asks the coordinator to preserve this balance. Inclusion of the right participants also drives the composition of the core group in all cases. While participants are not kept out of the core group, certain individuals are actively selected and included based on their knowledge, skills, or experience. In sum, core groups allow citizens' initiatives to deal with their collective action problems.

Conclusion and discussion

Citizens' initiatives are a form of collective action and are thereby subject to its challenges. We presented theoretical arguments that set out how exclusivity is a crucial instrument in overcoming collective action problems in citizens' initiatives. We argued that citizens' initiatives greatly benefit from boundary rules, position rules, and authority rules that have exclusive characteristics. By empirically illustrating our theoretical argument, we have learned three important lessons.

First, it should be noted that a tendency towards exclusivity is subtly and mostly manifested through position rules and authority rules. We expected to see general boundary rules (a hard divide between inclusion and exclusion) in citizens' initiatives, but surprisingly these are hardly used. All cases included were however characterized by having a core group or board which directs and steers most affairs, such as the authorities of other positions and which individuals can enter these positions. Accordingly, specific boundary rules regulating entrance to the available positions were present. The core group structure is, to some extent, similar to the conditions that Olson (1965) stated were necessary for collective action: having a coercive entity. For collective action of citizens' initiatives, this has multiple implications. On the one hand, a core group in itself is prone to collective action challenges, as seen in the social initiative. On the other hand, a core group is an effective instrument to mitigate the collective action problems of other positions like, for example, volunteers or gardeners. Core groups can control access and appropriation while also increasing production by structuring activities or contributing themselves. From our results, we can conclude that to organize collective action, more subtle mechanisms instead of general boundary rules and strict exclusivity of the good (Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom et al., 1999) should be in place. Rather, it is about the selection of people for specific positions, the specific boundary rules for entering these positions, and the various authorities devoted to these positions within citizens' initiatives. The combination of boundary, position and authority rules enables citizens' initiatives to address appropriation and production problems simultaneously. For pure public goods, accomplishing this 'smart' combination seems more difficult.

Second, the tendency towards exclusivity is especially fuelled by the need to include trustworthy, reliable, or 'the right' participants. Monitoring and sanctioning are, contrary to theory (Ostrom et al., 1994), not directly influential on becoming exclusive. Having the right participants is mainly an issue for the people in positions that organize the goods and select, monitor, and sanction other positions. Core groups aim to increase organizability (Tilly, 1978; Wade, 1987) by differentiating positions and authorities. We show that finding the right participants is an active pursuit (Sen, 2000) for initiators and core group members and that selecting the participants is realized with the help of a combination of subtle, specific boundary rules: only the right participants can occupy certain positions.

Third, exclusivity has normative implications that put citizens' initiatives under tension. For example, Adger (2003) and Bowles and Gintis (2002) show that vulnerable groups are sometimes excluded from community processes. Considering the domains in which citizens' initiatives are active, such as social cohesion, liveability, and social care, exclusivity is a balance between instrumental values and social virtues. Exclusivity may be beneficial for mitigating collective action problems, but it also may put vulnerable groups or citizens in disadvantaged positions. Reflecting on the core of this more normative question is outside the scope of this inquiry, but it is important for practitioners and local politicians who struggle with dilemmas such as this. In the end, however, our research shows that the produced or the appropriated good is not strictly kept exclusive, and this mitigates the dilemmas of exclusivity as mentioned in the introduction. The results of this plausibility probe thus mitigate dilemmas of staying open, inclusive, and accessible—principles associated with some of the goals and virtues of the initiatives—while applying some form of exclusivity for functional purposes of collective action. Virtually everyone can appropriate the produced goods, but, ultimately, the core groups stay in control and determine the authorities for different positions and decide who occupies different positions. While this structure is not designed by the initiators a priori, we see the structure across all the cases: citizens' initiatives seem to develop this structure along their way. To overcome the problems of collective action, citizens' initiatives create positions associated with different influences and authorities. In other words,

they divide power by invoking a hierarchical structure between their positions. This power divide requires a different public or political debate than the one posed earlier about the accessibility of the citizens' initiatives themselves or the goods. Debates should be about how the differences between the core group and the wider community are shaped, whether these differences are problematic, and which measures are necessary to mitigate the negative side effects of such a differentiation.

We suggest future research aimed at exploring the association between positions and authorities. How are rights and duties 'divided' among positions? And which factors determine who gets a certain position (with certain authorities)? Is there equity amongst participants when it comes to the ability to obtain different positions, or are citizens' initiatives actually stratified? Studies that unravel the composition of positions and the relative differences in authorities could also illuminate dilemmas about equality and the internal democratic legitimacy within citizens' initiatives. Another avenue for future research is to determine whether boundary rules are used to make individuals leave certain positions (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 41). Theoretically, boundary rules also prescribe how and when an individual leaves a position, but we did not find this particular use of boundary rules, nor did Ostrom and colleagues. A closer look into the governance of citizens' initiatives and the way in which informal and even implicit (configurations of) rules are used to enhance their organizability, is thus a promising way to understand why citizens' initiatives succeed and at what price.

Intermezzo 2

The previous chapter used collective action theory to zoom in on one of the important characteristics of collective action problems: exclusivity. This theory would predict that in order to successfully solve collective action problems, citizens' initiatives would need some degree of exclusivity.

The conclusion of this research was that citizens' initiatives indeed exhibit a subtle or nuanced tendency toward exclusivity. This tendency, however, is not expressed in hard boundary rules but rather in more subtle position and authority rules. In other words, to solve collective action problems, citizens' initiatives did not use 'hard' exclusivity to keep people out. They devised structures to find and bind the *right* participants in making the collective action happen. These structures were—in line with the collective action theory—used to simultaneously solve production problems (making sure that everyone contributes enough) and appropriation problems (making sure that no one takes too much).

One of the research goals of this dissertation is to

> *advance knowledge about the collective action capacity of citizens' initiatives. How does this capacity develop, and how is it maintained? This knowledge is important given the apparent contradiction that theory predicts that citizens' initiatives are unlikely to function, yet ample evidence simultaneously shows that they can.*

Chapter 2 contributed to this goal by showing how exclusivity is used by citizens' initiatives to increase the capacity for collective action. At the same time, it also revealed something about the possible value(s)—or lack thereof—associated with citizens' initiatives because exclusivity is something that certainly might not be valued.

What follows is a chapter that also builds on collective action theory. But it becomes more specific through the use of crowding theory. This theory is used to understand how incentives affect the initiators and participants of citizens' initiatives. In doing so, this chapter contributes to both research goals because the incentives may help initiatives to act collectively (research goal 1: a better understanding of the collective action capacity) and because the incentives are usually provided by governments (research goal 2: untangling the tense relationship between governments and initiatives).

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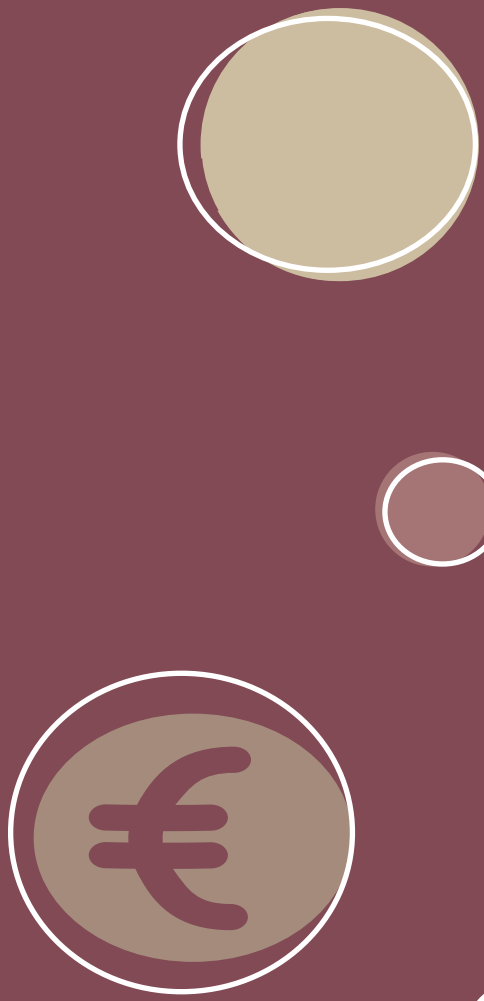
Chapter 3



Stimulating civic behavior? The paradoxes of incentivising self-organization

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Abstract

Crowding theory has highlighted the unintended consequences that well-meant financial incentives can have on behavior. Using field research, this study applies crowding theory to self-organizing citizens' initiatives in the Netherlands. Citizens' initiatives create different kinds of goods and services and are sometimes supported by governmental 'citizens' initiatives stimulation funds'. We found that (1) the crowding effect is multifaceted; (2) the psychological processes and mechanisms of crowding in and out are subtle and can happen simultaneously; (3) in some instances, stimulation funds seem to have affected the preferences of the initiatives, such as expectations about the funds' presence and procedures; and, (4) stimulation funds are well-suited to instrumentally support the initiatives in realizing their plans and ambitions, but less suited in fostering civic behavior or spontaneous self-organization. Our research raises important considerations about the possibilities and constraints for stimulating civic behavior through stimulating citizens' initiatives.

Introduction

Citizens taking initiative in organizing public goods or services are increasingly seen as indispensable partners in realizing collective goals (Healey, 2015; Van de Wijdeven, 2012; Igalla, Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2019). Accordingly, governments encourage citizens to participate in public affairs through various means (Brandsen, Trommel & Verschuere, 2017; Van Buuren, 2017). But encouraging citizens may also have adverse effects. Various scholars have argued that financial support as compensation for doing something out of a civic spirit can, in fact, undermine that spirit (Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997; Alford, 2002; Bowles, 2016). For instance, experiments show that fines meant to incentivize parents to pick up their children to the day-care on time can actually contribute to making them come in late (Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000). The common presumption is that the shortcomings of individuals should be neutralized by interventions from the state (Ostrom. 2000, p. 7). However, this presumption calls for rules and incentives that can invoke exactly the type of behavior that they are intended to prevent.

As stated above, governments aim to support citizens' initiatives (Brandsen et al., 2017, p. 677). Sometimes this support is deemed necessary because it is said to be the key ingredient in fostering the right climate for citizenship to evolve (Tonkens, 2006). Governments are also expected to ensure that participants in citizens' initiatives will not be suckered—i.e., taken advantage of—by free riders (Bowles, 2008). This article focuses on the question of what happens if a government incentivizes the self-organization of citizens' initiatives. An external incentive, for example, a fine or a subsidy, may crowd out intrinsic motivations and instead induce extrinsic motivations (Frey & Jegen, 2001). When intrinsic motivation is crowded out, self-esteem and self-determination are impaired. This means that ultimately initiators are discouraged and no longer motivated to collectively organize. To understand how crowding out works in relation to citizens' initiatives, this article answers the following research question: **To what extent and under what conditions do financial incentives by local governments aimed at citizens' initiatives crowd out motivations of the initiators of these citizens' initiatives?**

Supporting citizens' initiatives can be considered a balancing act for local governments, where wrong decisions about incentives can be unintentionally costly in the long term (Vollan, 2008, p. 563; Bowles, 2016; Brandsen et al., 2017). Thus, by focusing on this balancing act, this article contributes to our understanding of effective governmental facilitation by applying crowding theory to the phenomenon of citizens' initiatives. Second, as crowding effects are usually studied using experiments (Bowles & Polania-Reyes, 2012), we contribute to this body of knowledge by applying crowding theory in field settings to see how it works outside the labs. Finally, crowding theory is mostly known from and studied within economics or psychology with a strong focus on financial components. Crowding theory clearly states that any intervention may spark its crowding out effects (Frey & Jegen, 2001; Cardenas, Stranlund, & Willis, 2000; Bowles, 2016). We make a broader application of crowding theory by focusing on local funding schemes, a policy instrument that consists of a mixture of financial incentives, rules, and procedures.

In the remaining part of this article, we first set out some important theoretical building blocks about citizens' initiatives, crowding theory, and motivation. Next, we discuss the methods of data collection and analysis. We then present the results of our research. Finally, we draw conclusions about the crowding effect of stimulating citizens' initiatives and discuss the findings from a theoretical and empirical perspective.

Motivating active citizens

Governments view active citizens as important because active citizenship is seen as beneficial to both the individual and society (Tonkens, 2006, p. 9; Van Dam, Duineveld & During, 2015, pp. 165 and 175). Just like the concept of the Big Society in the UK (see Healey, 2015), in the Netherlands, 'the Participation Society' was coined to describe and prescribe the active relationship between citizens and governments. As such, the current emergence of citizens' initiatives fits well in the government's view on how citizens should behave in public life (The Ministry of General Affairs 2007, in Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 101). An illustration of

the various efforts that the Dutch government has unleashed to perpetuate the movement of public participation and citizens' initiatives are 'the Do-democracy', 'Into action with citizens' (Van Dam et al., 2015, p. 164), or more recent examples such as 'Democracy in Action' (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijkrelaties, 2018).[1] Citizens' initiatives thus fit well in the government's agenda.

Because of this agenda, governments also have an interest in supporting citizen's initiatives. Governments often give external incentives to reinforce motivation or to show what they see as desirable (e.g., Vollan, 2008, p. 560). Financial or organizational support by governments is seen as an important asset in making citizens' initiatives function properly (Nederhand, Bekkers & Voorberg, 2016, p. 1079). Tonkens (2006, 15) argues that 'active citizenship only comes about in an institutional stimulating context: viz, in interaction with, and supported and stimulated by active governments'.

Especially local governments are fond of citizens' initiatives and at the same time have a tendency to steer and control them with help from the rules that accompany their support (Streeck & Schmitter 1985, p. 122). Boonstra and Boelens (2011, p. 107) summarize the difficulty of the relationship between governments and citizens' initiatives. 'Governments ask for citizen involvement and shared responsibility, but (…) hold on to instruments that keep them in central positions, in a society that is no longer governable from that kind of one-dimensional perspective'. Van Straalen, Witte & Buitelaar (2017) provide evidence for the difficult relationship between a 'controlling' government and self-organizing citizens.

In summary, governments often envision the 'right behavior' of citizens and aim to incentivize that behavior with subsidies or other resources. We argue that supporting citizens' initiatives conforms to the governmental vision of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and civic behavior by citizens. Support may very well be beneficial to citizens' initiatives, but Brandsen *et al.* (2017, p. 676) warn that 'however commendable many initiatives may be, there is the risk that the desire on the

1 These examples are in order 'De Doe-democratie', 'In actie met de burgers', 'InitiatiefRIJK', en 'Democratie in Actie'.

part of governments for their citizens to participate and self-organize may lead the state to take over such initiatives'. This leads to a manufactured civil society where no spontaneous self-organization takes place as opposed to what takes place in a 'true' civil society. We further explore the drawbacks of incentivizing citizens' initiatives through crowding theory.

Crowding theory

Crowding theory is mostly known for the crowding out effect: the 'theoretical possibility that intrinsic motivation may be negatively affected when a previously non-monetary relationship is transformed into an explicitly monetary one' (Frey & Jegen, 2001, p. 590). Crowding theory acknowledges the fact that both crowding in and crowding out can occur (Frey, 1997, p. 1044), we therefore use the general term crowding theory, or we refer to the specific direction of crowding in or out. Crowding theory is known to originate from Titmuss' (1970) 'The Gift Relationship'. He wondered how blood donations differ in quality and quantity based on how the donation system was organized: public and based on volunteers or private and based on payments. Though, at that time, without an explanation of why altruistic motives supposedly outclass self-interested motives in blood donations, social psychologists coined 'the hidden costs of reward' (Frey, 1997, p. 1044). The hidden cost of reward is the decreasing or diminishing intrinsic incentive to act whenever an external intervention comes into play. Crowding out effects have been demonstrated by experiments in a NIMBY setting (Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997). Residents were asked if they welcomed a nuclear waste repository in their community. Almost half of the residents agreed out of civic spirit. When a compensation was introduced—a supposedly supporting incentive—acceptance rates sunk below 25%. Intrinsic motivation to do something for the public good was crowded out by extrinsic monetary incentives. Another well-known experiment is by Gneezy and Rustichini (2000) on day-cares: to reduce the number of parents who collected their children late, a fine was introduced. After the implementation of the fine, the number of late-coming parents increased. The parents saw the fine as a price to pay as compensation for being late.

Crowding theory basically views intervention as follows: all interventions originating from outside the person under consideration (i.e., both positive monetary rewards and regulations accompanied by negative sanctions) may crowd out or crowd in intrinsic motivation or leave it unaffected (Frey, 1997, p. 1045; Frey & Jegen, 2001, p. 592)

While crowding theory is mostly known for crowding out, because intervention is perceived as controlling (Frey & Jegen, 2001, p. 595), the theory clearly states that interventions can also crowd in, strengthening the desired effect at hand. This often happens when an intervention is perceived as supportive. Crowding not only occurs by imposing a monetary intervention; other measures—for example supervision (Bowles, 1998, p. 91)—may trigger effects as well (Frey, 1997, p. 1048; Cardenas & Ostrom, 2004, p. 312; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 59). For crowding out, the following psychological processes happen because of an intervention (Frey & Jegen, 2001, p. 592):

- Impaired self-determination. When an intervention is perceived as reducing self-determination, extrinsic control replaces intrinsic motivation. A person feels no longer responsible and no longer feels any autonomy. Intrinsic motivation is redundant next to a steering and controlling intervention.
- Impaired self-esteem. If an intervention signals that intrinsic motivation is not valued, e.g., through monetary compensation, the individual is deprived of showing and fulfilling his or her own interest and involvement. A reduced effort is the result.

Why then, do interventions reduce self-determination or self-esteem? Samuel Bowles (2016) argues that there are four 'mechanisms' that 'trigger' and constitute crowding out (Bowles & Polania-Reyes, 2012). These mechanisms should not be interpreted as mechanically determined/mechanistic, rather these mechanisms are mental/psychological in nature. They produce effects. The first mechanism is 'bad news': the incentive signals the principal's (in this case, the government's) negative beliefs and opinions about the agent (a citizens' initiative). For example, strict rules signal that the principal thinks that the agent is untrustworthy, lazy, and self-interested. According to Ostrom (2005, p. 267) two messages are currently

told through controlling policies: first, that citizens are selfish and therefore need regulation. Secondly, that citizens are incapable of solving complex problems and professionals should solve these. Both messages are illustrations of bad news. Citizens' initiatives stimulation funds (CIS-funds from here on) with strict rules or conditions could, in fact, trigger bad news.

The second mechanism is 'moral disengagement': the incentive creates a new, more instrumental perception of the situation that the agent is in. In the day-care example (Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000), collecting one's children late is put in a market-like situation where it receives a price, resulting in market-like considerations by the parents. The parents concluded that the fine was worth paying. The fine invoked a moral disengagement and created a rational cost-benefit analysis. When initiatives are only active because of the government's subsidy and for no other reason, initiators can become morally disengaged

The third mechanism is 'control aversion' and directly affects self-determination: an incentive that is perceived as a means to gain or increase control, restricts autonomy, and therefore negatively affects the agent's sense of self-determination. When the application or accounting procedure for the subsidy is overly strict, initiators might experience control aversion.

The last mechanism is 'endogenous preference updating'. This is less like a trigger compared to the previous three mechanisms. As opposed to the other mechanisms, which occur or work within the 'action situation' (where people make choices) and are seen as exogenous, preference updating is endogenous and does not influence the action situation like the other interventions do. Bowles and Polonia-Reyes (2012, p. 374) explain it as follows: 'The type and extent of a society's use of economic incentives also may affect the process of preference-updating by which individuals acquire new tastes or social norms that will persist over long periods'. In other words, because of the repeated use of incentives, individuals learn other preferences, preferences which may respond well to incentives. This, ultimately shapes the action situation more indirectly.

Motivation

The one question that we are left with before we can synthesize crowding theory and citizen's initiatives is: to what extent are citizen's initiatives based on intrinsic motivation? 'One is said to be intrinsically motivated to perform an activity when one receives no apparent reward except the activity itself' (Frey & Jegen, 2001, p. 591). Extrinsic motivation is usually associated with doing something for rewards or evading punishment. Ryan and Deci (2000a; 2000b) argue that extrinsic motivation is essentially based on how people are motivated to act, 'do something', or acquire certain ends aside from the activity itself. They also argue that extrinsic motivation is more like a continuum based on how self-determined an actor is. Individuals who act because they find some action important or because it reflects their values are very self-determined but ultimately extrinsically motivated. These individuals are acting not because it is 'fun' in itself, but for other end-oriented reasons. Ryan and Deci (2000a; 2000b) distinguish between four types of extrinsic motivation:

- external regulation (least self-determined) is about acting because someone demands it;
- introjected regulation is about acting to avoid a sense of guilt;
- identified regulation is about personal importance; and
- integrated regulation is the most self-determined form of extrinsic motivation, but it is still about achieving ends that the individual deems valuable.

Triggers that motivate people to do 'something' or solve a problem are important for citizens' initiatives to start acting (Hurenkamp, Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2006, p. 20; Nederhand et al., 2016). As such, it is unlikely that this motivation is purely intrinsic. Citizens have ends, goals, and ambitions in mind that they want to pursue. Initiating an action is then likely a more self-determined type of extrinsic motivation. Hurenkamp *et al.* (2006) show that many people self-organize for certain goals or reasons: because of a personal experience, an experience by others, or because of a social happening. All these reasons for self-organization are not associated with purely intrinsic motivation. Neither is it the type of extrinsic motivation that is usually associated with punishments or rewards.

Citizens' initiatives are not developed because someone forces citizens to do so or through rewards and punishments. It is most likely that citizens have their own reasons to act. In other words, they are extrinsically motivated by a strong sense of self-determination.

To summarize, citizens' initiatives exist because their initiators and participants are either extrinsically motivated with a high level of self-determination or intrinsically motivated. Therefore, their motivation can be crowded out. But motivation can also be crowded in. Based on the literature, we present four factors that affect how a crowding effect arises among citizens' initiatives when CIS-funds get involved. We inquire into the following issues:

1. What type of motivation is at play;
2. Whether the fund is perceived as supportive or controlling;
3. Whether self-esteem or self-determination has been affected;
4. What mechanisms are involved and how they are involved?

This leads to the following analytical framework with four types of variables and their possible values (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Variables and possible values

Variables	Possible values
1. Motivation	Extrinsically (with lower/higher degrees of self-determination) Intrinsically
2. Perception	Supportive/controlling
3. Processes	Self-determination: to a lesser/greater extent
	Self-esteem: to a lesser/greater extent
4. Mechanisms	Bad/good news
	Moral engagement/disengagement
	(An absence of) control aversion
	(Any form of) preference updating
5. Results	Is there a crowding in or out effect?

Methods and design

Data collection for this article has taken place through eight case studies of municipal incentive schemes for citizen participation with eight initiatives that receive subsidies from these schemes. Case studies are suited for our research purposes as we are testing and exploring why citizens' initiatives are prone to crowding based on the analytical framework. In that sense, our study follows a deductive logic. A case study design matches the multi-causality and probable fine-grained appearance of crowding effects in real-life situations.

Several municipalities in the Netherlands have CIS-funds to invite, entice, or support citizens' initiatives. We searched for funds that explicitly target citizens' initiatives as appears from their name: 'Initiative Fund'. This name distinguishes them from other municipal schemes that provide regular subsidies to associations. We found a dozen and included eight. Out of the four cases that were excluded, one municipal fund had no interest in participating in the research, two funds were unable to establish contacts with users of the funds and in the final one there were no initiatives that draw from the fund yet. The selected CIS-funds are all relatively young, maximally four years old because we assumed that older CIS-funds have experienced learning effects (see for example Van Straalen et al., 2017). The CIS-funds are all rather similar in terms of their purposes, rules, and additional conditions. The amount that one can maximally apply for and the total available money differ. An overview of the CIS-funds and their characteristics is available in the online supplemental material.

First, we conducted short unstructured interviews of approximately 30 minutes with a civil servant or volunteer of the fund and selected the initiatives in deliberation with the drawees. The selection criteria that we set and met were similarity and representativity. Similarity was important for our purpose to see how crowding theory applies to citizens' initiatives (Gerring, 2006, pp. 131–139) as 'most-similar selection' is very well suited to confirm if crowding theory applies to citizens' initiatives and explore how it works. Representativity was important for exploration and prevents our cases from being outliers. The selected initia-

tives were similar and representative in terms of the domains they were active in (Hurenkamp et al., 2006).

Second, we visited the initiative and interviewed one applicant from an initiative per fund about their activities and experiences with the fund over the course of the second half of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. Citizens' initiatives are often dependent on a small core group of active citizens and as types of motivation are important in this study, we interviewed the individual who was considered the driving force behind the initiative. We conducted semi-structured interviews (Gabrielian, Yang, & Spice, 2007, p. 156) of one hour with the initiators about the daily situations of and in their initiative. We used an interview protocol with the following themes: (1) the general characteristics of the initiative; (2) the goals, ambitions and motivations of the initiators; (3) how they perceive the fund; (4) what the CIS-funds does for/to them; and (5) how initiators perceive the subsidy, the rules, the procedures and the involved civil servants. Interviews were recorded, reviewed and summarized. We analyzed the interviews by coding all relevant statements about the variables in the analytical framework per case and we interpreted the data both ways. For example, CIS-funds could signal bad and good news. Descriptions of the cases were constructed based on the analysis with: (1) a short general description of the case and (2) perceptions of initiators and comprehensive storylines (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, pp. 111 and 115) with detailed attention to the 'little things' about the four mechanisms that make the crowding effect. The descriptions were reduced to the shorter analysis (in the next section) per variable to present a comprehensible overview of our findings (see the online supplemental material for the extended descriptions).

Results

First, we provide short descriptions of the cases followed by an analysis of each of the four categories from the analytical framework, and then we finish with a summary of our findings (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Cases and descriptions

No.	Description
1	This initiative organizes all kinds of activities focused on increasing social cohesion and unity in the neighborhood. Examples are fishing together, bus trips, 'neighbor-day', maintaining gardens and the particular activity supported by the fund of renovating a small garden
2	The activity is for improving and maintaining a playground in a specific block of a neighborhood. The active neighbors in this initiative consist of roughly seven families and their activities regarding the playground was a one-off occasion.
3	The orchard is located in a green space between two rows of houses in a relatively new neighborhood. The initiator and other citizens were not satisfied with the green space, and they made a new plan for the green space, turning it an orchard. They adopted some trees that the municipality wanted to get rid of and organize activities in the orchard.
4	The food garden is located in one of the Dutch COA's (*Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers*, roughly translated as 'central agency for the reception of asylum Seekers'. The initiators organize the garden in collaboration with the refugees.
5	Inspired by the counting of birds in the area and a recent lecture on butterflies, the initiators created a coalition with a local (retired) farmer who would make his land available, a school, and the municipality to create the butterfly garden.
6	This initiative involves redecorating structures. One was 'the cage'—a local gas distribution point—and the other was 'the shack'—a local hanging out spot for the youth—both in decayed state. The initiator, who is a teacher at a secondary school, thought of a project to let students aid in the renovation and decoration of the structures. Students, kids from the local primary school, the municipality, a cultural organization (with a graffiti artist), and the gas company made the structures more attractive
7	This initiative is a group of women who aimed to create a natural playground in their village for the kids. The initiators turned first to the developer of some of the lots in the village but with no results, and they then went on to the municipality and other partners to realize their ambitions.
8	This initiative is about a group of kids working weekly on robotics and who train/prepare for robot competitions. The initiative in its current form 'just came about' because the parents got involved in the kids' activities.

In the following sections, the findings of all the cases collectively are presented variable by variable. We conclude this section with a final verdict based on our findings.

Type of motivation

In none of the studied initiatives have pure forms of intrinsic motivations been found. Most of the initiators were motivated because they wanted to achieve something. They had concrete ends and goals, mostly in their direct neighborhood, which they wanted to acquire. Initiators acted because they found it personally important and valuable to achieve those results: parents wanted to facilitate activities for their kids so that they could work on robotics, and locals wanted to renovate a garden, improve or create a playground, or create a beautiful orchard. Based on Ryan and Deci's typology, identified regulation (high self-determination) was the most dominant type of motivation.

In three of the cases, integrated regulation (most self-determination) was at play. In the food garden, for example, the initiators were driven by deep values to change the welfare state, and one of them had been working on that for decades. At the same time, they were practically oriented towards their goals: they wanted their project to succeed and needed funds and partners to accomplish this. Also, in the butterfly garden and the redecoration/renovation cases, more self-determined forms of motivation were visible. The initiators of the butterfly garden were enthusiastic and involved with nature and since they were young, they wanted to pass on this enthusiasm and involvement to local school kids. In addition, they also want to help improve the current state of nature regarding bees and butterflies. In the redecoration case, the initiator was also an artist looking for inspiration.

Perceived support of control

Most of the citizens' initiatives perceived the CIS-funds—in general (we cover the application procedures later in the section about the mechanisms)—as supportive and not as controlling. In half of the cases, the initiators were steered to the fund by civil servants, showing that CIS-funds are actually looking to support

active citizens rather than tightly controlling and suppressing applications. This attitude of support is affirmed by the initiators from the food garden:

> *They were not looking for reasons to say 'no', they were looking for reasons to say 'yes'. And they also said: if you need more money later, please come back to us. After the report, which was very short, they also asked if they could have pictures. So they are very supportive.*

This perception of support is mainly the result of civil servants often being involved and helpful in the projects. The initiators of maintaining the playground were fond of the civil servants who were enthusiastic; the initiators of the butterfly garden mentioned that a civil servant helped with the application; and the initiator from the natural playground was aided by civil servants in making their project (plan) better. Other initiatives felt supported (and esteemed) because of a visit by a local council member to view the results. Consequently, in the end, none of the CIS-funds were seen as controlling by the initiators. At the same time, the initiators noted that they had other experiences with other non-governmental funds that had more controlling conditions or were more distant.

In two of the cases, renovating the bedding and the orchard, the CIS-funds were neither perceived as controlling nor as supportive. Instead, the initiators saw the CIS-funds and their accompanying rules as 'part of the deal' (we will get back to this later in the section on mechanisms).

Influenced self-esteem or determination

We did not find any instances of impaired self-esteem. The incentive did not devalue the motivations of initiators. Rather, in more than half of the initiatives (renovating the bedding, the food garden, the butterfly garden, the redecoration case, and creating the natural playground), the self-esteem of initiators increased because of involved, appreciative, and helpful civil servants or a local councilor (they felt respected for the same reasons as they felt supported).

Self-determination was not impaired; instead, we found indications that self-determination was actually 'nurtured' by the fund. In three cases, maintaining the

playground, the redecoration case, and the 'kids and robotics' case, the CIS-funds were not necessary for the projects because, according to the initiators, they were sure that they would have made it work either way. In those cases, however, the fund did offer the possibility to create better results. In the other five cases, the CIS-funds were indispensable for the initiatives to be realized. At first sight, the funding seems somewhat transactional, but the intervention seemed to do the opposite of replacing self-determined motivation: it facilitated it. Because of the fund, initiators were able to pursue their (non-intrinsic) motivations and create the results they aimed for: 'If we didn't get the fund, we wouldn't have made it financially' (renovating a garden); or 'You want the project to succeed. And I know that if we didn't get money elsewhere, we would have a problem' (the food garden); or 'If there are no resources, people often don't even start. A playground, for example, people are not going to pay for that. You need the fund' (the butterfly garden). To cite Frey and Jegen (2001, p. 595), initiators 'feel that they are given more freedom to act'.

Mechanisms

We distinguished four mechanisms that can provoke crowding effects. First, there were no instances of the CIS-funds signaling some kind of bad news in the cases that we examined. Most often, initiators did not perceive any signal at all or they perceived a positive signal. The good news was, in the cases of maintaining a playground and the butterfly garden, that governments want locals to take the initiative. Other examples of this positive news are the following statements 'It's some form of appraisal for initiatives' (redecoration case) and the initiators of the food garden said that 'Money from the CIS-fund, which is run by a local organization, has the benefit of the local approval' (as opposed to a general fund). The fund did not signal abstract good news to them, but rather they saw it as some form of good news legitimized by the neighborhood community.

Secondly, we did not find any signs of control aversion. The conditions for the application and the process of applying were seen as accessible and logical, rather than Kafkaesque and full of bureaucratic red tape. Furthermore, accounting for the received money was also generally seen as fair and accessible. Some initiatives were allowed to show photos of their results as accounting for the fund,

while others needed to present a balance sheet and bills. None of the present conditions nor administrative processes invoked control aversion.

Thirdly, we did not find any moral engagement; however, we did find multiple—but only slight—instances of moral disengagement. As is illustrated through quotes in the section on self-esteem, most citizens' initiatives need the CIS-funds or otherwise they would not exist. Some initiators (of the orchard, the food garden and the natural playground) were involved in applying for different funds or looking around for other funds. There were also instances where an initiator saw the CIS-funds as measures of 'outsourcing tasks' by the municipality. Other initiators noticed the tension between moral engagement and financial needs/support. The initiators of the butterfly garden discussed with one another how often money is necessary to realize projects. And how without funds, it would likely be difficult to start these civil activities. But in general, for these initiatives, their situation requires action which is framed in such a way that stresses the need for money.

Lastly and most surprisingly, we have seen multiple references that hint at some sort of conformation to updated preferences in all of the cases: initiators expect some jar of money accompanied by a set of rules or conditions because it is 'part of the system'. In all but one case (robotics for kids), the initiators provided reflections that resemble conformation to such preferences. The initiator that renovated a garden said: "But it is also part of 'how we do things,' the fund is part of the whole, it has to be there". Another initiator (maintaining a playground) expects to account for the subsidy: 'they want to know where their money goes. Something like that is part of the deal'. Also, in the cases of the food garden, the butterfly garden and the redecoration case, initiators mention it is good to account for the support given by the fund. It is 'taxpayers' or public money, after all'. Citizens' initiatives start, expecting that funds are available to make things possible. The presence of CIS-funds is seen as 'natural' and initiators anticipate its availability. The way in which respondents talked about the CIS-funds reveals that they see their initiative as part of the rules of conduct: governments that want to welcome initiatives have to make financial support available.

Crowding effects: the final scores

Through our findings, we conclude that crowding effects are highly multifaceted. First, in the cases that we have analyzed there are no strong crowding out or crowding in effects. The closest finding representing a full crowding effect—people quitting or starting—was one CIS-fund that inspired citizens to discuss among one another whether to apply for the funding.

Secondly, many of the CIS-funds are actually seen as supportive rather than controlling, but support was mostly perceived by the involvement of people of the governments showing appreciation. Self-esteem and self-determination did not seem to be impaired.

Finally, we saw that many CIS-funds signal good news to the initiatives and do not invoke control aversion by means of their conditions for application and procedures. These findings are all pertinent in explaining why we did not find any crowding out effects. Even though the CIS-funds showed more positive/supporting interpretations of the four mechanisms (good instead of bad news), and considering that self-determination and self-esteem seemed to be facilitated, we surprisingly also did not see any definitive crowding in effect. To explain why, we turn to the lack of moral engagement. In many of the cases there was a slight presence of moral disengagement because financial resources were necessary to realize the initiators' goals. External financial support is often indispensable and acquiring it requires considerable attention from the initiators. Without this money, some initiatives just do not take flight. Most initiators know this and seem to act accordingly because their goal is important to them. They were motivated—mostly through identified regulation (high self-determination)—to realize their goals. Identified regulation should be receptive to incentives that support realizing those goals, provided that they are not perceived as controlling. The CIS-funds did not undermine the motivations and impair self-determination. But the CIS-funds also did not trigger or increase motivation and did not morally engage.

Conclusion and discussion

The central question of this article was: To what extent and under what conditions do financial incentives by local governments aimed at citizens' initiatives crowd out motivations of the initiators of these citizens' initiatives? By dissecting the crowding effect, we were able to show how multifaceted this effect is. We did not find the expected controlling conditions nor an extensive crowding out effect as predicted by theory. However, it is striking that financial interventions did not crowd in either. Initiators felt respected and supported by appreciative civil servants but less so by subsidies. The CIS-funds that we investigated left considerable autonomy to the initiators and helped them realize their goals; the CIS-funds seemed to enhance self-determination to some extent. The CIS-funds also signaled good news and did not trigger control aversion. Simultaneously, we found that CIS-funds seemed to invoke slight moral disengagement and we found hints of updated preferences. The paradox of incentivizing self-organization appears to be absent: governments and local initiatives are playing an ordinary game where everyone knows exactly how 'it' is played, but without surprising outcomes.

We conclude this article by presenting two notable implications preference updating and moral disengagement, and three points about the role of citizens' initiatives.

First, many initiators perceive the CIS-funds provided for initiatives, a serious application to receive the funding, and the accounting for the subsidy as normal and 'part of the deal'. They do so because it is taxpayers' money and because their initiative fits into the more general discourse of an active civil society that can count upon governmental support. These perceptions indicate some conformation to (administrative) preferences and internalized assumptions about the rules of the game that initiators and governments play. Initiators assume certain roles for the government, policy instruments, and themselves. What is happening here, resembles Giddens's (1984) structuration theory. The initiators are not helplessly influenced by their structure (the incentive) or the other way around. They are able to reflect on their motives and the institutional structure: the rules

and incentives. At the same time, initiators reinforce the structure by playing according to the rules. The funds are used and legitimized on a day-to-day basis.

Second, the presence of the CIS-funds does not morally engage initiators; rather, it slightly disengages them. It disengages initiators because initiators are aware that they need money to produce the public or collective goods that they need or want. Because of this need for money, they expect the CIS-funds to be there. We also find that the CIS-funds facilitate self-determination, allowing the goods to be produced. This leads to a somewhat instrumental situation in which CIS-funds allow a logical transaction between governments asking for citizens to take responsibility, and active citizens expecting governments to enable them to do so. This lack of crowding in and the necessity of CIS-funds implies that without these funds, most initiators would not start their activities.

These two implications raise the first point of discussion about what citizens' initiatives are an answer to. For example, can we perceive active citizens as solutions for great societal questions (Tonkens, 2006)? We saw that initiators are not actively concerned with these societal questions, but (merely and adequately) producing diverse goods because they want them: activities, gardens and playgrounds. Broader outcomes are not intentionally pursued. Prudence about what citizens' initiatives are an answer to seems appropriate to prevent seeing citizens' initiatives as a magic bullet that solves social, economic, and political problems all at once (Edwards, 2009).

The second point is that this research has implications for how governments supposedly 'manufacture' civil society (Brandsen et al., 2017). Governments view citizens' initiatives as desirable and expect them to provide innovative solutions for problems, repair social cohesion, and revitalize civil society. However, the aim of manufacturing or revitalizing civil society through financial instruments risks destroying it at the same time. The danger is that 'the recreated communities may not be able to exist without government support' (ibid., 684). We have seen that initiatives are dependent on the CIS-funds, and this certainly hints at a more manufactured civil society where citizens do not self-organize in their

own way, but in a way that fits the governments' rules of conduct for the game of strengthening civil society.

A final point of discussion is about how CIS-funds influence civic behavior. From our research, we can extract one optimistic and one critical implication. Starting with the former, Ryan and Deci's (2000a; 2000b) self-determination theory states that when people internalize regulations over time, they experience greater autonomy in action. We found initiators who responded relatively well to the fund; there were no signals of reduced self-determination. As opposed to recent findings of co-production leading to feelings of loss of autonomy (Thomsen, Bækgaard & Jensen, 2020), we found that the CIS-funds are capable of nourishing or maintaining the initiators' motivations. On a more critical note, Bowles and Polania-Reyes (2012, p. 376) argue that 'the extent to which a society relies on economic incentives—as opposed to other kinds of motivations and controls—will affect how people learn new preferences that may persist over long periods'. And while this learning is based on a long-term process and, hence, unlikely to be observed in (short-term) experiments (ibid. p. 375), all the initiators whom we talked to, referred to how they expect governmental action and CIS-funds and how the situation 'just is like this'. These are all indications of conformation to preferences about policy instruments like the CIS-funds, but we could not demonstrate how these preferences have been updated or came about. On the one hand, as shown in this research, initiators may respond well to the CIS-funds and the risk of crowding out is modest. CIS-funds allow the initiators to realize their goals and produce their goods. But on the other hand, these instruments may not necessarily trigger new initiatives or more civic and cooperative attitudes. The CIS-funds have become a rather blunt instrument: they facilitate the transaction, but not the civic preferences and behavior. Moreover, the instrumentalization may further downplay other drivers such as compassion, patriotism, reciprocity solidarity—in other words: social capital (Bowles, 1998, p. 92). This even further strains ambitions of revitalizing a non-manufactured civil society.

Ultimately, our study has shown a more multifaceted working of crowding theory: it is possible to financially support citizens' initiatives without crowding out high and self-determined forms of motivation. This gives hope for funding schemes

to facilitate self-organization. Highly motivated initiators can be instrumentally supported. The funds do, however, not trigger civic preferences nor behavior.

Through our different-than-usual approach to unraveling crowding effects, we found that within the institutional context of governments supporting citizens' initiatives there are no such fierce crowding out effects as theories generally predict. While crowding out effects were mostly absent, crowding in effects were also mostly absent. Finally, we have found clues that indicate the presence of conformation to updated preferences of initiators about their self-organization, the availability of CIS-funds and how the game is played. Administrators and policymakers should, as such, be careful about how they deploy their policy instruments and to what ends. The fund should not only financially support, but also organize and conduct the fund in such a way that increases self-esteem and self-determination. This research has shown that CIS-funds can nourish self-esteem and self-determination to some extent: by signaling good news, by personal involvement of civil servants and aldermen, and by having 'reasonable' procedures.

This study has several limitations and we will name three. First, we showed nothing about the extent or the magnitude of the marginal crowding effect (e.g., does more subsidy crowd in/out more?). Second, although we have a selection of initiatives which did get financial support, we did not compare them to similar initiatives that applied for the fund and did not get the subsidy. As such, we were not able to make comparisons about types of motivation, esteem, determination, and the mechanisms between funded and non-funded initiatives. Third, we were not able to include funds that were more bureaucratic and more controlling (by means of conditions, procedures and accountability) which could be out there. Whereas these funds could trigger (fiercer) crowding out effects, our studied CIS-funds were mostly seen as relatively personal and supportive.

This article sheds light on an interesting part of the governance of citizens' initiatives: the extent to which governments can stimulate them by means of financial incentives. Our study reveals that the relationship between governments and initiatives is strongly driven by a transactional logic instead of a civic logic. In

order to discover what appeals to civic behavior, further research should uncover how governmental support can foster active citizenship and contribute to a non-manufactured civil society. Comparing whether moral engagement—of citizens and governments—could be fostered by different (or a mix of) instruments is another promising avenue for future research. Finally, future research should more thoroughly study, experimentally or qualitatively, how preferences regarding civic behavior are affected by policy instruments.

Intermezzo 3

Chapter 3 showed that crowding theory is multifaceted. Upon close examination of the 'mechanisms' that cause the effect of crowding, it appears that they can function in both directions simultaneously. Incentives by citizens' initiatives stimulation funds can both invoke supportive perceptions instead of controlling ones and good news (governments welcome initiatives) in combination with moral disengagement (taking initiative requires funds).

This chapter has provided valuable insight into two of the research goals. Firstly, it has shown that the results of collective action can be upgraded by external parties (research goal 1: a better understanding of the collective action capacity). Throughout this dissertation, I call that the 'upgrading' of outcomes. Secondly, governments can get involved with citizens' initiatives without exerting excessive pressure or control (research goal 2: untangling the tense relationship between governments and initiatives). When done right, the motivation of initiators will not be crowded out by incentives such as subsidies.

The next chapter takes a sharp turn from the trajectory of the preceding chapters. Chapter 4 unravels the perceived value of citizens' initiatives. Civil society literature and public value literature are the starting points for examining involved values. This chapter contributes to both the research goals, although more indirectly compared to the other three chapters.

Chapter 4 is important for research goal 1 because what is valued about citizens' initiatives may or may not contain properties that legitimize *how* citizens' initiatives solve collective action problems. For example, when inclusivity is highly valued by multiple actors (who are part of the research in Chapter 4), there is substantive tension between the tendency towards exclusivity (Chapter 2) and the perceived value of citizens' initiatives.

The following chapter is also relevant for research goal 2 because the tense relationship between citizens' initiatives and governments likely has a cause. The tension does not arise spontaneously. The perceived values and their associated expectations may be essential in comprehending the tension.

Chapter 4

The Public Value of Citizens' Initiatives: Evidence from a Dutch Municipality

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Abstract

Active citizens who take initiative are generally regarded as desirable. However, the precise reasons why citizens' initiatives are considered valuable and what their value consists of remain unclear, vague, and often unanswered. In this study, we used Q methodology to explore how civil servants, local politicians, and societal actors in a Dutch municipality view the public value of citizens' initiatives. The analysis reveals four distinct views of the value of citizens' initiatives: a view that values intangible results, a view that values a hands-on mentality, a view that values acting out of a sense of purpose, and a view that values citizens organizing and acting out of their own interests. Theoretically, we distinguish between material, immaterial, and process-oriented interpretations of values, and empirically this distinction shows that across the four value views, the process-oriented values are the most disagreed upon. Finally, we find common ground between the value views that we label "selfish collectivism." This is the view that appreciates citizens' initiatives for solving problems for the sake of the community, not for their altruism, but because they are self-serving. The strong differences in value views suggest that there is a risk that subsequent policy language and instruments based on these views could lead to conflict between the actors involved.

Expectations of Citizens' Initiatives

Citizens are asked to participate in a wide range of policy processes (Healey, 2015; Uitermark, 2015; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013; van de Wijdeven, 2012) and self-organizing citizens' initiatives are counted on to produce public services in a wide variety of domains. Citizens' initiatives or community-based initiatives also contribute to public life and generally have positive effects on society (Hurenkamp et al., 2006, p. 10 & p. 20; Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 117; Healey, 2015, p. 116).

Citizens' initiatives are viewed by local governments as promising vehicles to deliver solutions to a broad range of public problems. These initiatives are often expected to reduce costs for implementing policy programs, sometimes because they are "believed to empower and educate citizens and reduce the reliance of individuals and social organizations on state bureaucracies" (Bakker et al., 2012., p. 396, see also Edwards, 2009 about civil society expectations). Local governments want to include citizens in both policy-making and its implementation, or at times, want citizens to take care of themselves as self-sufficient and self-organizing beings (Hurenkamp & Tonkens, 2011, p. 27). Active citizenship is approached by governments to provide a solution to different kinds of societal puzzles. These range from providing libraries, playgrounds, and kindergartens, to correcting a deficiency of social cohesion, social exclusion, consumerism and asocial behavior, or to bridging the increasing gap between government and society (Tonkens, 2006, p. 5; Uitermark, 2015, p. 2311).

The "promise" of citizens' initiatives is sometimes labeled public value (Bryson et al., 2013, p. 25; Brandsen et al., 2017, p. 682; Duijn & Popering-Verkerk, 2018). However, what this value entails is often fuzzy (e.g., van de Wijdeven, 2012). Examples of describing these values are varied:

- citizens produce "publically valued goods and services in non-state and non-market ways" (Healey, 2015, p. 116),
- citizens' initiatives contribute to various societal values (Mattijssen et al., 2015, p. 85),

- citizens' engagement is necessary for better results and because of moral necessity (Hurenkamp and Tonkens, 2011, p. 27), or
- citizens' initiatives have a favorable effect on the local community (Hurenkamp et al., 2006, p. 57).

The specific ideas about the public value that citizens' initiatives produce are oftentimes vague while the expectations by local governments are high. We expect differences because initiators or participants themselves may have other views on why citizens' initiatives are more valuable than those of policy-makers or politicians (van Straalen et al., 2017). If this expectation is true and there is indeed a mismatch in what is perceived as the value of a citizen initiative, such ambiguity can help in understanding why the interaction between governments and citizen initiatives is often problematic. Governments may expect too much of citizens' initiatives, even demanding too much of them, resulting in disappointment by both initiators and governments. Or governments may create a suboptimal institutional context in terms of rules, enabling conditions and policy instruments that are not in agreement with the motives and ambitions of the initiative itself (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985, p. 122). Some overlap or the complementarity between perceptions and ideas of public value by citizen initiatives is likely to be important for successful coproduction. Therefore, we propose to investigate the following question: **To what extent do ideas of the public value(s) of citizens' initiatives differ between local politicians, civil servants and societal actors?**

With this study, we analyze whether there is such a difference and, if so, what that possible difference could look like. In doing so, we provide some clarifications within the public value debate (Alford & Hughes, 2008; Hartley et al., 2017; Prebble, 2018). Responding to Stoker's (2006) argument that public value has a highly contextual character, this research creates a specific contextual setting to determine what is valued by the public: the value of citizens' initiatives within a local context. In other words, our research adds to the understanding of the question of what *"a public values"* instead of what "*the public values"* (Benington, 2009, p. 233; Hartley et al., 2017, p. 672). If there is a perception gap between the initiators of citizens' initiatives and local governments of what public values are,

unraveling this gap may help to revisit the current 'ways of working' between these two. Consequently, clarifying the current working relationship, including the usual incentives to support (Blok et al., 2022) and the institutional arrangements between citizens' initiatives and local governments, may promote productive interaction.

Theoretical Literature: Public Value and Categorizing Outcomes

Two types of literature are discussed: the literature that helps to understand the value that citizens' initiatives could lead to and the literature that helps to further distinguish different kinds of valuable outcomes. We start with the former by providing three lenses that provide a perspective on why citizens' initiatives could be valuable.

Public value is a broadly coined concept that is also used to capture some of the trends surrounding self-organization (e.g., Mattijssen et al., 2015, who speak of "creating value with the public"; Duijn & Popering-Verkerk, 2018). Public value is primarily known through Moore's book *Creating Public Value* (1995). But public value is a complicated concept for at least two reasons. The first reason is that Moore's book "has the term 'public value' in its title, but the book is really more about quality public management and presents no stable concept of public value" (Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007, p. 357). Therefore, the absence of a sound definition of public value, while the concept is massively used[5], is a profound problem (ibid., but see also Alford & O'Flynn, 2009; Bozeman, 2002; Overeem & Tholen, 2011). For example, the concept is used to make a point about innovation in the public sector, but, although fulfilling an important part of the authors' arguments, "*what the value actually is*" is often taken for granted (e.g., Hartley, 2005). Rhodes and Wanna state (2007, pp. 408 & 419): "Moore is unclear whether he offers a new theoretical framework, a concept, a heuristic device, or an operational tool of

5 Just consider the rough 5.000 citations of Moore's one book. Most cited articles (Scopus or WebOfScience) are, among others, by Stoker (2006), Bozeman (2007), Jørgensen & Bozeman (2007) or work by Alford & O'Flynn (2008). We use their work here as well.

management." The second reason is summarized by Stoker (2006, p. 50): "The concept of public value does appear to have a decidedly context-dependent character" which makes it difficult to use to define valuable outcomes in general (see also Alford & O'Flynn, 2009, p. 176). Anything can be valuable given "the right" context.

The public value paradigm, framework or theory offers, so far, little if any help in defining what makes citizens' initiatives valuable. The premise on which the public value discourse is based—value—could be of use. As Alford and O'Flynn (2009, p. 175) note about value: "that property of a thing because of which it is esteemed, desirable or useful; worth, merit or importance." Similar definitions arise from Meynhardt (2009, p. 197).

In sum, *someone* must find value in *something* that citizens' initiatives produce. The question remains: who is to do the valuing? Alford and Hughes (2008) argue that public value is valuable to whoever consumes it. Self-organizing citizens often produce valued goods or services that they use themselves as well. In that sense, from the public value perspective, citizens' initiatives are valuable because they do something that initiators or participants themselves see as desirable (and because they use it themselves). Moreover, as argued in the introduction, public authorities value citizens because they produce desirable goods and services. There are multiple actors who may be suited to do the valuing (see also Hartley et al., 2017, p. 674).

The second lens is about *how value is created*. Self-organized citizens' initiatives are a form of collective action (Bakker et al., 2012; Blok et al., 2020). When citizens successfully organize and produce "something," they overcome the collective action problem (Ostrom et al., 1994). Succeeding in collective action can be seen as valuable because it signals the ability to cooperate. Thus, citizens' initiatives are seen as valuable because they are a form of collective action or because they show evidence that its problems, as described by Olson (1965), can be overcome.

The third and final lens is value expressed by concepts such as civil society, social cohesion, and social capital. These concepts are prominent cornerstones in Put-

nam's work (2001, p. 22): *bonding social capital,* as he labels it, is "good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity." In line with this, bonding social capital is associated with trust and citizen participation, a combination that enables the production of socially desirable outcomes (ibid., p. 288). Social capital, Putnam states at the end of *Bowling Alone*, makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy, (ibid., p. 290). Social capital "is presumably what produces a dense civil society" (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 7; see also Walzer, 1991). Civil society encompasses all social relations between citizens (Bryant, 1993) and has a dense network of civil associations (Foley & Edwards, 1996, p. 38). As such, it is also seen as necessary for fruitful and spontaneous self-organization (Bryant, 1993, p. 399) and a healthy public sphere (Diamond, 1994; Edwards, 2009). Castells (2008, p. 76) argues that civil society is the place where various views are expressed and that a good relationship between the state and civil society is the cornerstone of democracy (see also Keane & Merkel, 2019). Self-organizing citizens' initiatives are valuable because they can be seen as an expression of "the civil society." Within this civil society, citizens deliberate about common affairs and act and organize independently of the state.

However, making distinctions between these last two lenses might lead to some confusion. Citizens' initiatives are manifestations of cooperative behavior (lens two) and, therefore, naturally connected to concepts such as social cohesion and civil society (lens three). As such, we feel it is necessary to elaborate more on these distinctions. Following Edwards (2009) position on this matter, distinctions should be made between civil society or collective action as a means to get somewhere on the one hand and as a vision of "the good society" on the other. In this research, we view civil society (that one wants to create) and social capital (which is something one possesses) as valuable ends.

These ends *could* be achieved through collective action by citizen's initiatives, but this is not necessarily the case. Civil society can also be created by healthy states, well-functioning markets, and non-associated citizens. Simultaneously, a vivid associational life full of initiatives is hardly sufficient in itself to make a society civil (Edwards, 2009, pp. 44–48).

Next, for the second type of literature, we identified three fruitful starting points to better understand the public value(s) of citizens' initiatives: first, distinguishing between internal and external; second, conceptualizing different levels of outcomes; and third, defining public value in terms of material, non-material, and process outcomes.

Igalla and colleagues (2019) make the distinction between internal and external outcomes. External outcomes are observable outside the initiative; they are the produced goods. They state that citizens' initiatives "provide and maintain an alternative form of traditional governmental public services, facilities, and/or goods themselves, such as water distribution, education and training, and residential care" (ibid., p. 7). In terms of external outcomes, the authors find that, according to the literature, most initiatives contribute to social improvements of the community, economic improvements of the community, physical improvements of the community, and environmental improvements. In terms of internal outcomes, they refer to organizational aspects that the initiatives realize for the initiative itself, such as durability, legitimacy, and organizational outcomes (ibid., p. 10).

Another distinction in outcomes is made by van de Wijdeven (2012, p. 257). He differentiates between the outcomes in terms of the questions of "what does it yield," "what does it bring about" and "what does it bring forth"? Van de Wijdeven answers these questions sequentially: the first with "the clean park," then, with "sociality and self-confidence," and finally, with "citizenship." His distinction is primarily aimed at how the impact of outcomes is experienced by those who are involved.

Van der Torre et al. (2019) studied public value for "The Association of Netherlands Municipalities." As a starting point, they used three categories of values (ibid., p. 5) that are also useful for this research: material values (of which lower taxes or higher employment opportunities are examples); immaterial values (of which happiness or a sense of community are examples); and process values (of which co-creating a space for citizens, making decisions transparently, or anchoring in democratic processes are examples).

Ultimately public value, social capital, and collective action are well-connecting concepts (Benington, 2009). The public value of citizens' initiatives is related to its external goods, to its internal goods, and to the process of how citizens' initiatives do things. Our framework captures these distinctions by the previous authors in combination with the three lenses on valuable outcomes that we have just discussed. In this way, we can distinguish between these values:

- The material values: refer to the external goods of citizens' initiatives (Igalla et al., 2019) or the "what does it yield-question" by van de Wijdeven (2012). Material values are ends and may also encompass the more instrumental benefits of self-organizing citizens' initiatives (see e.g., Eriksson, 2012, p. 688).
- The immaterial values: are ends that refer to the outcomes that are good for citizens and society (Tonkens, 2006; van Dam et al., 2015). This relates to the 'what does it bring about-question' (van de Wijdeven, 2012). Self-reliance, civil society, and mutual relating concepts, such as sociality (Walzer, 1991) or social capital (Putnam, 2001), are in this category.
- The process values: are somewhat difficult to separate definitively from the immaterial values. We follow our framework by pointing to collective action, deliberation (Bryant, 1993, p. 356; Bohman, 2000, pp. 55–56), or interactive problem-solving as examples of process values. The process values are related to the valuable aspects of how citizens' initiatives do things (and what results from the "act of doing," such as acquiring a skill or the ability to work better together)[6] and in that sense process values are categorically more like means.

Next, we discuss the grounds for expecting differences in the perspectives of public value between different actors surrounding citizens' initiatives.

6 And this type also connects to the last category by van de Wijdeven (2012), but more to his example – civility – than to the question 'what does it bring forth' because that question allows for a broad range of answers (such as a clean park too).

The Tensive Relationship Between the Government and Initiatives

In many countries collectives of citizens who engage with public problems are becoming increasingly important (Baum, 2001; Bailey, 2012; Healey, 2015; Henriksen et al., 2018). There are multiple reasons why governments are partial to citizens' initiatives. Firstly, most ideas refer to "the right behavior" of citizens (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 101). For example, citizens should be self-reliant because it is good for them and good for society (Tonkens, 2006, p. 9; van Dam et al., 2015, pp. 165 & 175). Arguments often start by stating that citizens rely too much on the government and, furthermore, that they behave like consumers (Kleistra, 2019; van Rooij et al., 2019, p. 429). The Dutch government stated in 2013 that "the goal is to activate as many citizens as possible to take on local activities" (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2013). Secondly, active citizenship is necessary for a well-functioning democracy associated with natural communal activities and self-organization and is therefore a crucial building block for civil society (Eriksson, 2012, p. 687). Within the Dutch context of this research, the government has set up multiple efforts to increase the number of citizens participating in society or to support, facilitate, and even entice citizens to participate and organize themselves (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2018; van Dam et al., 2015, p. 164).

Both of these views held by the government illustrate that there are high expectations about citizens' initiatives. These high expectations by political parties and civil servants have also been found in previous studies (Den Ouden et al., 2019; de Haan et al., 2018, p. 313; who, for the record, also found some lower expectations of civil servants). In addition, social funds and housing corporations have laid their eye on citizens' initiatives (Denters et al., 2013). To illustrate the point of having unreasonably high expectations, we quote Edwards (2009, p. 16) about associations in civil society, which we believe also applies to citizens' initiatives:

"There is equal danger in expecting too much from associational life, as if it were a 'magic bullet' for resolving the intractable social, economic and political problems (…). It seems, [they] are expected to organize social services, govern

local communities, solve the unemployment problem, save the environment, and still have time left over for rebuilding the moral life of nations."

These expectations make governments eager to help (Den Ouden et al., 2019, p. 51). However, with the best intentions, governmental involvement can have adverse effects (Vollan, 2008, p. 563). Brandsen and colleagues (2017, p. 676) warn that local governments may take over citizens' initiatives, resulting in a manufactured civil society instead of a spontaneous one. In such a situation, the character and value for which citizens' initiatives are valued are crowded out. Moreover, while intended as supporting, governmental attitudes are sometimes described as controlling (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985, p. 122; Benington, 2009, p. 242), and citizens' initiatives sometimes encounter this controlling tendency (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 107; van Straalen et al., 2017).

In conclusion, governments have high expectations about citizens' initiatives and the public value they create. But these expectations may be too high, and, moreover, we seriously doubt that all expectations are shared by those involved in citizens' initiatives. This mismatch of expectations may consequently result in wrong or suboptimal policies and inappropriate instruments aimed at inviting or supporting citizens' initiatives. As such, we find it crucial to understand more precisely what the perspectives of all the actors are and how they differ.

Research design

We used the Q methodology (Brown, 1993; McKeown & Thomas, 1988; Stephenson, 1953; Watts & Stenner, 2005), which has *quantitative* features, such as factor analysis to order and couple certain *qualitative* points of view. "Fundamentally, Q methodology provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity" (Brown, 1993, p. 93). The purpose of this study is to discover how different actors, or different 'publics' if you will (Benington, 2009), view the public value(s) of citizens' initiatives. In a sense we are exploring the "contests, debates and arguments between and among different [actors] about what constitutes public value" (Hartley et al., 2017, p. 674). And because values "express subjectivity"

(Meynhardt, 2009, p. 199), a systematic study of subjectivity fits the purpose because the participants in this study decide what they think is valuable about citizens' initiatives (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p. 69).

To successfully execute the Q study, the following procedure was applied: (1) making a **Q sample** of statements by sampling a topic such as the public value of citizens' initiatives; (2) selecting the **P set,** i.e., the participants or respondents; (3) having the respondents sort the sample of statements, their **Q sort**; followed by (4) analyzing the data through factor analysis, and finally, (5) interpreting the analysis (Brown, 1993; McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2005). The study was done in a medium-sized municipality (approximately 57.000 inhabitants in 2021) in the Netherlands. The municipality was merged in 2019 and contains 21 villages. Given the village-like character and the possibly close-knit community there, there may be a relatively strong tendency to value things such as social cohesion.

The Q Sample: Public Value Statements

The primary concern of constructing the Q sample is making it generally representative (Watts and Stenner, 2005, p. 75). Collecting the samples can be done either in an unstructured or in a structured way. And as structured samples are drawn based on theoretical arguments (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p. 23), or, more specifically, the theoretical framework, we chose to do the latter. A total of 179 statements was reduced to 36 statements (12 for each value). First, we categorized the statements on face value, which led to roughly 25 categories of statements for each type of value. Next, we further compressed the statements by finding overlaps between the categories until a total of 12 statements for each type of value remained. One of the authors *scraped* the Dutch 'Coalition Agreements' by city councils of 2018 on citizens' initiatives (and similar labels). This led to an inventory of 31 municipalities profiling themselves with high ambitions for citizens' initiatives (all but one explicitly and actively wanted to support citizens' initiatives). None of the municipalities explicitly mentioned citizens' initiatives before the merger. In the new coalition agreement, the municipality is quite vocal about citizens' initiatives. Examples are that they "really want to give space," that they see "citizens' initiatives as leading in how the municipality deals with

its community" and that they want to "stimulate, encourage and facilitate" citizens' initiatives. The inventory of coalition agreements was then used to check whether the 36 statements also represented these coalition agreements. Finally, we discussed the statements with a panel of eight experts from science and practice, and from local and national governments. We created a Q sample from the following sources (see Appendix 1 for an overview):

- Dutch commissioned research from practice: for example, a ministry commissioned a series of five research projects on citizens' initiatives and another ministry commissioned a research report on the possibilities for the *Right to Challenge*;
- Dutch scientific research that is often used by researchers or practitioners;
- International scientific research that is often used by researchers or practitioners;
- Other semi-public research or pieces about citizens' initiatives, such as documents by Courts of Audits [Rekenkamercommissie], the Ombudsman, or the Dutch information center for democracy, "ProDemos."

It was already remarkable how most of the documents were aimed at stimulating citizens' initiatives or describing indicators that increase the success of citizens' initiatives without explaining what it is that is valuable or successful in terms of citizens' initiatives.[7] Many of the documents also have a rather instrumental vision of citizens' initiatives. For example, Movisie (2011) presents an overview of interventions to stimulate active citizenship, and a committee of a local Court of Audit stresses the need for citizens' initiators to work with other actors to realize their goals (instead of working well together internally, i.e., collective action).

The P set: Selecting Participants

The selection of actors who will do the "valuing" has partly been theoretically presorted (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p. 31) because we expect various social actors to have different views. Therefore, we included local politicians, civil ser-

7 De Haan et al. (2018, p. 313) also found this in their literature as well: "The conditions and indicators of success are also well described in the literature (…), but these studies do not examine how success is conceptualised."

vants, and societal actors, including initiators. Together with the municipality, we selected a diverse set of participants within these groups, for example, local politicians from different political parties and civil servants ranging from the city manager to street-level bureaucrats. As for citizens, we included initiators and non-initiators and they were all active and societally involved respondents (from schools, the library, or the 'village council') who could be approached via the municipality. With this step in the Q methodology, we tried to refrain from including only enthusiasts (Fiorina, 1999, p. 402).

With this P set, we figuratively "created well-informed publics"—again, not *the* public—to express ideas about the public value of citizens' initiatives (Benington, 2009, p. 232; Meynhardt, 2009, p. 206).

The Q Sort and Interview: Ordering Statements and Expressing Ideas

Our sample of 22 respondents ranked the 36 statements according to a forced-choice format. The statements were ranked on a normal distribution from –4 to + 4, which is appropriate for Q samples smaller than $N = 40$ (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p. 29). Respondents ranked the statements from 'least in accordance' to "most in accordance." This range indicates that a score (or position on the format) is always to some extent in accordance.

				36				
				35				
			32	33	34			
			29	30	31			
		24	25	26	27	28		
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Least in accordance							**Most in accordance**	
–4	**–3**	**–2**	**–1**	**0**	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**

Figure 4.1: Distribution of the forced-choice format

Due to the covid pandemic, the interviews took place in the summer of 2021 via MS Teams and Miro (an online whiteboard) and the statements were posted on digital *post-its.* The Q interviews typically lasted 50 -70 min. A few questions were asked before the sort: e.g., "what is your background?" and "how do you define citizens' initiatives?" And a few after the sort: "why did you put these statements at the extremes?", "did you miss specific statements?"; "do you think citizens' initiatives can do the majority of public tasks better than governments?"; "do you think citizens' initiatives should always be financially supported?"; and "what are the downsides with and problems for citizens' initiatives?" The answers to these questions and the additional explanations to the rankings were written down by the researchers, leading to 22 research notes of approximately 1,000 words a piece.

Analyses and results

We analyzed the Q sorts with KADE (Banasick, 2019), an open-source application for the analysis of Q study data. First, the correlations of all respondents were calculated, resulting in a .22 correlation between all the sorts, indicating that the respondents were a rather heterogenous group. Second, the Principal Components Analysis led to 8 factors of which 7 had an Eigenvalue higher than 1. We reviewed the analysis and noticed that, with 5 factors or higher, only single respondents represented those factors. Therefore, we continued with 4 factors having an explained variance of 57% (the "composites" of these 4 factors are in Appendix 2). Third, factors were rotated using Varimax.

Table 4.1 shows the various respondents (categorized by types) and how they "loaded" on the factors. Respondents can load negatively (–1 to 0) or positively (0 to + 1) on the factors. Next, we interpreted each of the factors based on the characterizing statements, i.e., those statements with a score of ± 3, 4 or the distinguishing statements (these are "significantly" different for one factor compared to the others), and the explanations of the respondents.

Table 4.1: Correlation coefficient between respondents and factors

Resp. #	Respondent type	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
9	Civil servant (project office)	**0,7415***	-0,0284	0,3009	0,2046
12	Civil servant (housing)	**0,7051***	0,0365	-0,114	0,0975
5	Politician (liberal)	**0,6928***	0,2847	0,0857	0,1553
3	Civil servant (communications)	**0,6886***	0,2853	0,1197	-0,033
6	Civil servant (social domain)	**0,6634***	-0,0365	0,1544	0,2226
18	Civil servant (clerk)	**0,6589***	-0,1262	-0,4021	0,3353
4	Civil servant (legal)	**0,6516***	0,2092	-0,0663	0,1095
21	Politician (local party)	**0,524***	0,3809	-0,3476	0,1315
17	Politician (local party)	0,0194	**0,6737***	-0,2058	0,2065
15	Societal actor (village council and business association)	-0,0112	**0,6514***	0,0511	-0,1869
22	Politician (Christian democrat)	0,1393	**0,5222***	0,079	0,1369
1	Societal actor (teacher and board member school)	0,0146	**0,5134***	0,3495	0,3306
16	Civil servant (field service)	0,4284	**0,4692***	0,004	0,467
10	Societal actor (village council)	0,3361	**0,4079***	0,065	-0,0114
14	Societal actor (Fortress Governor and initiator)	-0,1117	-0,1015	**0,8176***	0,0973
2	Societal actor (initiator and member foundation)	0,2617	0,4191	**0,5367***	-0,3943
11	Civil servant (city management)	0,3117	0,2235	**0,5307***	0,1087

Table 4.1: *Continued.*

Resp. #	Respondent type	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
20	Societal actor (director of a societal organization)	-0,0514	0,1817	0,0972	**0,797***
19	Civil servant (strategic)	0,3809	0,1387	-0,1122	**0,7317***
13	Civil servant (communications)	0,3194	0,224	-0,2984	**0,7014***
7	Societal actor (volunteer)	0,213	-0,0851	0,2229	**0,5992***
8	Societal actor (librarian)	0,5181	-0,227	0,2094	**0,5198***

***** are significant factor loadings
Significance at the $p < .05$ is one that exceeds $1.96(1/\sqrt{36}) = \pm 0{,}33$. Significance at the $p < .01$ exceeds $2.58(1/\sqrt{36}) = \pm 0{,}43$ (see Watts and Stenner, 2005, pp. 87–88). All significant factor loadings also exceed Humphrey's rule (Brown, 1980, p. 223): multiplying the highest factor loadings should exceed twice the standard error (SE) = .32 (The SE in this study is $1\sqrt{}$[number of statements], $1\sqrt{}36 = .16$).

Factor 1: Idealistic Immaterialists

Factor 1 has 8 significant loadings: 6 civil servants and 2 local politicians. Factor 1 opines that citizens' initiatives are intrinsically valuable. That citizens' initiatives contribute to the involvement in the community, livability, and solidarity/community spirit are expressions of that intrinsic value. Respondents who associate strongly with this factor value citizens' initiatives because they are viewed as a form of reassurance that people are still *willing to do something* for their community and the public cause.

Factor 1 is also rather idealistic in the sense that it values the immaterial rather than the material. All the statements that the participants did not agree with are material values; furthermore, their idealism is visible in the statement quotes. Citizens' initiatives should—in principle—not be valued for the savings they might realize or as replacements for the government's role in major maintenance projects. In other words, the real value of citizens' initiatives is not as instruments to realize output. Another respondent also highlights how "feeling

involved" is what matters for citizens' initiatives, and anything else is secondary (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Statements with highest/lowest scores for factor 1

	Rank	Sig	Type	Statement/quote (by respondent)
Agree	+4	**	P	25 CI's are valuable in themselves.
	+3	*	I	15 CI's contribute to community involvement.
	+3	**	I	17 CI's contribute to livability in the neighborhood.
Disagree	–4		M	10 CI's create savings because they take over tasks from the government.
	–3		M	4 CI's contribute to the economy.
	–3		M	6 CI's ensure 'major maintenance' in the neighborhood.
Notable	–2	*	P	29 CI's contribute to the self-reliance of the participants.
Quotes				"People are—still—willing to do something, which is why citizens' initiatives are so valuable." (6)
				"The value of citizens' initiatives lies in those side effects: how one feels. Those are positive." (9)
				"It's not about money in my view. Money should not, in principle, be 'the reason.'" (3)
				"You shouldn't do it for savings because it demotivates. Then you are immediately watching the money again and steering accordingly." (5)

Distinguishing statement at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Factor 2: Pragmatic Partners

Factor 2 has 6 significant loadings: 3 societal actors, 2 local politicians, and 1 civil servant. This factor is called pragmatic because it conveys a certain kind of hands-on mentality. Not the kind that leads to all sorts of material output, but the kind that leads to livability and a better relationship between the municipality

and the community. The statement *'CI's solve problems that they themselves find important'* also ranked + 3 on this factor.

The combination of taking action when necessary as initiators is central to this factor and also central for nurturing collaboration/partnership between the municipality and the community. The interaction is necessary to get acquainted and to strengthen cooperation/partnership between governments and initiators. In addition to Table 4.3, other quotes illustrate this position:

> *The relationship really improves by talking to each other. (...) And it is good to listen to initiatives because then you notice what is happening locally. (16)*

This factor is also characterized by some sort of sobriety. One should not overexaggerate the value of citizens' initiatives. They are not training grounds for better behavior, personal development, or mutual relationships. They also do not contribute to "the economy," nor do they create value for the entire society. Pragmatic partners want no-nonsense and view citizens' initiatives as a way to force governments and initiatives to partner up.

Table 4.3. Statements with highest/lowest scores for factor 2

	Rank	Sig	Type	Statement/quote (by respondent)
Agree	+4	**	P	27 CI's contribute to the ability to work together.
	+3	**	I	17 CI's contribute to livability in the neighborhood.
	+3	**	I	14 CI's contribute to a better relationship between the government and residents.
Disagree	–4	~	P	32 CI's contribute to altruistic/selfless behavior.
	–3	**	I	13 CI's create societal value for the entire society.
	–3		I	21 CI's contribute to personal development.

Table 4.3: *(continued)*

	Rank	Sig	Type	Statement/quote (by respondent)
Quotes				"Collaboration between the government, residents, entrepreneurs and village councils is very important and it will get much better." (15)
				"That's what it's about. You often see situations of 'it is so bad if something happens to it or not' and then people take action and it is solved." (10)
				"It doesn't have to yield anything. Citizens' initiatives often cost a lot. (...) Finally, many things are difficult or undesirable to calculate in economic terms, such as quality of life!" (1)

Distinguishing statement at * p < .05, ** p < .01

Factor 3: Personal Purpose

Factor 3 has 3 significant loadings: 2 societal actors and 1 civil servant. This third perspective is characterized by a mix of immaterial and material values. Factor 3 encompasses elements of both meaning and fun because taking initiative provides both. Furthermore, they find meaning in engaging with important subjects such as ecology and sustainability.

But factor 3 is also quite unique by disagreeing strongly with three process-type values. Citizens' initiatives do not contribute to democracy, inclusivity, or altruistic behavior. Respondent 11 summarized this view:

> *When people are involved in citizens' initiatives, it really contributes to their sense of purpose. That is not selfless. They do it because they find it important themselves or because they want to achieve something. Or because it's fun. And that's fine. But that's not altruism and it doesn't have to be. (11)*

This factor perceives citizens' initiatives a little bit in the "bonding-social-capital-approach" as it sees initiatives as oriented toward themselves. Citizens' initiatives are tightly knit—therefore, they are also quite exclusive toward outsid-

ers—and it is important for the in-group to search for the important things in life and to engage with them (14) (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Statements with highest/lowest scores for factor 3

	Rank	Sig	Type	Statement/quote (by respondent)
Agree	+4	**	I	20 CI's contribute to the meaning of the participants.
	+3	**	I	7 CI's contribute to sustainability.
	+3	**	M	3 CI's ensure ecological value and nature.
Disagree	–4	*	P	33 CI's strengthen democracy
	–3	**	P	31 CI's contribute to an inclusive society.
	–3		P	32 CI's contribute to altruistic/selfless behavior
Quotes of interviews				"We all think it's very important, we enjoy doing it, and everyone gets a lot out of it." (2)
				"Democracy, that's way too big. Municipal councils and citizens' initiatives are sometimes at odds with each other." (11)
				"There is a split between 'old' groups and newcomers here (...). So, it is quite exclusive." (14)

Distinguishing statement at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Factor 4: Democratic Developers

Factor 4 has 5 significant loadings: 3 societal actors and 2 civil servants. This final factor sees citizens' initiatives as *boosters* for democracy. But there's a catch: citizens' initiatives are not democratic per se, but they strengthen democracy by advocating for and acting on their interests. In that sense, they increase the democratic influence of participants and increase the quality of policy decisions. It is expected, but nevertheless, legitimate, that citizens' initiatives act—perhaps egoistically—out of their own interest. No person can be truly altruistic and, moreover, democracy needs the articulation of interests and action of collectives. It is valuable and important that citizens' initiatives take responsibility and 'solve the problems that they themselves find important.'

Factor 4 also values citizens' initiatives because they are viewed as self-determined and constructive. Protest is seen both as "being against something" or as encouraging others to do something rather than taking action oneself. Citizens' initiatives should also—just as the idealistic immaterialists believe—not be viewed too instrumentally. They are not to be seen as producers of public goods, a savings opportunity, or as replacements for the municipal field service (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Statements with highest/lowest scores for factor 4

	Rank	Sig	Type	Statement/quote (by respondent)
Agree	+4	**	P	33 CI's strengthen democracy.
	+3		P	28 CI's increase the control/influence of the participants.
	+3		M	5 CI's contribute to the quality of policy decisions.
Disagree	–4	**	P	34 CI's ensure protest about what is wrong.
	–3		M	10 CI's create savings because they take over tasks from the government.
	–3		M	1 CI's ensuring collective/public goods for all.
Notable	–2	**	M	2 CI's contribute to the practical management and refurbishment of things.
Quotes of interviews				"Especially because I believe that taking initiative and taking action is a social decision. It is about determining in your own living environment." (19)
				"Control, certainly. [Local] Politics is absolutely sensitive to citizens' initiatives. And she should be!" (8)
				"You don't achieve much with protest in itself. You mainly encourage others to do something while you are not doing it yourself." (7)
				"I think that basically people also come into citizens' initiatives out of an interest that they also have themselves. (...) Altruism is wonderful, but at its core it must/needs to arise from altruistic motives. (19)

Distinguishing statement at * p < .05, ** p < .01

Similarities and differences

In the introduction, we argued that it is extremely important that a specific agreement or complementarity between the perceptions and ideas of public value as produced by citizen initiatives is to result in successful coproduction. To understand this (lack of) overlap and complementarity, we make a few comparisons.

In table 4.6, the correlations between factors are presented (1 is high, 0 is low). The correlations show that especially the factor of *personal purpose* seems to have the most disagreements with the other factors. There also seems to be a considerable correlation between the *idealistic immaterialists* and the *democratic developers*, indicating that a consensus about the value of citizens' initiatives could be reached easier between these two factors. For example, both factors show disagreement on the statements that citizens' initiatives contribute to sustainability or ensure "major maintenance" in the neighborhood. Both factors also show relatively strong agreement with statements that citizens' initiatives solve problems they themselves find important or that they increase control and influence of the participants.

Table 4.6: Correlation coefficients between respondents and factors

	Idealistic immaterialists	Pragmatic partners	Personal purpose	Democratic developers
Idealistic immaterialists	1	0,37	0,05	0,50
Pragmatic Partners	0,37	1	0,11	0,36
Personal purpose	0,05	0,11	1	0,00
Democratic developers	0,50	0,36	0,00	1

There are three statements about citizens' initiatives that lead to the most disagreements (in Appendix 3 we discover some more differences):

- They strengthen democracy
- They are valuable in themselves
- They contribute to meaning-making for participants

These disagreements are salient because political or governmental discourse on citizens' initiatives is often related to democracy (see van Dam et al., 2015).

In general, this Q study shows that the conflicting statements are generally process statements, and the most agreeable statements are generally material and immaterial statements. It seems that the material values of citizens' initiatives—within this study context—are the least disputed.[8] In the end, all views combine multiple types with what they agree or disagree on. The idealistic immaterialists, however, strongly agree with immaterial statements (that's no surprise), and this factor also relates quite well to the second lens (citizens' initiatives as expressions of the civil society and "what does it bring forth?" question). The personal purpose type, on the other hand, strongly disagrees with the process-type statements.

The statement "*citizens' initiatives solve problems they themselves find important*" was the most agreed upon with scores of +2 and +3 by all factors. And the statement "*Citizens' initiatives contribute to altruistic/selfless behavior*" was disagreed upon by all factors with scores of either -3 or -4. Two other statements that the factors generally agree on are that citizens' initiatives do not necessarily create safety nor innovation. But generally, this "selfish collectivism" (self-selection of problems and non-altruïsm) is common ground across all the value views.

Finally, while it is not at the heart of Q studies to compare the respondents (rather, it is about their views), we were still interested in—albeit prudently—comparing the social actors. Figure 1 shows how our actors, on average, relate to the four value views. Societal actors share the view of "*personal purpose*" the most and "*idealistic immaterialists*" the least. Civil servants mostly share the view of "*idealistic immaterialists*" and least share the view of "*personal purpose.*" Local politicians share the view of "*pragmatic partners*" the most and of "*personal purpose*" the least. This comparison is a first glimpse, and again such a comparison is not at the heart of Q studies, so this result should be considered cautiously.

8 When we calculate the total z score variances of the three types of statements, the material types have the lowest (indicating that these statements are often placed around the same positions on the Q sort) and the process types are the highest (indicating the opposite).

Our results show that there are some shared aspects across the views, for example, selfish collectivism, that could be common ground for fruitful coproduction. At the same time, as Figure 4.2 illustrates, there are not only differences between views, but also meaningful disagreements between views *and*, likely, between social actors. To illustrate this point imagine a city council that shares a vision and sets budgets in line with the *pragmatic partners*, and civil servants who (having some discretionary room) write/employ policy language and act in line with the *immaterial idealists.* While the initiators and participants themselves need support to meet their needs in line with *personal purpose*. Such a scenario would lead to strain, frustration, and would reduce motivation.

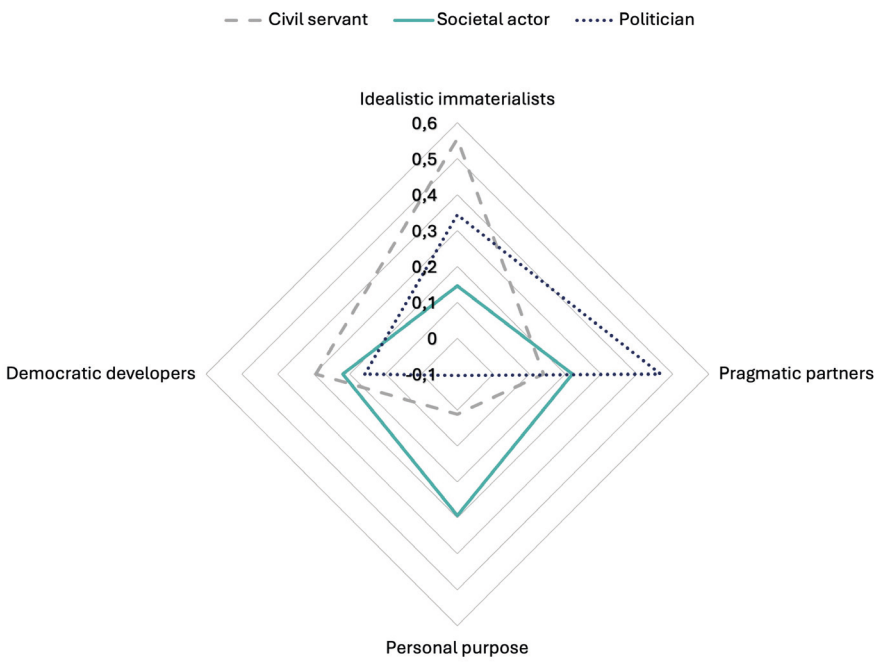


Figure 4.2: Social actors and the value views (average correlations of actors and value views)

Conclusion and discussion

In the introduction and theoretical sections, we problematized the possible misalignment of values between governments and citizens' initiatives. The vast majority of information that we analyzed to help us collect statements for the Q interviews, more or less took the value of citizens' initiatives for granted. The majority of the research or reports was concerned with increasing the conditions for the success of citizens' initiatives. It was all about pushing the buttons or changing the levers in order to "systematically increase outcomes" regardless of what the outcomes are (MacIntyre, 2011, p. 90). But exactly what the value of citizen's initiatives is, was often taken for granted, unspecified, and/or accepted as the *one thing* that they "just create." The value perspective was not questioned. Citizens' initiatives are approached as "initiatives-as-they-happen-to-be" and facilitated, upgraded, and governed. But if the values are examined more closely, there's a whole world behind them, and our research was able to show that this world contains a plurality of values.

By studying different types of social actors within a medium-sized Dutch municipality using Q methodology, we found four different views connected to the values of citizens' initiatives. These four views all have different configurations of how they define what is valuable about citizens' initiatives. But there are also similarities. All four views value citizens' initiatives because of their self-determination. Various actors value citizens taking action and doing something instead of waiting for officials to step in. This relates to other findings (Edelenbos et al., 2018, p. 61) where it is concluded that citizens' initiatives take action because of some trigger. Another interesting similarity among the views is that citizens' initiatives are *not* necessarily valuable because they "*contribute to self-less behavior.*" This view subscribes to the idea that it is logical and acceptable that citizens' initiatives are (partly) driven by individual or group interests. We labeled the common ground between value views "selfish collectivism."

One of the theoretical lenses that helped us to examine our research question was about distinguishing types of values. We found that process-type statements created the most disagreements. Statements expressing the idea that citizens'

initiatives are valuable in themselves or strengthen democracy were especially prone to grave disagreements. In contrast, the material values are, relatively, the least prone to disagreements (because most disagreed with these statements).

As for how the different actors viewed the value of citizens' initiatives, we did a more in-depth study towards how the different views of the values concerning citizens' initiatives take shape. We did, however, also take a look at how the various types of actors/respondents connect to the four views. While this type of study is not definitive in claiming that these differences are significant—these findings should be interpreted cautiously—it does suggest that there may be meaningful differences between actors in value views about citizens' initiatives that may hinder fruitful collaboration. This is especially the case when it comes to creating the right "invited space" or funding schemes for citizens' initiatives.

Next, we set out a few implications based on our study and findings. Given that governments are fond of citizens' initiatives (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Bakker et al., 2012; Brandsen et al., 2017; Hurenkamp & Tonkens, 2011) and that they likely have *specific* value views about citizens' initiatives or specific goals (such as strengthening democracy), tensions could definitely arise. As citizens' initiatives may be shaped by the perceived expectations and goals of governments (van Dam et al., 2015, p. 174), they could be subjected, controlled, and governed in a way that does not align with *their* value views about themselves. "*This governmental control of organizations can be achieved through at least four mechanisms: (...) [such as] the use of symbolic policy language"* (Brandsen et al., 2017, p. 684). We have already demonstrated how a mismatch between a council's language, the policy language, and the needs of initiators can exist. And there is still the risk that citizens' initiatives can be seen as magic bullets (Edwards, 2009). We therefore argue that it is crucial to first discover the relevant value patterns within a certain context before creating various arrangements.

In this study, we set a specific context (a medium-sized Dutch municipality) in which we let various respondents express their value-views of citizens' initiatives. This approach is particularly suitable for studying public value(s) (Meynhardt, 2009, p. 199), even in municipalities with different characteristics. We

started with the argument that what people value about citizens' initiatives is often somewhat fuzzy, unclear, or that it is just "a heap of good things." We believe that with this study, we made the discourse about the value of citizens' initiatives clearer and more comprehensible and that we have discovered distinctive value patterns. Q methodology is indeed, as suggested by Hartley and colleagues (2017), suited to trace and map values. Our final contribution is to show that it indeed matters to explore the value views of citizens' initiatives and be specific about them. As "public value can only exist in a coproduction between government, citizens, associations, entrepreneurs and firms" (Brandsen et al., 2017, p. 682) it seems wise in these interdependent coproductions to understand each other's value views before action is taken.

This study has limitations and we discuss the most important ones. First, this study is mainly about citizens' initiatives with some government involvement. There are citizens' initiatives that operate almost completely independently of governments (although they must abide by the law). These initiatives are naturally less affected by high or specific expectations from governments. Second, we did not quantitively examine significant differences in views between groups. In order to further inquire the possible tensions and problems we described, such a study would be very helpful. Third, studying values is a difficult exercise. With our distinctions between type of goods and type of values, we made the exercise somewhat less difficult. But these distinctions are not perfect. We acknowledge that some statements could have fitted in other types of value-views, depending on how they are interpreted. Another weakness is that a Q study does well when the statements are unambiguous and when not open to too many different interpretations from participants. We tried to design such statements, but straightforward statements can also flatten a complex discourse, such as the one about values. Nevertheless, there is little, or even no room, for conditional viewpoints about a statement because it needs to be ranked. Working with these statements also leaves less room for the sedimentation in values: the potential future spinoff in values or the changes in values over time. Finally, as the Q methodology is not yet mainstream (but becoming more *en vogue*), some would also criticize this method; for example, there is the criticism that any sample of statements is prone to selection bias by the researchers. From a Q-point-of-view,

we argue that it is not so much about "the total meaning" of the Q sample, but how meaning is given by respondents to "*the Q sample*"; that is the heart of the method (Brown, 1993, p. 101).

Of course, there are multiple promising options for further research. First, it would be useful to do this Q study in other municipalities, regions, or provinces to see how meaning is given to the value of citizens' initiatives elsewhere. It is also promising to zoom in on various actor groups: What kind of value views characterize different groups such as civil servants or local politicians, and which value differences exist within these groups? In this study we more a less treated these actor groups as homogeneous, not acknowledging nor inquiring about the differences within these groups. Finally, a more quantitative approach—perhaps based on the statements or the four views in this study or future studies—to explore the various value views of citizens' initiatives of a representative sample of the whole population would be insightful. Such an approach would greatly increase our knowledge about how various actors perceive the value of self-organization and about the possible problems and tensions set out in this piece.

Intermezzo 4

The previous chapter did the heavy lifting for research goal 2 (untangling the tense relationship between governments and initiatives). Upon examining the perspectives of those involved in citizens' initiatives, four distinct views regarding their value were identified. This indicates that there are a minimum of four distinct approaches to valuing citizens' initiatives. Despite these different views, there is some common ground: selfish collectivism.

Selfish collectivism recognizes that citizens' initiatives take action because they perceive an issue as significant enough to warrant action. Furthermore, selfish collectivism deems it acceptable for citizens' initiatives to not be altruistic. Acting solely for their group's interest rather than the greater good is perfectly fine.

Considering that these distinct value views exist, it is not that surprising that tensions between governments and initiatives exist because they may subscribe—assuming a homogenous view within both actor groups—to one or more different views compared to the other.

The next chapter and final empirical chapter move back to collective action theory and crowding theory. It presents a classic collective action experiment but in a contemporary context. In this experiment two interventions are deployed to study its effect on participants' cooperative behaviour, further elaborating on the crowding effect.

The level of cooperativeness displayed by participants in the experiment aids in understanding the capacity for collective action (research goal 1), while the effectiveness of the interventions lends insight into establishing a collaborative relationship between citizens' initiatives and governments with less tension.

Intermezzo 5

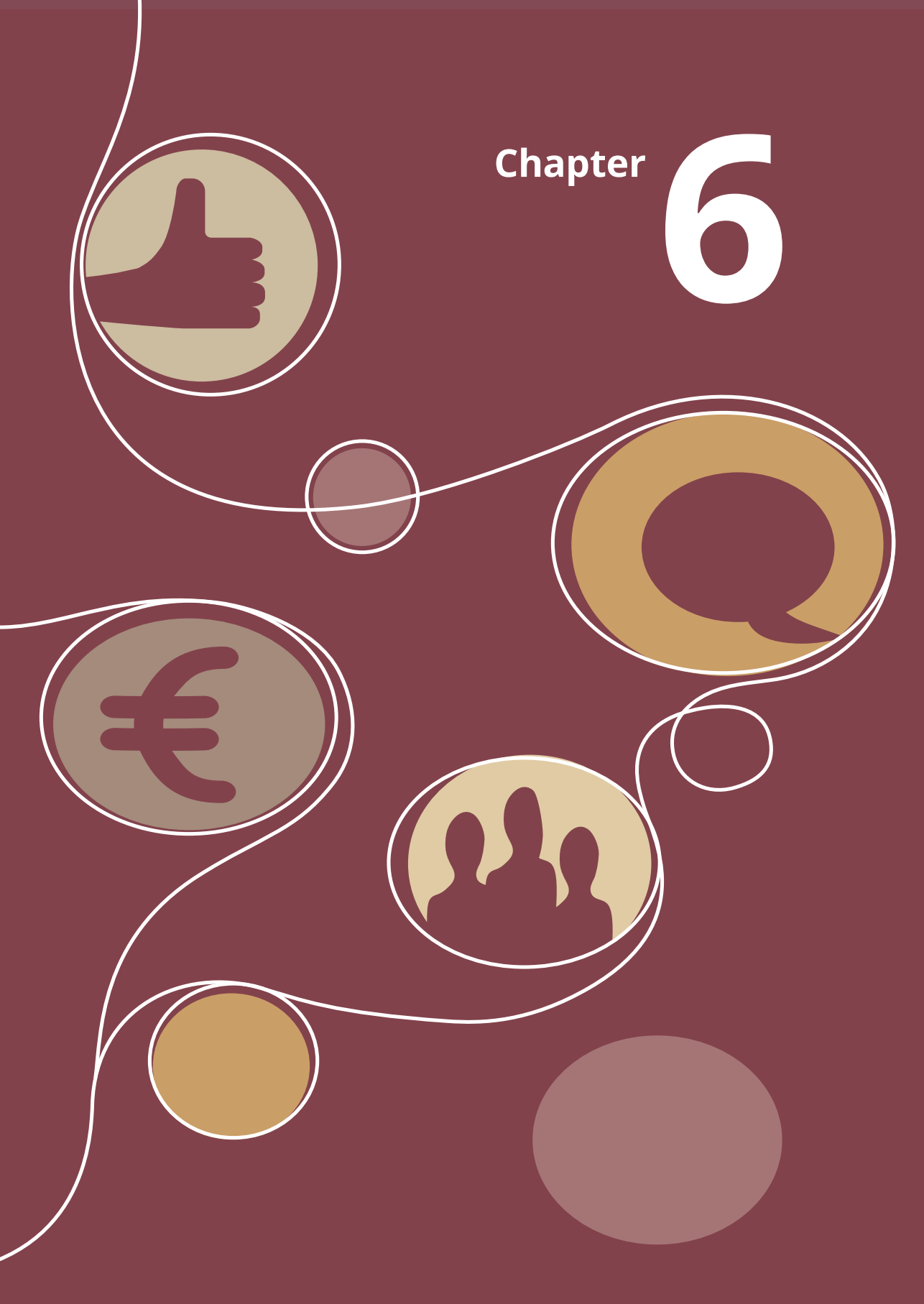
Chapter 5 was the final empirical chapter and presented a ‘classic’ collective action experiment in a new guise: maintaining the community garden. The results of the multiple experiments strongly contribute to research goal 1, ‘understanding the capacity for collective action’. Community garden participants ‘broadcast’ their level of cooperation when they have the opportunity. They let other people know that they’re willing to work together.

In addition, both financial interventions showed different effects. Sanctions are sometimes beneficial to participants’ collective action and sometimes not. Trying to influence participants with subsidies does not make them more cooperative; they do not spend more hours on maintenance because of the subsidy. But the subsidy does add extra resources to the community garden, creating better ‘payoffs.’

The next chapter presents the conclusions of this dissertation. It begins with a retrospective review of the research question and the research goals. Then, each empirical chapter is briefly reviewed: what was the research question, what were the findings and conclusions, and what are the implications?

These summaries are followed by the three major, general conclusions of this dissertation. Finally, the chapter closes with social relevance, limitations and discussion points for discussion.

Chapter 6



Conclusions and discussions

Two approaches for considering citizens' initiatives

Active citizens who collaborate with others can overcome collective action problems (Ostrom et al., 1994), contribute to civil society (Bryant, 1993), display desirable behavior (Hurenkamp & Tonkens, 2011), and create various goods and services (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Healey, 2015, p. 116). The many properties make them a particular phenomenon that simultaneously defies the image of humans as rational, egoistic, utilitarian individuals and leads to an array of different expectations. To better understand these citizens' initiatives, this dissertation asked, How can the collective action of self-organizing citizens' initiatives in their relationship with governments be better understood?

To answer this question, this dissertation took two approaches. Both explored a tension relevant to citizens' initiatives. The first approach examined the capacity for collective action by citizens' initiatives—more specifically, their collective action within an initiative and their collective action when governments get involved. The tension here is that classic conceptions of collective action, which assume that citizens will probably sucker another and "free ride," render it unlikely for citizens' initiatives to exist or function properly. This conception is still very much present in instruments currently used in policy (Ostrom, 2000; 2005; Bowles 2016; Bowles & Polania-Reyes, 2012). These policies therefore signal that citizens are rational, utilitarian knaves that must be managed. They signal that citizens cannot solve social dilemmas. They signal that if citizens want to do something, they should go all the way and perform even better than governments;[24] they should act at lower costs or they might need to be upgraded.

At the same time, collective action has been shown to be possible, even in pitiful conditions. Citizens' initiatives and other related developments—in public participation, energy cooperatives, and crowdfunding—underline the possibility of collective action. To summarize, citizens' initiatives are, according to broadly accepted conceptions, unlikely to exist—and yet they do. This makes it all the

24 This is literally part of the aforementioned right to challenge (DCLG, 2011). See also My Community. (2020). Understanding the Community Right to Challenge. Available via: https://mycommunity.org.uk/understanding-the-community-right-to-challenge

more interesting that contemporary policies still invoke the classic conception. This dissertation explored this tension.

This dissertation's second approach was to unpack the value of citizens' initiatives. From the introduction to the conclusion, many examples of either exceptionally high or low expectations have been presented. The value perception of citizens' initiatives is disjointed, but hardly questioned nor specified. The expectations relate to a form of governmental, political, or even societal agenda that envisions the "right behavior" and an active role for citizens' initiatives. Many of the recurring concepts (Participation Society, Big Society, Do-Democracy, and others) describe and prescribe an active relationship between citizens and governments (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013; Aiken & Taylor, 2019, p. 16). The prescribed active relationship can lead to eagerness to motivate, kickstart, and support citizens' initiatives. That is, naturally, accomplished through policy instruments and external incentives aimed at realizing goals such as "making citizens' initiatives function properly" (Seixas & Berkes, 2009; Nederhand et al., 2016), making them perform better (Igalla et al., 2020), or making them durable (Edelenbos et al., 2018). As written before, the eagerness is not ill-intended. However, the well-intended support by (local) governments may miss the mark by means of external or crowding out effects. This misunderstanding about the value of citizens' initiatives has subsequent effects.

The combination of arguments—that citizens' initiatives are misunderstood in their capacity for collective action and in terms of why they're valuable, and that dangers lurk in the current relationships between governments and citizens' initiatives—inspired the research goals of this dissertation. The next section briefly presents each of the chapters, covering each research question, methods, and conclusion before presenting the general conclusions.

Considerations for overcoming collective action problems

Chapter 2 answered the following question: *How does exclusivity by boundary rules influence the ability of citizens' initiatives to overcome problems of collective action?* With a heavy focus on applying collective action theory and its predictions on citizens' initiatives, this research was a form of theory refinement

(Dubois & Gadde, 2002) or a plausibility probe (Levy, 2008, p. 3). The theoretical prediction was that citizens' initiatives tend towards exclusivity to keep their collective action feasible. Four drivers were designated to create this tendency: enhancing trust, organizability, monitoring, and sanctioning, and including the right participants. I concluded that citizens' initiatives indeed demonstrate a nuanced tendency towards exclusivity. However, this tendency was not expressed in boundary rules; that is to say, people were not averse to joining the collective or benefiting from its goods. However, the exclusivity was expressed in position (what positions are available) and authority rules (what are the rights and duties of the positions). Citizens' initiatives were greatly concerned with finding and binding the "right participants" to keep the initiative "organizable." Therefore they devised structures that simultaneously solved production and appropriation problems. The most common example was a "core group," an exclusive subset of participants who set the rules for other participants and direct the activities.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, for collective action theory, some Olsonion (1965) solutions, like creating a more hierarchical and coercive identity, work to enhance collective action. This solution, however, is developed and implemented in a rather subtle way. People are not excluded from the citizens' initiative or from accessing its produced goods. Rather, initiatives are looking for "smart" combinations of boundary, position, and authority rules to keep people in and out of certain positions within the initiative. The tendency toward some form of exclusivity is therefore present. Second, regarding the value of citizens' initiatives, this chapter shows that citizens' initiatives—like any other collective—are prone to problems of collective action and therefore need solutions to those problems. It is therefore likely that in their self-organization, they create rules (Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom, 1999). Some form of exclusivity is a natural consequence of such solutions. To value citizens' initiatives for the production of goods and services and for their radical inclusivity and empowerment of all their members—at the same time—is a rather difficult position to hold empirically. A more merciful or nuanced view, that citizens' initiatives embody some values but also certain inevitabilities, is much more realistic. There is some trade-off between instrumental values (like a tight-knit group that trusts

one another and acts collectively) and social virtues (inclusive empowerment for vulnerable groups).

Upgrading instead of inviting

Chapter 3 answers the question, *To what extent and under what conditions do financial incentives by local governments aimed at citizens' initiatives crowd out the motivations of the initiators of these citizens' initiatives?* To answer this question, this chapter used deductive logic and case studies. The following four factors were explored to unravel the crowding effects within various cases of citizens' initiatives that were supported by CIS-funds (citizens' initiative stimulation funds):

- What type of motivation was at play?
- Was the fund perceived as supportive or controlling?
- Had self-esteem or self-determination been affected?
- What mechanisms were involved, and how?

I conclude that the crowding effect is highly multifaceted. Neither the expected controlling conditions nor an extensive crowding out effect were found. At the same time, there wasn't a clear crowding in effect! The inquired CIS funds seemed to simultaneously enhance self-determination and invoke slight moral disengagement. Finally, hints of updated (administrative) preferences by initiators were found. Regular policy tools were, luckily, deployed without significant crowding out effects, but at the same time, they have become rather "blunt" tools. This is in line with other research that argues that creating new structures or policy instruments hardly suffices to be invitational for initiators (Visser, van Popering-Verkerk, van Buuren, 2021, p. 878). The expected paradox of incentivizing self-organization was absent: Governments and local initiatives were playing an ordinary game where everyone knew exactly how the game should be played, without any surprising outcomes.

Three implications result from this research. Regarding collective action, the research findings show that governments can positively influence the results (sometimes called payoffs in other chapters) of citizens' initiatives. The funds were suited to upgrade outcomes by increasing the self-determination of ini-

tiators and participants. This effect is possible without crowding out motivation. This research does, however, show no evidence that motivation or input by initiators or participants is positively influenced. Rather, the CIS-funds slightly morally disengage citizens' initiatives. They do so by framing the situation as one in which money matters most. Secondly, regarding the value of citizens' initiatives, this research showed that initiators were not concerned with solving great societal questions. They pursued the production of various goods because they wanted them. Finally, relating to the modest findings on updated preferences, citizens' initiatives and local governments seem to be engaged in a rather ordinary game where everyone plays their assumed part. That means that when an initiative gets funding, certain procedures and accountability are "part of the game." No one is questioning this game structure. This ordinary game, which works adequately but which also makes citizens' initiatives actively seeking and dependent on subsidies (examples of moral disengagement), seems to resemble a more "manufactured civil society" (Brandsen et al., 2017).

A rich world of values

Chapter 4 answered the research question, *To what extent do ideas of the public value(s) of citizens' initiatives differ between local politicians, civil servants, and societal actors?* This chapter used Q methodology with statements about the material, immaterial, and process values of citizens' initiatives. Various participants—civil servants, local politicians, and social actors—from one municipality all made various statements about the value of citizens' initiatives.

I concluded that if one examines citizens' initiatives more closely, one would find that they contain a whole world of values, which this research revealed. Many of the literature and documents encountered for this research took the value of citizens' initiatives for granted. Citizens' initiatives were approached as "initiatives-as-they-happen-to-be" and just facilitated, upgraded, and governed without. The research showed four distinctive patterns of value views. Citizens' initiatives include four types of participants:

- *idealistic immaterialists* who create mainly immaterial outcomes
- *pragmatic partners* who have a hands-on mentality

- *personal purpose* who act out of feelings of meaning (and fun)
- *democratic developers* who organize, voice, and act upon their own (group) interests.

The common ground between views was coined as "selfish collectivism." This selfish collectivism consists of the belief that citizens' initiatives act because they find something important and the opinion that citizens' initiatives do not have to be altruistic. According to selfish collectivism, it is acceptable for them to be somewhat egoistic and to stand up for their own (group) interests.

This research chapter has implications relating to the eagerness of actors to get involved with citizens' initiatives. Throughout this research, it has often been hypothesized that the value of citizens' initiatives is often unquestioned and seen as entirely positive. The Q study showed that distinctive value views are indeed present. Moreover, these value views differ greatly. These value views could be at the root of myriad other tensions. The potentially conflicting value views influence how citizens' initiatives and other social actors interact. More specifically, local governments can hold specific value views and draft, enact, and execute policies accordingly. Again, such views can conflict with value views of citizens' initiatives (about themselves, in this case). These often undiscovered and different value views risk scenarios that are straining, risky, and demotivating. Citizens' initiatives may be subjected, controlled, and governed in a way that does not align with their values and views about themselves. A final implication is that, even in light of strong differences in value views, some common ground that should be considered when working with citizens' initiatives. Selfish collectivism is an important feature for local politicians, policymakers, and initiators to consider because it might trigger a tendency towards exclusivity.

A specific type of communication

Chapter 5 answered the following research and sub-questions: *How do individuals solve the collective action problem of the community garden?*

- How do communication and the ability to self-organize influence the problem-solving capacity of individuals?

- How do external incentives impact communication and the ability to self-organize and influence the problem-solving capacity of individuals?

The research in this chapter was conducted via multiple experiments: in the first place, a physical experiment with Dutch mayors, and in the second place, digital experiments with first-year Dutch bachelor's and master's students via a web application that we built. In a rather classic production game, players had to produce the public good, "the community garden." Based on various treatments, ranging from no treatment (where players played anonymously and could not talk) and treatments with financial interventions (still anonymously, no talk, but with a sanction or subsidy) to a communication treatment (still anonymously, but with the ability to chat) participants' behavior and outcomes were studied.

Finally, I conclude that financial interventions barely affected what and how players communicated. Communication as a deliberative practice had the most positive results in terms of collective outcomes. This was also expected in theory. The multiple experiments we conducted led to the conclusion that people solve collective action problems of citizens' initiatives by broadcasting their willingness to be cooperative when given the possibility.

This research chapter has multiple implications. First, it corroborates the findings of Chapter 3. Subsidies are suited to upgrade results, but they are ineffective at sparking, inciting, or improving cooperative civic behavior. This chapter also showed that sometimes sanctions, a controlling instrument, work. However, as sanctions sometimes crowd out cooperative behavior, they are risky. The corroborated finding that communication-based opportunities to self-organize still work best for collective action has implications for governmental involvement. If governments seek involvement to prevent crowding out effects and to prevent themselves from manufacturing the initiative, creating opportunities for communication may be the best opportunity. Even though the way that initiators and participants communicate might be unpredictable, governments should create outlets to broadcast cooperative behavior. Finally, within collectives, conditional cooperators can find one another by broadcasting their benevolence, even in

suboptimal conditions. That is, at minimum, a valuable characteristic of citizens' initiatives.

General conclusions

Combining the four pieces of research, I draw three general conclusions that answer the overarching question: *How can the collective action of self-organizing citizens' initiatives in their relationship with governments be better understood?* First, unknown or divergent values create innumerable misunderstandings, particularly regarding the selfish collectivism of citizens' initiatives. The second general conclusion is that a combination of exclusivity, communication, and selfish collectivism increases the capacity for collective action. Finally, I conclude that instruments, values, and collective action are co-dependent in nature.

There is a plurality of values of citizens' initiatives, but there is also selfish collectivism

On a fundamental level, this research found stark differences in views on the value of citizens' initiatives. Given that these differences are either unknown or divergent, they create the playing field for all the misunderstandings presented throughout this dissertation. I will present three examples of consequences that arise from value differences.

First, value views literally influence what is appreciated about citizens' initiatives. This could not be a surprise. Given the value differences that were discovered throughout this research, the variation in appreciation for citizens' initiatives has both major benefits and grave risks. The plurality of values allows for a more nuanced yet more specific view of citizens' initiatives. They need not contribute to all the expectations found in public discourse, academia, and policies. It is perfectly reasonable to have more specific and realistic views about the value of citizens' initiatives.

At the same time, the plurality of values carries the risk of social misalignment. Either because the values are completely unknown or because the differences

are unknown, this dissertation found both causes during the research process. The misalignment risks various conflicts, such as the idea that different actors seem to agree on the value of citizens' initiatives, while in reality, they do not. Such a situation is bound to lead to disillusionment, disappointment, or conflict.

Even though there is a plurality of values, there is also common ground: selfish collectivism. This common ground allows a better understanding of citizens' initiatives. Selfish collectivism comprises the elements of accepting that citizens' initiatives are self-centered and, as a group, egoistic rather than altruistic. At the same time, they are acting for the good of their collective. Acknowledging selfish collectivism allows one to allow citizens' initiatives to be themselves and create their own devices to manage themselves. If one values selfish collectivism and its consequences, it becomes easier for an involved government to make peace with the fact that citizens' initiatives do not contribute to various policy goals by governments. (Previous research on citizens' initiatives showed that governments asked citizens' initiatives to align their goals with the policy agenda [Ubels, 2020].) When one mainly values citizens' initiatives for their "executive" or "implementation power," managing and upgrading them naturally gains importance.

The unknown or conflicting values have an important relationship with the exclusivity of citizens' initiatives. Citizens' initiatives are often celebrated for features of inclusivity, empowerment, and various social effects. These values are at odds with the need for exclusivity to solve collective action problems. In this dissertation, I found that some form of exclusivity helps collectives. Initiators or participants are not ill-intended actors who keep others out of the initiative for arbitrary reasons. They are addressing collective action problems in creating and running their initiative. Initiators are seeking arrangements and structures that allow them to fruitfully cooperate, and some form of exclusivity is part of that. While it is in their interest to be slightly exclusive, it may be in the government's interest to have inclusive initiatives (because inclusion is valued in itself, but also because non-exclusivity serves more citizens).

Citizens' initiatives sometimes must be exclusive to organize themselves. Additionally, the ability to organize themselves and overcome collective action problems can be valued in itself. However, this specific value may be at odds with policy goals that seek other values. As such, the tendency towards exclusivity is a specific conflict among the many values of citizens' initiatives.

The acknowledgment that there is not only a plurality of values regarding citizens' initiatives but also some common ground provides a better understanding of citizens' initiatives in their relation to governments.

Selfish collectivism, communication as the best instrument, and exclusivity are a package deal

Chapter 2 showed that some exclusivity is beneficial for collective action, and Chapter 5 showed that the option to communicate to broadcast one's willingness to be cooperative also increases collective action. In short, communication was the "best" intervention. Broadcasting helps find the "right participants" even in suboptimal situations (Axelrod, 1984). Communication also helps coordinate positions, needs, and tasks. Broadcasting benevolence allows others to respond, build trust and esteem, and enforce reciprocity (Foley & Edwards, 1996). The common thread among these findings is that they all work together to benefit the capacity for collective action. I will explain this relationship in three steps.

First, selfish collectivism centers on collective action with a somewhat inward orientation—hence the selfishness. More inward-oriented groups tend to have higher levels of trust and bonding capital, which subsequently benefit their collectivism (Putnam, 2000). Thus, the inward orientation of selfish collectivism is likely to be associated with an increased capacity for collective action.

Second, the inward orientation is, of course, somewhat exclusive. The drivers for exclusivity from Chapter 2—such as "enhancing trust" and "finding and binding the right participants"—correspond to this inward orientation of selfish collectivism.

Finally, communication was the best instrument to solve collective action problems. The ways in which communication was used overlapped strongly with the drivers of exclusivity. Players used communication to create a form of trust, to increase organizability by dividing tasks, to monitor performance, to informally sanction each other, and to present themselves as the "right participants" for others to collaborate with.

It makes sense that the best means of overcoming collective action problems—the option to communicate—leads to some forms of exclusivity. Participants used communication to foster selfish collectivism, solving their collective action problems while driving them toward exclusivity in the process. That is the second general conclusion.

This general conclusion adds to the better understanding of the collective action capacity of citizens' initiatives. Capacity for collective action increases through selfish collectivism and communication but has exclusivity as an attachment.

Every instrument has its own way of signaling value views and influencing the capacity for collective action

There seems to be a strong interaction between collective action, value views, and policy instruments. In a sense, this conclusion approaches a combination of the findings of Fischbacher et al. (2001) and Ryan and Deci (2000a; 2000b). Initiators, varying in their degree of cooperativeness and motivation, respond differently to certain instruments.

The literature has already suggested that every instrument signals something (e.g., Ostrom, 2005, Bowles & Polania-Reyes 2012; Bowles, 2016). This is an important suggestion to further understand this interaction between collective action, value views, and instruments. A closer look at the instruments that were primarily inquired about—sanctions, subsidies, and communication—reveals a certain view of the values and vices that each of these instruments signals. Each instrument can create externalities through what it signals. I will discuss the three main instruments:

- Sanctions, or other controlling measures, might signal that citizens' initiatives need correction because they breed "free-riding" behavior, are partially exclusive, or do not produce the right goods by themselves. Requirements (categorically close to sanctions[25]) might also explain the tendency towards some form of structure and hierarchy, as seen in Chapter 2. That is a possible externality: As citizens' initiatives must abide by requirements—ranging from legal entities to a business case, both common examples—they require some form of professionalization (Wilensky, 1964, p. 157), and more participants must be kept in line.
- Subsidies might signal appreciation for citizens' initiatives[26], but it is appreciation within some kind of normative framework (about what features should be appreciated). Additionally, subsidies might signal that engaging with the production of public goods and services is a world that revolves around money. That would be an externality. Moreover, the presence of subsidies might also explain the tendency towards some form of exclusivity. Applying for the subsidy asks something of participants (Ubels, 2020, pp. 152 & 178): investment of time, knowledge, and skills, all factors that relate to finding the right participants who possess these qualities.
- Communication might signal making peace with selfish collectivism. It is acceptable to not purely be altruistic, inclusive and open, because initiatives need to be able to devise their own rules and arrangements. However, creating "merely" communication outlets might also signal apathy: Citizens' initiatives are self-organizing entities, so they should independently resolve whatever they must. The externality is that governments may signal through communication that "we're not getting involved."

To better understand citizens' initiatives in their relation to governments, it is important to realize that these instruments are not neutrally at one's disposal. What the instrument does and what externalities it creates depend on how it interacts with (1) the involved value views, (2) the acceptance of selfish collectivism, and (3) the involved groups. Interventions should be carefully conducted.

25 They both discipline and signal what is seen as vicious, bad or undesirable.

26 Chapter 5 showed that subsidy was very much welcomed by the players. In that sense, it might have signaled a huge appreciation for the citizens maintaining the community garden.

To allow initiatives to reach their potential values, the policies and instruments should mesh with these values. It is unfair to ask citizens' initiatives to create a revitalized civil society by nudging them to maintain public works. A meaningful match between expectations—whether too high or too low—and the actual activities of citizens' initiatives that are supported is necessary to truly see the value of citizens' initiatives.

The general conclusions all suggest that understanding citizens' initiatives and getting involved with them requires a lot. It is about exploring the value views and finding the right balance between these values of citizens' initiatives and all the practical implications (in terms of expectations, policies, and instruments) of what one finds valuable. It is about considering a degree of selfish collectivism and exclusivity to let collective action flourish. The ingredients of collective action, the value views of citizens' initiatives, and the right policy instruments should not be considered separately. They are all part of a recipe, and these ingredients should be carefully weighed.

Societal relevance

This research is societally relevant because it generates and explicates knowledge that is helpful for readers. Below, I present additional concrete points that allow to implement these research findings more directly in practice. The points for practice are aimed at local governments and initiators or participants.

First, it is important to raise a point of relevance for all involved with the public value(s) of citizens' initiatives. Earlier, I argued that not knowing the value views and not considering the differences in value views is a likely culprit in many of the misunderstandings covered in this dissertation. There are two points of relevance linked to this, and the first is substantive.

Aside from the explanation that patterns of value views may differ in various contexts, the strong common thread across value views was selfish collectivism. Considering how often extraordinary expectations have been presented, it is

societally relevant to strongly consider this selfish collectivism. It is, according to this research, a fruitful point of departure in discussing what to expect from citizens' initiatives, what to think about them, and how to act with (or within) them. What is more, this value view matches successful collective action by citizens' initiatives.

The second point is methodological. Understanding and studying public value is difficult. Even a productive conversation with a relevant public about certain values is still challenging. However, Chapter 4 showed that the Q methodology is well suited to sparking a fruitful discussion about the value of citizens' initiatives.

By creating "a public" of various actors to fill in the Q sort about the public value(s) of citizens' initiatives, this research followed the ideal process according to the public value literature and combined it with the common process of a Q study (Benington, 2009; Meynhardt, 2015). Values essentially express subjectivity (Meynhardt, 2009, p. 199), and that led to a Q study, which is a systematic study of subjectivity especially suited to studying public value. In Chapter 4, every participant had to decide what they, subjectively, saw as valuable given the specific context of citizens' initiatives (Stoker, 2006, p. 50; Watts & Stenner, 2005, p. 69).

This way of studying values can also be applied to other topics: the value of representative democracy, public participation, governmental programs, and values regarding societal questions (such as climate change, refugees, or economic models). Therefore, this research is societally relevant because it shows the methods by which general value discussions and public value issues can become more fruitful and manageable.

Points for practice: aimed at local governments

This dissertation explored the tension between local governments and self-organizing initiatives. It is therefore no surprise that the societal relevance and points for practice are aimed at local governments. I will cover two categories: the values and expectations and the policy instruments.

1. On values and expectations

It is crucial that local governments do not start in the middle with "just supporting" citizens' initiatives or with specific instruments (such as the *right to challenge*).[27] Rather, they should start with exploring what is seen as valuable. This dissertation has shown that distinctive value views about citizens' initiatives are bound to be present. Two practical reasons explain why it is important to explore and discover the values early.

First, a plurality of values is present. It does not make sense anymore not to question the value of citizens' initiatives, nor to see them as magic bullets or "execution power" for policy. This research has shown a wide range of possible values that can be expected from citizens' initiatives. Aligning these values is considered important by various frameworks about collaboration (e.g., Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012); the same holds for working with citizens' initiatives.

Second, it is important to unravel the value patterns to determine if there is any common ground between actors who are bound to engage with one another. Such common ground is a fruitful starting point for anything more practical that follows. Finally, understanding the values involved allows policy instruments to be aligned with what matters and prevents successive policies and instruments from clashing with the values.

Finally, to make a more substantive point for practice about values and expectations, I will again highlight the concept of selfish collectivism. This distinctive value view should be considered because it is an important feature of citizens' initiatives. It would help to create an inviting space (Visser et al., 2021) where selflessness and collectiveness can flourish simultaneously. However, public organizations must know how to address people who are excluded because of this selfish collectivism. If the strengths of citizens' initiatives are appreciated, they should not be disciplined into other features. Promising initiatives should not be overtasked to achieve even more by forcing them to strive for other, perhaps more inclusive, values. If the presence of differences between core groups and wider

27 This was strongly visible in the scraped coalition agreements used in Chapter 4.

communities is problematic, public organizations can implement "upgrading" measures to mitigate the negative effects of such differences instead of preventing them.

2. On policy instruments

As for policy instruments, the main warning for local governments is to avoid morally disengaging initiators and participants or pushing them too far with imposed administrative preferences. Everyone who works in local government should avoid any tendency to instrumentalize citizens' initiatives. Expecting initiators and participants to think, act, and deliver in the same way as local governments is neither fair nor realistic.

"Making better use of initiatives" is one of the main critiques in my research chapters. At the same time, governments are often necessary for initiators, and policies regarding public participation and citizens' initiatives are more likely to increase than disappear. If one becomes instrumentally involved, one should aim to create the right invited space, for which this dissertation has provided some practical insights. Assuming that (1) governments and collectives already share some interface and (2) that values, ambitions, and ends have been appropriately exchanged, there is room to practically focus on the instruments for such a space.

First, multiple instruments are necessary. As various groups respond differently to interventions, it is crucial to ensure that the community has myriad policy instruments available. Only having one specific instrument is unlikely to wield success, especially when applied blindly and uniformly.[28] Second, subsidies are suited to upgrade but not (yet) to entice, invite, or motivate citizens. One should consider this conclusion in combination with what is valued in respective communities and municipalities. If enticement and invitation of initiatives are more important, then subsidies might not be the most effective method. At the same time, if upgrading is necessary and appropriate, accessible funds or subsidies can be useful instruments that do not necessarily crowd out—as long as the instruments are not too controlling but rather perceived as supporting. Third,

28 I am referring to the bill that nudges towards the right to challenge (Rijksoverheid, 2022).

self-esteem, important for motivation, is still raised by in-person involvement. If council members or civil servants want to signal that they value initiatives (the crowding-in mechanism of *good news*), in-person appreciation is the most effective approach. Fourth, governments should create spaces where face-to-face communication is possible and fruitful; such spaces allow for appreciation by others and might also help with moral engagement.[29] Finally, local governments should adhere closely to the action logic of citizens' initiatives to help them act collectively. If the initiators create their own structures to solve collective action problems, governments should help them with these structures rather than discourage them.

Points for practice: aimed at initiators or participants

This research leads to two categories of points of practice for initiators and participants: The first is focused on the internal affairs within initiatives, and the second is focused on the relationship with (decentral) governments.

1. On the organization of a collective

This dissertation used collective action theory to examine citizens' initiatives, and selfish collectivism was argued to benefit the capacity for collective action. Taken together, for initiators and participants, this means that selfishness and collectivism should simultaneously be invoked.

To elaborate, this dissertation showed that communication was the most fruitful intervention to overcome collective action problems. Common sense would say that this is an open door. However, the research specifically showed that broadcasting cooperative behavior is key to collective action. Making proposals or forming a coalition with confirmation of proposals by others positively affected cooperation.

Either at the beginning of an initiative or well into it, one should ensure that the initiative has the environment and the norm—in other words, the collectivism—where the broadcasting of benevolence is possible and valued.

29 See the all the moral appeals in the communication rounds in Chapter 5.

Then, next to collectivism, selfishness must also be called upon. One of the interesting findings was that citizens' initiatives solved collective action problems by creating solutions that simultaneously solved production problems (people putting in work) and appropriation problems (people taking too much). As such, it would be relevant, when trying to organize, to specifically consider such solutions. One should not shy away from some form of hierarchy and structure—expressed through position and authority rules—as they may be necessary. Some nuanced forms of exclusivity might be helpful for smart solutions that tackle collective action problems, and this can result from communication and self-organization. However, this dissertation also showed that boundary rules (excluding people categorically) are not necessary to collectively organize for many citizens' initiatives. In the end, initiatives should try to find structures that are conceived, refined, and enacted by the collective itself. Those structures are most likely to work effectively.

2. On the relationship with (decentral) governments

When initiators sense that officials from local governments have different value views compared to themselves, this is a red flag for future problems. As unknown values or clashing values are the likely culprits in many misunderstandings, it pays off to resolve them early. It has been said before, but much of "the" governmental perception is not ill-intended; they are often enthusiastic and eager to support. Still, their perception might be the result of the prevailing, dominant paradigms with governments. Governments are intent on bridging the gap between themselves and societal actors; therefore, it is fair to require them to converge with the values of self-organizing collectives.

Secondly, it is important to identify what policy instruments work for initiators and participants. It could be that a citizens' initiative is seeking some start-up funds or government subsidies to upgrade some of the results. Additionally, when some policy instruments are too controlling, it is important to signal this. Most local governments are fond of citizens' initiatives. Overly controlling or harsh instruments are not likely to be ill-intended, and as such, one must notify public bodies whether their policy instruments fit the communities' character and needs. Initiatives can signal whether these instruments are appropriate and functional.

Finally, in this dissertation's research, there were enthusiastic and involved civil servants. Many initiators were helped well, were led to the CIS-funds and were appreciated by civil servants or public officials. Every decentralized government likely has at least one of those civil servants who is "not looking for reasons to say no." If initiators can find these civil servants, some fruitful relationships should be able to blossom. With the current attention given to strengthening public participation, revitalizing communities, creating public value, and inviting governance, a better awareness within governments is likely to gain a firm foothold. If initiators can create small subgroups with willing civil servants to use the best cooperative strategies, they can outperform traditional, managerial, and less open strategies (Axelrod, 1984).

The points of practice for initiators and participants about their relationship with governments are mostly about awareness and signaling. As such, it is like the counterpart of the *administrative preferences* that citizens themselves might have developed over the years. The points for practice can kickstart some *social preferences* to shape or change "the game" played by governments and self-organizing collectives.

Limitations

There are three categories of limitations to discuss: focus, subject selection, and methodology.

First, in terms of focus, this research is limited because, while it contributes to knowledge about citizens' initiatives, it barely addresses other collectives. Other collectives, such as "regular" volunteers, social enterprises, protests, and even individual citizens, engage with public problems. Citizens' initiatives are assemblies of certain kinds of people: They have the capacity to act, are motivated in some sense, and might feel invited "enough" to do something (see Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; van de Wijdeven, 2012). Citizens' initiatives have certain properties that other collectives might not. Therefore, the research findings in terms of value patterns, cooperation, broadcasting strategies, and crowding

effects may be less generalizable to other collectives and contexts. The "game" that is played by governments and citizens' initiatives is not played everywhere. The protest "game" is likely to be different due to the antagonistic nature of citizens versus a government; the volunteering "game" is different, powered by more purist or loose interpretations of "true" volunteering (Cnaan, Handy & Wadsworth, 1996); and the social enterprise game might be different through their commercial properties (Fenger, Karré & Blok, 2023).

The focus on the tension between governments and citizens' initiatives can also be considered a more overarching limitation since there are many citizens' initiatives that operate almost completely independently of governments (they must, of course, abide by the law). For these types of initiatives, the various tensions would not exist, or at least would be less pressing. All the research questions refer to this tension by exploring the perspectives and logic of government and society. This tension is the research problem that inspired most of the chapters. While these tensions certainly are present and discussed thoroughly (in this dissertation and even more outside of it), this might seem a bit like a *weak man argument*: cherry-picked to suit the interests. Again, the argument is that not many of the tensions arise from ill intentions. But tensions arose from the ways in which the public administration system currently works. I'll reflect some more on this system in the discussion.

The second limitation concerns subject selection, and there are two ways to examine this: selection of cases and selection of respondents. Most of the case studies included citizens' initiatives that were already a collective. In other words, there was some sort of successful selection bias in the case selection. Groups of citizens who were not successful in overcoming collective action problems[30] or obtaining the funds were not in this study. Therefore, the studies could not examine the major barriers of citizens' initiatives that did not succeed, either as a functional collective or in terms of obtaining funds. Regarding respondents, there is a second way to look at limitations. For example, in Chapter 4 with the Q methodology, I made a conscious selection of respondents to ensure a distribution

30 Except for one case in Chapter 2.

of positions (Brown, 1980, p. 192; McKeown and Thomas, 2013, p. 31): various civil servants, local council members, and societal actors. Still, these were more or less "usual suspects." While this was the goal of the study, it is possible that some positions were not discovered because "ordinary" citizens were not included. Chapter 5 covered public administration students, sociology students, and Dutch mayors. These groups are far from representative of any society. However, including these groups and comparing them to others (for example, the farmers in the original study by Cardenas et al. [2000]) still provides valuable knowledge about how totally distinct respondents react to incentives while also cooperating.

Finally, this section will discuss methodological limitations, which have mostly been covered in the respective chapters. Chapter 2 was mostly a theoretical exercise to explore the presence of the hypothesized tendency towards exclusivity. A modest number of cases were used to conduct this exploration. Firmer evidence across diverse cases is necessary to further verify the plausibility probe (Levy, 2008). In Chapter 3, we were only able to show a marginal crowding effect (more or less crowding) and not a categorical crowding effect (whether there was a crowding effect or not); this limitation was partly due to the earlier mentioned selection bias in cases. Therefore, the research could not show comparative strengths, such as comparisons between funds (which could be more or less controlling), between initiatives that did or did not receive the fund, and consequently between effects on motivation, esteem, determination, and mechanisms. Chapter 4 used a qualiquantitative approach: harnessing the strengths of qualitative aspects via subjectively positioning statements and quantitative aspects via factor analysis. This mixed approach prevented us from delving too far into the values of respondents, something that an interview could have risked. Moreover, this approach also prevented a purely quantitative approach in comparing actors and value groups. Aside from that, the collection and formulation of statements were prone to some form of construct validity: to what extent do our statements reflect what the theories say? Are the statements meaningful in broader interpretations than *just* the meaning given to them by the respondents?

The experiment in Chapter 5 had two major limitations: the participant selection, which has already been discussed, and the design. The design involved a

process of pioneering: the payoff structure, the treatments (sanctions, subsidies, and communication), and the entire web application were created with great care, though they were still somewhat simple. The payoff structure could have been more lifelike to make the experiment feel less artificial. All of these aspects could also have been better adjusted to account for unobservable and observable variables that influenced either the treatment or the outcomes (Morton & Williams, 2010, p. 79).

Altogether, an overarching methodological limitation is that these different methods—each with its own limitation—provided a diverse set of findings that may 'just not' provide a sharp picture with equally sharp conclusions. The use of a more consistent toolbox of methods—for example, experiments only—might have led to a more precise overall picture and conclusion.

These limitations raise two major reservations about this research: one relating to theory and one relating to generalizability. Although this research provided some notable additions to theory, given the limitations, the validity of these additions should be viewed with caution. The conclusions about the tendency towards exclusivity should be verified more broadly and in different contexts before they rightfully stand as meaningful theoretical conditions. Additionally, the conclusion that the crowding effect is multifaceted came from certain cases. Such cases are quite typical for citizens' initiatives, but in terms of motivation or perceived control by a fund or government, many other typical or least-likely cases are conceivable. Therefore, caution about the validity of dissecting the crowding effect to discover its results is also warranted. Finally, the selected units (actors, respondents, and initiatives) and the specific context (of a municipality in Chapter 4 and a specific vignette in Chapter 5) inhibited generalizability. A different selection of actors in a different geographical area (another municipality, region, or neighborhood) could produce different patterns of value views. Another group of respondents other than students or mayors could show distinctive behavior, and a different vignette could trigger even more cooperative or non-cooperative behavior.

Notwithstanding these reservations, the research in this dissertation made contributions that are theoretically and generally important. These contributions were outlined in each section of the respective research chapters. All the research adhered to theory, with verified and valid constructs, and made specific applications to everyday collectives of citizens found everywhere. This combination of strong deductive logic from theory and real-life applications makes the insights more valuable outside of the specific research questions, goals, and subjects of this dissertation.

Suggestions for future research

This research provided valuable insight into collective action by citizen's initiatives, and this second-to-last section reflects on new avenues and puzzles that this research has raised. Most of these new puzzles lie at the intersection of collective action, incentives, and values.

First, in terms of the value of citizens' initiatives, it would be useful to broaden research and make it more explanatory. One example would be to use the value patterns in a large *N* study to determine how these value views are distributed in society. Such a large *N* study could also be used to ask respondents about certain strategies (van Buuren, 2018), policies, and instruments. Such studies provide explanations for why certain strategies or instruments work (or not) based on how they fit within certain value views. This insight could shed light on the moral aspects of complementing incentives (Bowles, 2006) by combining profound viewpoints on values with practical strategies. A last addition is that large *N* studies about value patterns and instruments also reveal how regional or urban differences (van den Berg, 2019) in self-organization and cooperative behavior might arise. This explanation would shed light on community responses (Velez et al., 2010) to certain policy instruments. Ultimately, this category of examples for future research provides information about the various invited spaces (Visser, 2023) that fit various collectives of citizens, all with different motivations, goals, and needs.

A second category of puzzles concerns the broader relations of the value views with three subjects: the capacity for collective action, the manufactured or true civil society, and the motivation in the light of self-determination theory. Starting with the capacity for collective action, it is of great importance to discover if various value views or patterns are related to the capacity for collective action. Are the pragmatic partners more successful in collectively acting, and what barriers arise for them? How do initiatives more closely related to democratic developers overcome their collective action problems? Are certain value views more prone to "free riding"?

Second, the risk of manufacturing civil society, with all its related consequences, is an important aspect of this research. With possible conflicts in value views between actors, moral disengagement, and updated (administrative) preferences, something is at stake. The value views could reveal what is—generally or within certain contexts—seen as a manufactured civil society and as a "true" civil society. In order to be more careful of a manufactured civil society, overly managed citizens' initiatives, and greedy governance (Trommel, 2009), a more thorough understanding of what is truly valued about collective action and what is merely opportunistic policy language is necessary.

Finally, future research could explore what values or value views relate to the various forms of motivation. Self-determination theory already states what the relation between motivation and instruments could be (instruments should create or enhance autonomy, competence, and relatedness), but what relationship is present between the values that citizens' initiatives contain and high forms of motivation? Are certain value views more connected to extrinsic forms of motivation and others more to intrinsic forms?

Finally, this dissertation raised multiple questions about the mechanisms of crowding theory. For example, moral engagement seemed to be an important mechanism and should be investigated more in-depth. However, the first hints of updated (administrative) preferences were surprising. These findings should be studied in various ways, ranging from survey experiments to comparative case studies with observation or longitudinal studies following collectives. An-

other example is that the experiment in Chapter 5 could be updated to different vignettes of the treatment, creating four versions or the subsidy representing each of the mechanisms. Both more qualitative research on how and why certain mechanisms create partial crowding effects as well as more quantitative research would be fascinating.

Discussion

This reflection will be limited to two points of discussion. The first point will focus on the implications of this research for the theories used, and the second point will focus on systems of public administration, paying special attention to the manufactured and managed civil society.

1. Theoretical implications

Four theoretical bodies were important to this research: collective action, crowding, civil society, and public value. With respect to collective action, the findings of this dissertation share many results with the work of Ostrom (1999; Ostrom, et al., 1994), Olson (1965), Axelrod (1984), Cardenas et al. (2000), and others. These shared findings imply that previous work on collective action still stands firm when applied to citizens' initiatives. We saw groups responding well to the sanctions (Olson) but also groups collaborating well in suboptimal situations (Axelrod), and in communication rounds (Ostrom). More broadly, this dissertation refines one's understanding of the capacity to solve collective problems. Citizens' initiatives are forms of collective action, and they are actively practicing—perhaps unknowingly—that capacity. When citizens' initiatives can flourish, cooperation can be practiced daily. Without exaggerating this practice, it is important for the so-called developmental effects (Warren, 2001; Buecker, Mund, Chwastek, Sostmann, Luhmann, 2021). When citizens self-organize and overcome collective action problems, they must collaborate with other individuals, solve conflicts, and make moral appeals. Those activities increase humanity's capacity to work together, a practice that is needed to confront all the actual tragedies of the commons that face society (Dietz et al., 2003; Karl & Trenberth, 2003, Folke et al., 2005, The Consilience Project, 2021; Sparkman et al., 2022). Broadcasting benevolence,

to be specific, is an important device to signal cooperativeness and thereby helps coordinate collective solutions, ranging from social to environmental domains (see also Sparkman et al., 2022, p. 1).

Crowding theory is still a contested field of inquiry. Sometimes striking effects take place (Frey & Oberholzer-Gee 1997; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000). Sometimes the effects are more diffuse or even absent (Velez et al., 2010; Voorberg et al., 2018). This dissertation has some interesting implications for this field. The first is that using an incentive to upgrade preexisting qualities versus using an incentive to influence the lack thereof is an important distinction (while it may sound almost "nit-picky"). Secondly, by means of the four mechanisms, it became clear how the crowding effect did or did not partially arise. The crowding effect is not "all or nothing"; it has a few shades of gray. This research also found that appeals to one another via communication were powerful triggers for cooperation. These findings resonate with Bowles' *The Moral Economy* (2016, chapter 7): Moral messages complement incentives. The subsidies successfully upgraded outcomes, and communication worked for more cooperative behavior. As such, and again, this research strongly suggests a mix of policy and instruments in addressing citizens' initiatives. The invitation should therefore include an honest and fair request, as those morals complement the instrumental sides of the invitation.

As written in the introduction, civil society is a slippery concept while simultaneously strongly associated with citizens' initiatives. Walzer's (1991) description of civil society as a "project of projects" is particularly insightful. That description implies that citizens' initiatives are one of the projects, contributing to something larger. The civil society provides three arguments for why citizens' initiatives contribute to the civil society: democratic arguments, political arguments, and social arguments. More narrowly, this research implies that citizens' initiatives *can* indeed contribute to "the project" of civil society and all the good associated with it (Walzer, 1991; Warren, 1992; Newton, 2001; Edwards, 2009; Keane & Merkel, 2019). However, the key word is *can*. Citizens' initiatives do not necessarily aim to contribute to civil society. Many of the included initiatives were producing diverse goods because they wanted them (see Chapter 3). One of the important conclusions of this dissertation is that citizens' initiatives embody *self-*

ish collectivism. They contribute to cooperation, self-organization, some form of daily politics, and perhaps trust-building, but they are focused on their own group's interests. Explicit instances of tolerance, solidarity, and discussions of a good society were absent. The civil society literature helps elucidate the value of citizens' initiatives but still risks inflating the expectations of citizens' initiatives. Collectives can contribute to civil society, but not all explicitly aim to do so.

This research also sheds some light on why public value and citizens' initiatives are such likely partners. Public value creation requires creating a public—"calling it into existence"—that does the act of valuing (Moore in Bryson, et al., 2014). This act is an inherent characteristic of citizens' initiatives because they are literally *a created public* that is *valuing something*. Citizens' initiatives often create themselves because they are triggered by an issue or because they want to do something. That makes citizens' initiatives the ideal vessels to engage in the act of defining and creating public value.

2. Public administration and a managed civil society

Finally, as for the second point of discussion, the introduction sketched some contextual developments to establish a better understanding of citizens' initiatives. These developments move from a Weberian public administration via new public management (see Hood, 1991) to something that is often labeled as public value management or public value governance (Stoker, 2006; Bryson et al., 2014). In this last paradigm, collaboration, or co-production—with markets, states, citizens, and the third sector—is key. Currently, there is much attention on public value management, both in academia and in practice.[31]

I want to add some critical notes to these well-known developments.

MacIntyre (1998; 2011 [1981]) argues that *managerialism* is the overarching orientation that pervades modern societies. This means that NPM and PVM are both part of the same orientation. Managerialism is often visible in public administra-

31 The Dutch Ministry of Interior made public that they renounced new public management and that public value should be central to their philosophy (NRC, 2023; Bekkers, 2023).

tion's (the scientific community's) aim to improve and assist governments, as the field is "not satisfied with being merely a social science" (Overeem & Tholen, 211, p. 726). Naturally, this goal traps the field, as "there is no fundamental consideration of ends, but only of the proper means to achieve those ends that happen to be favored" (ibid., p. 727; Abrahamson, 1996, p. 261).

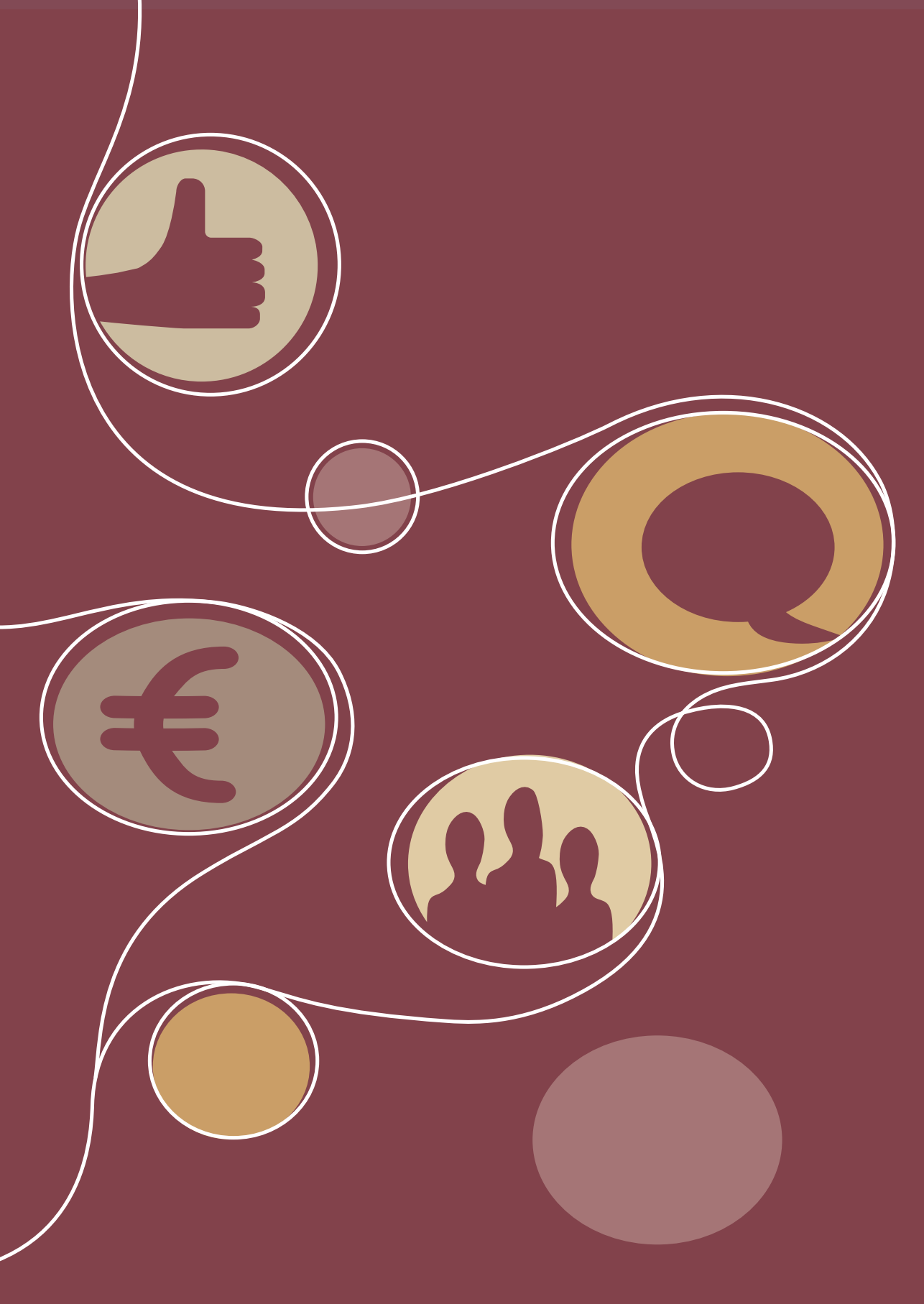
While a search for public value emphasizes "a public" that defines and deliberates on ends that are valuable to that public, two problems remain. The first is that self-organizing citizens are still a means to an end, as the public is a vehicle through which to define and create public value. In that sense, there is still a managerial tendency to make self-organizing initiatives more efficient at what they do ("Make the process of defining and deliberating more efficient. Make them do it cheaper. Make it more manageable. Give it more action perspective." These should be some familiar examples.). Such a tendency could be the underlying tension mentioned throughout this dissertation. The eagerness, enthusiasm, and meddlesomeness, which are not ill-intended, could stem from the managerial tendency to make value definition and creation more efficient.

The second problem is that the results of the valuing processes by initiatives—the self-created publics—are, possibly, still "ends that happen to be favored." Those ends are not necessarily the right ends, as illustrated by exclusion, NIMBYism, some protests, or controversial initiatives such as neighborhood watches that usurp the monopoly on violence (Lub, 2016). These are many ends that happen to be favored, or at least taken for granted, by a public. In current polarizing times (Törnberg, 2022) where collectives of citizens are disengaging themselves from public life, politics, and literally "the grid," this problem is far from a small matter.[32] Accepting whatever citizens' initiatives favor poses severe difficulties. When governments embrace public value creation by citizens' initiatives, they are, in a sense, decentralizing definitions of valuable and invaluable ends.

32 The examples are countless: Hawley, N. (2023); Hawkins, S., Yudkin, D., Juan-Torres, M. & Dixon, T. (2018).

It is important to be careful about managerialism regarding citizens' initiatives. Additionally, it is important to prevent governments or other forces from instrumentalizing civil society and citizens' initiatives for their ambitions, whatever these may be. Instrumentalizing risks crowding out intrinsic (or high self-determined forms of extrinsic) motivation; it forces certain values upon self-organized collectives and might hinder fruitful collective action, as self-devised structures are often more effective at overcoming collective action problems. This instrumentalization resembles what Brandsen *et al.* (2017) call the "manufacturing" of civil society. The manufactured civil society might be the ordinary game that everybody, perhaps implicitly, knows how to play. It is a game without any surprising outcomes because it is manufactured and managed well. Instrumentalizing citizens' initiatives for the sake of civil society is highly paradoxical, but this approach would at least serve a purpose. Instrumentalizing citizens' initiatives in a purely managerial sense—with no fundamental consideration of ends, just to make them more productive—is worse. It is not inconceivable that there could be situations in which citizens' initiatives are instrumentalized for unknown, vague, or arbitrary purposes. This dissertation demonstrated how many of the city councils wanted to actively support citizens' initiatives, but their motivation was unclear. The time and energy that initiators and participants devote to their activities is limited. They are not an inexhaustible resource that can be freely used to solve every problem.

Even if they do solve many problems, when citizens' initiatives are instrumentalized, they must be optimized to work with the overarching orientation of managerialism. Ultimately, this situation risks citizens' initiatives becoming over-asked and depleted. Citizens' initiatives themselves, as valuable goods, are over-appropriated. That means there is a new tragedy, not of the commons, but this time of *the publics*.



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Used literature and checked coalition agreements for the concourse

Author	Type
Bailey, N. (2012). The role, organisation and contribution of community enterprise to urban regeneration policy in the UK. Progress in Planning, 77(1), 1-35.	International Scientific
Igalla, M., Edelenbos, J., & van Meerkerk, I. (2019). Citizens in action, what do they accomplish? A systematic literature review of citizen initiatives, their main characteristics, outcomes, and factors. Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 30(5), 1176-1194.	International Scientific
Van Dam, R., Duineveld, M., & During, R. (2015). Delineating active citizenship: The subjectification of citizens' initiatives. Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning, 17(2), 163-179.	International Scientific
Bakker, J., Denters, B., Oude Vrielink, M., & Klok, P. J. (2012). Citizens' initiatives: How local governments fill their facilitative role. Local Government Studies, 38(4), 395-414.	International Scientific
Healey, P. (2015). Citizen-generated local development initiative: recent English experience. International Journal of Urban Sciences, 19(2), 109-118.	International Scientific
de Haan, E., Meier, S., Haartsen, T., & Strijker, D. (2018). Defining 'Success' of Local Citizens' Initiatives in Maintaining Public Services in Rural Areas: A Professional's Perspective. Sociologia Ruralis, 58(2), 312-330.	International Scientific
Verhoeven, I., & Tonkens, E. (2013). Talking active citizenship: Framing welfare state reform in England and the Netherlands. Social Policy and Society, 12(3), 415.	International Scientific
Bakker, J., Denters, S. A., & Klok, P. J. (2011). Welke burger telt mee (r) in de doe-democratie?. B en M: tijdschrift voor beleid, politiek en maatschappij, 38(4), 402-418.	Dutch Scientific
Vrielink, M. O., & Verhoeven, I. (2011). Burgerinitiatieven en de bescheiden overheid. Beleid en Maatschappij, 38(4), 377-387.	Dutch Scientific
Van de Wijdeven, T. M. F., De Graaf, L. J., & Hendriks, F. (2013). Actief burgerschap: lijnen in de literatuur.	Dutch Scientific

Author	Type
Igalla, M., & Van Meerkerk, I. (2015). De Duurzaamheid van Burgerinitiatieven. Een Empirische Verkenning (The Sustainability of Citizen Initiatives. An Empirical Exploration). Een Empirische Verkenning (The Sustainability of Citizen Initiatives. An Empirical Exploration), 25-53.	Dutch Scientific
Salverda, I., & Van Dam, R. (2008). Burgers en landschap deel 1: Voorbeelden van burgerparticipatie en maatschappelijk initiatief. Wageningen: Alterra Wageningen UR.	Practical/ commisioned Research
Van Dam, R., During, R., & Salverda, I. (2008). Burgers en Landschap deel 2: Trends en theorieën over betrokkenheid van burgers. Wageningen: Alterra Wageningen UR.	Practical/ commisioned Research
Dam, R. V., Salverda, I., & During, R. (2010). Burgers en Landschap deel 3: Strategieën van burgerinitiatieven. Wageningen: Alterra Wageningen UR.	Practical/ commisioned Research
Duineveld, M., van Dam, R. I., During, R, & van der Zande, A. N. (2010). Burgers en Landschap deel 4: The importance of being nimby; Een essay over burgerverzet en erfgoed. Wageningen: Alterra Wageningen UR.	Practical/ commisioned Research
Van Dam, R. I., Salverda, I. E., & During, R. (2011).). Burgers en Landschap deel 5: Effecten van burgerinitiatieven en de rol van de rijksoverheid. Wageningen: Alterra Wageningen UR.	Practical/ commisioned Research
Denters, S. A. H., Tonkens, E. H., Verhoeven, I., & Bakker, J. H. M. (2013). Burgers maken hun buurt. Platform31.	Practical/ commisioned Research
ProDemos (2015). Doe-democratie. Tips voor raadsleden, wethouders, ambtenaren en burgers. Available via: https://www.prodemos.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ProDemos-Doe-democratie_brochure.pdf	Practical Literature
Ombudsman (2018). Burgerinitiatief: waar een wil is.... Onderzoek naar de rol van overheidsinstanties bij burgerinitiatieven. Available via: https://www.nationaleombudsman.nl/system/files/bijlage/Burgerinitiatieven%20waar%20een%20wil%20is%20rapport%202018-020.pdf	Practical Literature

Author	Type
Movisie (2011). Actief burgerschap. Een overzicht aan interventies. Available via: https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/publication-attachment/Verkenning%20Actief%20Burgerschap%20%5BMOV-177889-0.4%5D.pdf	Practical Literature
Ouden W. den, Boogaard G. & Driessen E.M.M.A. (2019), Right to Challenge. Een studie naar de mogelijkheden voor aan algemene regeling voor het 'Right to Challenge' en andere burgerinitiatieven in Nederland [eindrapport]. Leiden: Universiteit Leiden.	Practical/ commisioned Research
Rekenkamercommissie Wassenaar, Voorschoten, Oegstgeest, Leidschendam-Voorburg (2018). De burger neemt het initiatief. Via: https://kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/media/255725/rapport_onderzoek_burgerinitiatieven.pdf	Practical Research
Ministerie van BZK (2020). Lokale democratie: tentoonstelling over de ontwikkeling van de lokale democratie na 1945. Nota Doe-democratie. Available via: https://kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/het-geheugen-van-bzk/lokale-democratie/tijdlijn-lokale-democratie-4/2010-heden/2013-nota-doe-democratie/	Practical literature
Ministerie van BZK (2013). De Doe-Democratie. Kabinetsnota ter stimuleren van een vitale samenleving. Available via: https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties/2013/07/09/kabinetsnota-doe-democratie	Practical literature
Buurtwijs. (2019). Wat maakt burgerinitiatieven duurzaam?. Available via: https://www.buurtwijs.nl/content/wat-maakt-burgerinitiatieven-duurzaam	Practical literature
Universiteit van de Humanistiek & Movisie. (2018). Niet meer zomaar te stoppen: Over duurzaamheid van burgerinitiatieven Available via: https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2019-01/Niet-meer-zomaar-te-stoppen-duurzaamheid-burgerinitiatieven.pdf	Practical research
van Delden, P. (2020). Sociaal offensief tussen lockdowns door. Sociale vraagstukken. Available via: https://www.socialevraagstukken.nl/sociaal-offensief-tussen-lockdowns-door/	Practical Literature
Visser, V. (2019). Lager opgeleiden voelen zich te min om te participeren in burgerinitiatieven. Sociale vraagstukken. Available via: https://www.socialevraagstukken.nl/lager-opgeleiden-voelen-zich-te-min-om-te-participeren-in-burgerinitiatieven/	Practical Literature

Author	Type
de Moor, T. (2020). Meer ruimte voor de commons'' Sociale vraagstukken. Available via: https://www.socialevraagstukken.nl/meer-ruimte-voor-de-commons/	Practical Literature
Salverda, I., van Dam, R. & Pleijtje, M. (2017). Pionieren: De impact van innovatieve maatschappelijke initiatieven op een natuur-inclusieve samenleving. Wageningen University Research. Available via: https://edepot.wur.nl/425310	Dutch Scientific
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Coalition agreements scanned of municipalities:			
Eijsden-Margraten	Leidschendam-Voorburg	Hollands Kroon	Soest
Achtkarspelen	Leudal	Zaanstad	Voorschoten
Amersfoort	Maasgouw	Zuidplas	Weesp
Asten	Weststellingwerf	Hilversum	Utrecht
Bunschoten	Enkhuizen	De Wolden	Westerveld
Doesburg	Goes	Houten	Woudenberg
Horst aan de Maas	Gooise Meren	Oegstgeest	Zwartewaterland
Leiderdorp	Bernheze	Rijswijk	

Appendix 2: Composites: views, statements and positions

#	Statement	1	2	3	4
1	CI's ensuring collective/public goods for all.	0	-1	-3	-3
2	CI's contribute to the practical management and refurbishment of things.	0	0	1	-2
3	CI's ensure ecological value and nature.	-2	0	3	-1
4	CI's contribute to the economy	-3	-3	-1	-1
5	CI's contribute to the quality of policy decisions.	0	1	-2	3
6	CI's ensure 'major maintenance' in the neighbourhood.	-3	1	1	-2
7	CI's contribute to sustainability.	-2	-1	3	-2
8	CI' create mainly nice extras in the neighborhood.	1	1	1	-2
9	CI's solve problems they find important themselves.	2	3	2	2
10	CI's create savings because they take over tasks from the government.	-4	0	0	-3
11	CI's contribute to the public cause.	2	-1	-1	0
12	CI's contribute to policy implementation.	-1	0	-1	0
13	CI's create societal value for the entire society.	1	-3	0	2
14	CI's contribute to a better relationship between the government and residents.	1	3	0	1
15	CI's contribute to community involvement.	3	2	0	1
16	CI's create a sense of responsibility among its participants.	1	2	0	2
17	CI's contribute to liveability in the neighbourhood.	3	3	0	1
18	CI's lead to (more) innovation.	0	1	-1	0
19	CI's ensure more mutual relationships between the participants.	0	-2	3	1
20	CI's contribute to the meaning of the participants.	-1	-1	4	0
21	CI's contribute to personal development.	-2	-3	1	-1

#	Statement	1	2	3	4
22	CI's contribute to safety in the neighbourhood.	-1	0	-1	-1
23	CI's lead to a sense of community/belonging among its participants.	3	0	1	1
24	CI's make sure that society—aside from the government and the market—has more influence on the public space.	1	1	2	3
25	CI's are valuable in themselves.	4	-1	2	-1
26	CI's increase diversity of contacts and identities.	0	2	-2	0
27	CI's contribute to the ability to work together.	0	4	0	1
28	CI's increase the control/influence of the participants.	2	2	-1	3
29	CI's contribute to the self-reliance of the participants.	-2	0	0	2
30	CI's increases societal skills among its participants.	-1	1	2	0
31	CI's contribute to an inclusive society.	0	-1	-3	-1
32	CI's contribute to altruistic/selfless behaviour	-3	-4	-3	-3
33	33 CI's strengthen democracy	1	-2	-4	4
34	CI's ensure protest about what is wrong.	-1	-2	1	-4
35	CI's contribute to the development of (public) opinions among its participants.	-1	-2	-2	0
36	CI's lead to a change of how governments work.	2	0	-2	0

Appendix 3: Differences in most disagreed statements across factors

Green is most agreement by a value view, red is most disagreement by another value view.

Statement: Citizens' initiatives...	Type	Idealistic immaterialists	Pragmatic partners	Personal Purpose	Democratic developers	Difference beween agreement & disagreement
strengthen democracy	P	0,37		-1.89		**2,26**
			-1,10		1,31	**2,33**
				-1,89	1,31	**3,2**
are valuable in themselves	P	2,4	-0,54			**2.93**
		2,4			-0,58	**2,9**
contribute to meaning making for participants	I		-0,6	2,14		**2,73**
		-0,5		2,14		**2,64**
contribute to the ability to work together*	P	0,05	2,36			**2,32**
create societal value for the entire society	I		-1,59		1,06	**2,64**
ensure protest about what is wrong	P			0,84	-2,21	**3,05**

* even though there is quite a difference in scores, they are still both positive.

Appendix 4: the instructions of the experiment with mayors (in Dutch)

Buurttuin onderhoud

Samen een de buurttuin optimaal onderhouden!

Wat gaan we doen?

Burgerinitiatieven in Nederland organiseren in Nederland van alles: zorg coöperaties, activiteiten in de wijk, voorlezen aan kinderen, eten met ouderen en het samen onderhouden van een buurttuintje.

In dit spel gaan we samen een buurttuin onderhouden om te ervaren waar burgerinitiatieven mee te maken hebben. Jullie hebben samen een buurttuin, hier:

- Verbouwen jullie groente: tomaten, peultjes, sla, wortels, bleekselderij etc., en fruit: appels, bessen, druiven, aardbeien!
- Ondernemen jullie activiteiten met elkaar: een buurt-BBQ, spelletjes voor kinderen, en markten om de groente en het fruit te verkopen.

De tuin heeft dus een **belangrijke samenbindende factor in de wijk en voor jullie zelf**! Maar er is ook onderhoud nodig, jullie hebben als betrokkenen beloofd om per maand een keer te komen helpen om:

- Onkruid te wieden, struiken te knippen en het gras te maaien
- Te oogsten
- Het opslaghuisje te onderhouden
- **Kortom**, jullie moeten ook **tijd en energie investeren** in de tuin! Om te kijken hoe jullie dat doen, bootsen we de situatie na.

De simulatie

De opbrengst van al het mooie dat de tuin jullie brengt drukken we uit in **experimentele oogst**. Jullie tijd en investering mogen jullie zelf bepalen aan de hand van het aantal **uren** dat jullie per maand aan de tuin besteden.

Jullie krijgen een aantal papieren: een **registratieformulier**, een **oogsttabel** en ***onderhoudskaarten***.

1. We gaan zo een aantal rondes spelen waarin jullie **individueel beslissen over het aantal uren dat je aan onderhoud** wilt besteden. Na elke ronde krijgen jullie een individueel opbrengst in experimentele oogst. We gaan meerdere rondes spelen. De individuele opbrengst hangt af van jullie eigen inzet **en de inzet van de groep**, zie de oogsttabel (onderstaand).
2. Elke ronde beslissen jullie hoeveel uur je onderhoud besteed, het aantal uren vul je in op de ***onderhoudskaart***. De gemaakte keuzes (en dus de ***onderhoudskaart***) moeten privé blijven. Ook wij maken de individuele keuzes niet bekend aan de rest.
3. De kaarten halen wij per ronde op om de totale onderhoudsuren te berekenen en bekend te maken.
4. Op basis van het totaal aantal onderhoudsuren en de **oogsttabel** kun je je eigen **experimentele oogst berekenen** en noteren op het registratieformulier.

Hoe bereken je een score?

		Mijn uren onderhoud in de tuin								
		8	**7**	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**0**
Uren van anderen	**29**	488	520	550	578	603	625	645	661	674
	28	475	506	**535**	561	585	606	625	640	653
	27	461	491	519	544	567	587	**605**	619	630

Twee voorbeelden

Je kiest er voor om 6 uren onderhoud te verrichten.
Nadat alle onderhoudskaarten zijn opgehaald, blijkt dat er in totaal 34 uren door iedereen onderhoud aan de buurttuin is gepleegd.
Nu weet je dat het aantal 'uren van anderen' in de buurttuin 28 is, en je opbrengst voor de ronde 535 is. Nu weet je ook dat anderen ongeveer 4 à 5 uren hebben besteed. Minder dan jijzelf in dit geval.

Je kiest er voor om 2 uren onderhoud te verrichten.
Nadat alle onderhoudskaarten zijn opgehaald, blijkt dat er in totaal 29 uren door iedereen onderhoud aan de buurttuin is gepleegd.
Nu weet je dat het aantal 'uren van anderen' in de buurttuin 29 is, en je opbrengst voor de ronde 605 is. Nu weet je ook dat anderen ongeveer 4 uur hebben besteed. Meer dan jijzelf in dit geval.

Je registratieformulier

Naam: _____ **Speler nr.:** _____

	Kolom A	**Kolom B**	**Kolom C**	**Kolom D**
Ronde	**Mijn uren in de tuin** (Uw aangegeven uren)	**Totaal aantal uren in de tuin** (Wordt aangekondigd)	**Aantal uren van anderen in de tuin** (B minus A)	**Mijn oogst deze ronde** (Gebruik de oogsttabel)
1	6	34	28	535
2				

Appendix 5: experimental protocol

Step	What stage	Notes
1. Welcome	Stage 0	
2. Consent and player nickname in the first screen	Stage 0	
3. Introduction and explanation (also bout the null treatment)	Stage 0	
4. First practice round 0 in the app as a test	Stage 0.5	
5. Play stage 1 round 1	Stage 1—null treatment/ baseline: no reg/no sub/ no com	
6. Show results stage 1 round 1	Repeat step 5 & 6 for 5 rounds	
7.A. Explain treatment sanction or subsidy	Stage 2.A—treatment two: sanction/no subsidy/no communication	Explained on screen and in a presentation
8.A. Play stage 2.A round 6	Stage 2.A—treatment two: sanction/no subsidy/no communication	
9.A. Show results stage 2.A round 6	Repeat steps 8.A and 9.A for 5 rounds	
7.B. Explain treatment communication	Stage 2.B—treatment two: no sanction/ subsidy/no communication	Explained on screen and in a presentation
8.B. Play stage 2.B round 6	Stage 2.B—treatment two: no sanction/ subsidy/no communication	
9.B. Show results stage 2.B round 6	Repeat steps 8.B and 9.B for 5 rounds	
10. Explain treatment three	Stage 3—treatment three: no sanction/no subsidy/ communication	Explained on screen and in a presentation

Step	What stage	Notes
11. Play stage 3 round 11	Stage 3 –treatment three: no sanction/no subsidy/ communication	
12. Show results stage 3 round 1	Repeat steps 11 & 12 for 5 to 10 rounds	
13. End the game	Stage 4—last questions in the app: Manipulation check Asking general individual information for control	
14. Explain the game	Stage 5—explanation and exit	Questions welcome at blok@essb.eur.nl
15. Exit	Stage 5—explanation and exit	

Appendix 6: descriptives about the participants

Sample size	24 + 30
Percentage of men / women / other	32,6% / 58,1% / 9,3 %
Average age	22
Amount of sanctions given	7 / 10 and 1/5
Amount of subsidies applied for / accepted	15 / 15 and 5/5

Appendix 7: analyses on differences withing groups

The ANAVO's per group showed the following results:

- Group 1 (sanction): (F (2.12) = 35.39; p < .001)
- Group 2 (sanction): (F (2.12) = 11.84; p < .01)
- Group 5 (subsidy): (F (2.12) = 9.00; p < .01)
- Group 6 (subsidy): (F(2.12) = 4.24; p < .05)

The effects of sanctions within groups

Let's first look at the two groups that were treated with the imperfect sanction and had significant differences. In total 7 players have been sanctioned (and remind you, only one gets sanctioned each round. That means that in 7/10 rounds a sanction took place). For both groups (bachelor's and master's in this case) a sharp increase in spent hours is visible. A t-test for paired samples (means, two-sided) shows that

- for group 1, the difference between *no treatment* (M = 4.55; SD = .27) and the *sanction* (M = 6.6; SD = .22) is **significant** (t (4) = - 12.36; p < .001) with the following effect sizes: Cohen's d = .37 and Hedges g = .47 which are between 'small' and medium' effects;
- for group 2, the difference between *no treatment* (M = 3.72; SD = 0.30) and the *sanction* (M = 5.48; SD = 0.22) is **significant** (t (4) = - 11; p < .001) as well with Cohen's d = .36 and Hedges g = .45 which are also between 'small' and medium' effects.

As figure 3 shows, both groups don't really show a decline towards 'previous behavior' after the rule has been implemented. Their hours spent on maintenance stays somewhat the same during the sanction treatment. In the manipulation check, participants showed slight agreement on the question whether the sanction helped them to cooperate better (3,33 on a scale from 1 to 5). Group 7 has also been treated with the sanction rounds, but showed no significant differences.

In general, the sanction seemed to increase players' effort to maintain the garden. On the player level, when someone got a sanctioned, that player did not improve his/her behavior the next round. In 3/7 instances, sanctioned players lowered their amount of hours in the next round, in 2/7 they remained at the same amount of hours (for which they were sanctioned) and in 2/7 rounds, players moved to another treatment (and therefore their next input is influenced by two causes: the sanction *and* the new intervention). None of the players 'improved' their behavior.

The effect of subsidies within groups

Four groups were treated with the subsidy. In groups 3 , 4 no significant differences were found between the treatments on the ANOVA nor the t-test between the *no treatment* and *subsidy* rounds. And while the ANOVA on group 5 indicates significant differences between treatments, the difference between the *no treatment* (M = 4.47; SD = .98) and *subsidy* (M = 5.27; SD = .51) was **not significant** (t (4) = - 1.49; p = .21). The same counts for group 6, who was also treated with the subsidy. The difference between *no treatment*: (M = 4.25; SD = .45) and *subsidy*: (M = 4.57; SD = .73) was **not significant** (t (4) = - .71; p = .515). In the manipulation check, participants indicated agreement on the question whether the subsidy helped them to cooperate better (3,80 on a scale from 1 to 5).

The effect of communication within groups

Figure 3 shows that generally, the participants show some increased cooperative behavior in the last five rounds where they could chat with one another. The figure also shows some interesting major 'dips' that should be accounted for, let's get back on that, after first presenting the effects of the communication treatment.

Again, the effects of communication were significantly present in groups 1, 2, 5 and 6.

Interestingly, in groups 1 and 2, where a significant difference was already visible between the *no treatment* and *sanction* rounds, there are no further significant differences between the treatments *sanction* and *communication.*

Group 5 shows a **significant difference** (*t* (4) = - 2.91; *p* = < .05) between the *communication* rounds (*M* = 6.49; *SD* = .71) and the *no treatment* rounds (*M* = 4.47; *SD* = .97) with the following effect sizes: Cohen's *d* = 1.55 and Hedges *g* = 1.94 (very large). And, not too surprising, because there was no significant difference between the *subsidy* and *no treatment*, there's also a **significant difference** (*t* (4) = - 3.68; *p* = < .05) between the *communication* rounds (*M* = 6.49; *SD* = .71) and the *subsidy* rounds (*M* = 5.27; *SD* = .51) with the following effect sizes: Cohen's *d* = .74 and Hedges *g* = .93 (large effect sizes).

Group 6 shows a **significant** difference between the *no treatment* (*M* = 4.25; *SD* = .45) and *communication* rounds (*M* = 5.68; *SD* = 1.12) but only at the 0.1 level (*t* (4) = - 2.56; *p* < .1). The effects sizes are Cohen's *d* = 1,25 and Hedges *g* = 1.57 (very large effects).

In the manipulation check, participants indicated some agreement on the question whether the rule helped them to cooperate better (3,47 on a scale from 1 to 5).

English summary

Citizens' initiatives are groups of people that initiate action for any cause they deem important enough to do something about. When people do something together, they face a famous challenge. This challenge is famously illustrated by the '*The Tragedy of the Commons*.' The essence of the tragedy is that:

- individuals realize that they benefit from taking more than they should; or
- individuals realize that it is useful for them not to participate in the production of a good or to withhold resources;
- therefore the logical thing for each individual to do is to take more and produce less.

In that case, the result would always be that goods would not be created and/or would be exhausted.

This tragedy, this collective action problem assumes that individuals are maximizing utility, selfish, and focused on short-term benefits. It presupposes that individuals cannot cooperate unless they benefit 'enough' or unless they are coerced to do so. This is a 'grim' assumption about individuals and inspires most of our policies and governmental instruments. Think of regulations, subsidies, and fines. They are all aimed at disciplining behavior. This presumption about collective action declares that citizens' initiatives should not exist nor function well.

Yet there are countless examples of instances that show that collective action is actually possible; even under the worst conditions. Today, the pile of evidence is growing with many examples such as energy or care cooperatives ad hoc volunteering, and, of course, citizens' initiatives. Yet the way in which collectives and individuals are viewed by governments and disciplined by policy instruments still represents the earlier grim presumption about their ability to cooperate.

It is strange that the assumption of cooperative behavior described above still inspires and shapes most public policies and instruments despite the evidence to the contrary. This dissertation explored this tension.

When citizens do something together (and solve some public problems, large or small), governments quickly get enthusiastic. This is probably because governments view active citizenship as desirable:

- because citizens' initiatives fit well in governments' views on how citizens should typically behave in public life;
- because citizens are needed to address societal problems; and
- because there are ideas that citizens should be self-sufficient, self-serving, and take personal responsibility for their own lives in terms of employability and dependency on the welfare state.

There seems to be a governmental agenda that envisions the 'right behavior' and an active role for citizens' initiatives.

Because governments are fond of citizens' initiatives, they are likely to get involved. For example, they may try to improve citizens' initiatives by making them function 'properly' or making them durable. Well-known titles like the Dutch *Participation Society*, the British *Big Society*, and the *Do-Democracy* are all examples that illustrate that governments want something from or with citizens. These titles describe and prescribe an active relationship between citizens and governments. This dissertation took a closer look at this relationship and its consequences.

Altogether, this dissertation had two research goals:

- It aimed to increase the knowledge of the 'collective action capacity of citizens' initiatives.' How does this capacity develop and how is it maintained?
- It aimed to untangle the tense relationship between citizens' initiatives and well-intentioned governments who expect a whole lot of those initiatives. The good intentions and high expectations make governments eager to interfere, creating possible negative external effects.

Taken together, to make more sense of the world around these citizens' initiatives, the general research question was 'How can the collective action of self-or-

ganizing citizens' initiatives in their relationship with governments be better understood?'

To answer the research question four different schools of thought were used:

- Collective action theory was used to set out the profound problems that initiatives face such as free riding.
- Civil society literature helped with defining the range of what can be valued about citizens' initiatives. Three arguments for why citizens' initiatives are valuable were derived from the civil society literature.
- Public value literature helped to understand why governments are that fond of citizens' initiatives. Governments desperately need a collective of citizens to define public value. But there are major risks to the involvement of governments: *crowding effects*.
- Crowding theory (explaining the crowding effect) was used to explain how external interventions influence the collective action capacity of (groups of) individuals. Interventions can peoples' motivation have to work together, but can also *crowd out* this motivation, having detrimental effects.

What did I find?

In chapter two I concluded that citizens' initiatives show a subtle and nuanced tendency towards exclusivity. This tendency towards exclusivity was not expressed in terms of boundary rules, i.e. people aren't prevented from joining the collective or benefiting from its goods. However, exclusivity was expressed in position rules (what positions are available?) and authority rules (what are the rights and duties of these positions).

As citizens' initiatives were greatly concerned with finding and binding the 'right participants' to keep the initiative 'organizable', they devised structures that simultaneously solved production and appropriation problems. An example of such a structure is the 'core group', a more exclusive subset of participants, who set the rules for other participants and direct the activities.

These findings were relevant because they showed

- that citizens' initiatives—like any other collective—are prone to collective action problems and therefore (as expected) need solutions to these problems.
- that classical collective action solutions (still) work. Not in a very crude way—keeping everyone out—but in a more subtle way. Initiatives were looking for 'smart' combinations to keep people in and out of certain positions within the initiative.

The findings suggest that initiatives are likely to create a form of exclusivity in their self-organization, which is a natural consequence of such solutions. To value citizens' initiatives for inclusivity and empowerment of all their members is an expectation that is likely to lead to disappointment. The research showed that a more nuanced view, in which citizens' initiatives embody some values but also some inevitabilities, is much more realistic.

A second conclusion from chapter three is that: the crowding (in and out) effect is highly complex. Both the expected controlling conditions (created by governments) and a significant crowding out effect were absent. The funds enabled the initiators to achieve their goals but also made them dependent on the funds. The research suggested that the initiators may have had 'updated preferences.' This basically means that ideas about civil society, taking initiative, and workings of policy instruments—such as the funds—have changed in interesting ways. A concrete example of this is that the initiators more or less expected the funds to be there and that a serious accounting for the subsidy is only fair. Fortunately, the use of policy instruments has not had negative crowding out effects, but they have become rather 'blunt' tools.

This was relevant because the findings show that it is possible—as a government—to positively affect citizens' initiatives. And that it is possible to do so without crowding out motivation. However, the funds tend to morally disengage those collectives who become more focused on the monetary aspects of their activities. Second, it seems that citizens' initiatives and local governments are engaged in a rather ordinary game where everyone knows exactly how 'it' is played. This means that if an initiative receives funding, certain procedures and accountability are 'part of the game.' No one questions the structure of the

game. This ordinary game, which works adequately but makes citizens' initiatives actively look for and depend on subsidies, may not live up to the idealized expectations of citizens' initiatives.

In chapter four I found that if you look closely at the perceived value of citizens' initiatives, a whole world opens up. I found four distinctive perspectives. Citizens' initiatives as:

- *idealistic immaterialists* who create mainly immaterial outcomes;
- *pragmatic partners* who have a hands-on mentality;
- *personal purpose* who act out of a sense of meaning (and fun!); and
- *democratic developers* who organize, express, and act out of their own (group) interests.

The common ground between the views was coined as 'selfish collectivism.' This selfish collectivism consists of the view that citizens' initiatives act because *they* find something important and the view that citizens' initiatives don't have to be altruistic. According to selfish collectivism, it's perfectly fine that they are a bit selfish and stand up for their own (group) interests.

This was relevant because the research showed that there are distinct value views that can conflict with one another. It showed that citizens' initiatives are not *magic bullets* (simple solutions to many complex problems). The often undiscovered and different value views risk scenarios—flowing from those differences—that are straining, risky, and motivation-reducing. Citizens' initiatives may subjected, controlled, and governed in a way—inspired by a specific view—that is not in line with the values they hold about themselves.

In chapter five I concluded that people solve collective action problems of citizens' initiatives by broadcasting their willingness to be cooperative when given the opportunity. This research highlighted previous findings that communication had the most positive results in terms of collective action and its outcomes. Financial interventions, such as subsidies and sanctions, also affected collective action, but in divergent ways. Some groups respond well to sanctions and others

don't. Some groups were really fond of the subsidy as an intervention, while other groups barely responded to it.

This was relevant because it further confirmed earlier findings in this dissertation. Subsidies are suitable for upgrading results and outcomes. Subsidies are helpful for civil activity *that's already there*. But subsidies are rather bad at sparking, inciting, or improving cooperative behavior. Finally, this research has shown that collective action problems are profound problems for citizens' initiatives (just as in Chapter 2). But, the problems are not always that bad because the participants were already more cooperative than expected in the experiment. They can solve collective action problems with measures which are known from the theory: by finding other individuals willing to work together.

What did I conclude?

To start, there is a plurality of values related to citizens' initiatives which *creates opportunities* and *risks misunderstandings*. This research shows that at a fundamental level, there are strong differences in views about the value of citizens' initiatives. There is, however, a common denominator among the different value views: selfish collectivism. Because these differences are either unknown or divergent, they create the playing field for many misunderstandings that lead to many of the tensions described in this dissertation.

Second, I conclude in a more general sense that selfish collectivism, communication, and exclusivity are a package deal. Selfish collectivism is about taking collective action with a somewhat inward orientation to one's group. Hence the selfishness. The inward orientation is naturally more exclusive and this helps with overcoming collective action problems. Communication, as the best instrument to overcome collective action problems, was used to find the right participants, build some form of trust, and coordinate actions. The ways in which communication was used, overlapped strongly with theoretical drivers of exclusivity.

Third, every instrument (to intervene in collective action) has its own profile in terms of what values it signals and in terms of how it influences collective action.

Sanctions or other controlling measures might signal that citizens' initiatives need some form of correction because they breed free-riding behavior, are partially exclusive, or don't produce the right goods by themselves. Sanctions or requirements might also explain the need for structure and hierarchy because a serious organization is needed to comply with the sanctions or requirements.

Subsidies, on the other hand, might signal an appreciation for citizens' initiatives, but an appreciation for certain kinds of features (which are described in the terms of the subsidy or other policies). In addition, subsidies might also signal that engaging in the production of public goods and services is a world that revolves around money.

Communication might signal that the government has made peace with selfish collectivism. It's okay not to be purely altruistic, inclusive, and open because that's what it takes to make your own rules and arrangements.

But creating 'merely' communication outlets might also signal apathy: citizens' initiatives are self-organizing entities, so they should work out whatever they have to by themselves. Governments may signal: 'We're not getting involved.'

Lessons for practice

My research led to a few lessons for those who are practically involved with the themes of this dissertation.

1. The research laid out a copyable way to study a difficult topic as public value with the Q methodology. This way is also applicable to other topics such as (representative) democracy, public participation, governmental programs, and the involved values concerning societal questions (such as climate change, refugees, or economic models).
2. Selfish collectivism is an important consideration to reach common ground in discussing what to expect from citizens' initiatives, what to think about them, and how to act with (or within) them.
3. Don't start in the middle with 'just supporting' citizens' initiatives or with specific instruments (such as the *right to challenge*). Start with what's seen

as valuable. This dissertation has shown that distinctive value views about citizens' initiatives are bound to be present. Explore them and discover them, because it's important for a more realistic view (to prevent future disappointments) and it can create a fruitful starting point for practical collaboration.

4. Be watchful for morally disengaging initiators and participants or pushing them too far with imposed administrative preferences. Embrace their own way of organizing and the good things that they contribute to. I think it is wise to be careful to stay away from instrumentalizing citizens' initiatives.
5. For initiatives, it is valuable to make sure that there is a norm where the broadcasting of benevolence—the *collectivism*—is possible and valued. Then, next to the collectivism, the *selfishness* must also be called upon. Some nuanced forms of rules and structures that result from communication might be helpful for smart solutions that tackle collective action problems.
6. With the current attention on strengthening public participation and communities at local levels, better awareness of this trend is likely to get a firm foothold within governments. Create small subgroups with well-willing civil servants to play the best cooperative strategies and outperform the other, less open and welcoming strategies.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Burgerinitiatieven zijn groepen mensen die samen actie ondernemen voor iets dat ze belangrijk genoeg vinden om er wat aan te doen. Wanneer mensen samen iets doen, hebben ze te maken met een beroemd probleem: 'De tragedie van de meent' ('*The Tragedy of the Commons*'). De kern van deze tragedie is dat:

- individuen zich realiseren dat ze voordeel hebben van het nemen van meer dan ze eigenlijk zouden moeten; of
- individuen beseffen dat het nuttig voor hen is om niet deel te nemen aan de productie van een goed of om middelen achter te houden bij de productie van een goed;
- daarom is het logisch dat elk individu meer neemt en minder bijdraagt.

Als deze tragedie klopt is het resultaat altijd dat goederen niet tot stand komen en/of uitgeput worden.

Deze tragedie, dit collectieve actieprobleem, veronderstelt van individuen een bepaald soort gedrag: het maximaliseren van nut, egoïstisch en gericht op voordelen op de korte termijn. Het veronderstelt dat individuen niet kunnen samenwerken tenzij ze 'genoeg' profiteren of dat ze alleen kunnen samenwerken als ze daartoe gedwongen worden. Ik vind dit een beetje een 'grimmige' visie op het individu—en ik ben zeker niet de enige. Tegelijkertijd inspireert deze visie veel van ons beleid en onze overheidsinstrumenten zoals regelgeving, subsidies en boetes. Al deze instrumenten zijn erop gericht om gedrag te disciplineren. Deze grimmige visie op (het onvermogen tot) collectieve actie zou stellen dat burgerinitiatieven niet bestaan of niet goed functioneren.

Toch zijn er talloze voorbeelden die aantonen dat collectieve actie wel degelijk mogelijk is, zelfs onder de slechtste omstandigheden. Vandaag de dag blijft de stapel bewijsmateriaal hiervan groeien met vele voorbeelden zoals energie- of zorgcoöperaties, ad hoc vrijwilligerswerk en natuurlijk de burgerinitiatieven. Ondanks dit bewijsmateriaal weerspiegelt de manier waarop collectieven en

individuen door overheden met beleidsinstrumenten behandeld worden nog steeds de eerdere, grimmige visie.

Het is vreemd dat de hierboven beschreven aanname van individueel gedrag nog steeds het meeste overheidsbeleid en -instrumenten inspireert en vormgeeft, ondanks het al het bewijs dat het tegendeel aangeeft. Dit proefschrift onderzocht deze spanning door verder te onderzoeken hoe groepen individuen—burgerinitiatieven—collectieve actieproblemen oplossen.

Wanneer burgers iets samen doen (en sommige publieke problemen oplossen, groot of klein), worden overheden ook snel enthousiast. Dit komt waarschijnlijk omdat overheden actief burgerschap als wenselijk zien:

- omdat burgerinitiatieven goed passen in de opvattingen van overheden over hoe burgers zich typisch zouden moeten gedragen in het publieke leven;
- omdat burgers nodig zijn om maatschappelijke problemen op te lossen; en
- omdat er ideeën zijn dat burgers zelfvoorzienend en dienstbaar moeten zijn en zelf verantwoordelijkheid moeten nemen voor hun leven (denk aan het hebben van een baan en niet afhankelijkheid zijn van de verzorgingsstaat).

Er lijkt een overheidsagenda te zijn die het 'juiste gedrag' voorschrijft en een actieve rol voor burgerinitiatieven voor ogen heeft.

Omdat overheden dol zijn op burgerinitiatieven, zullen ze waarschijnlijk betrokken raken bij deze initiatieven. Burgerinitiatieven bestaan bijna nooit in een vacuüm waarin ze helemaal niks met een overheid te maken hebben. Overheden kunnen bijvoorbeeld proberen burgerinitiatieven te verbeteren door ze 'goed' te laten functioneren of duurzamer te maken. Bekende titels zoals de Nederlandse Participatiesamenleving, de Doe-Democratie of de Britse *Big Society* zijn allemaal voorbeelden die illustreren dat overheden iets van of met burgers willen. Deze titels *beschrijven* een actieve relatie tussen burgers en overheden, maar eigenlijk *schrijven ze het ook voor*. Dit proefschrift nam deze relatie en de gevolgen ervan onder de loep.

Al met al had dit proefschrift twee onderzoeksdoelen:

- Het vergroten van de kennis over het 'vermogen van burgerinitiatieven tot collectieve actie'. Hoe ontwikkelt dit vermogen zich en hoe wordt het onderhouden?
- Het ontrafelen van de gespannen relatie tussen burgerinitiatieven en overheden die veel van die initiatieven verwachten. Goede bedoelingen en hoge verwachtingen maken overheden gretig om in te grijpen, met mogelijk negatieve, externe effecten tot gevolg.

Om de wereld rondom deze burgerinitiatieven beter te begrijpen, was de algemene onderzoeksvraag 'Hoe kan de collectieve actie van zelforganiserende burgerinitiatieven in hun relatie tot overheden beter begrepen worden?'

Om de onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden werden vier verschillende theorieën gebruikt:

- Collectieve actietheorie werd gebruikt om de diepgaande problemen waarmee initiatieven te maken hebben, zoals de tragedie van de meent en meeliftgedrag (*free riding*) uiteen te zetten.
- Literatuur over *civil society* (de burgermaatschappij) hielp bij het definiëren van wat gewaardeerd kan worden aan burgerinitiatieven.
- Literatuur over publieke waarde hielp om te begrijpen waarom overheden zo dol zijn op burgerinitiatieven. Overheden hebben het collectieven van burgers hard nodig om publieke waarde te definiëren. Maar er zijn grote risico's verbonden aan de betrokkenheid van overheden: *verdringingseffecten*.
- De verdringingstheorie (die het verdringingseffect uitlegt) werd gebruikt om te verklaren hoe externe interventies het collectieve actievermogen van (groepen) individuen beïnvloeden. Interventies kunnen de motivatie van mensen om samen te werken versterken, maar kunnen deze motivatie ook verdringen, met nadelige gevolgen.

Wat heb ik gevonden?

In hoofdstuk twee vond ik dat burgerinitiatieven een subtiele en genuanceerde neiging tot exclusiviteit vertonen. Deze exclusiviteit zat niet in het hard buitensluiten van mensen (in de literatuur heet deze vorm van exclusiviteit 'een grensregel'). Mensen worden niet verhinderd om lid te worden van een collectief of te profiteren van de opbrengsten van een collectief. Maar exclusiviteit kwam tot uiting in positieregels (welke posities zijn beschikbaar voor deelnemers?) en autoriteitsregels (wat zijn de rechten en plichten van deze posities?).

Omdat burgerinitiatieven erg bezig waren met het *vinden en binden* van de 'juiste deelnemers' en om het initiatief 'organiseerbaar' te houden, bedachten ze structuren die tegelijkertijd productie- en consumptieproblemen oplosten. Een voorbeeld van zo'n structuur is de kerngroep, een meer exclusieve groep deelnemers, die de regels bepaalt voor andere deelnemers en de activiteiten aanstuurt.

Deze bevindingen zijn relevant omdat ze aantonen

- dat burgerinitiatieven—net als elk ander collectief—vatbaar zijn voor collectieve actieproblemen en daarom (zoals verwacht) oplossingen nodig hebben voor deze problemen,
- dat klassieke oplossingen voor collectieve actieproblemen (nog steeds) werken. Niet op een heel harde, exclusieve manier—iedereen maar buiten de deur houden—maar op een subtielere manier. Initiatieven zochten naar slimme combinaties van structuren om mensen in bepaalde posities binnen het initiatief te plaatsen.

De bevindingen suggereren dat initiatieven wanneer ze zichzelf organiseren waarschijnlijk een vorm van exclusiviteit creëren, wat een natuurlijk gevolg is van de noodzaak om collectieve actieproblemen op te lossen. Het waarderen van burgerinitiatieven voor inclusiviteit en *empowerment* van al hun leden is eenn verwachting die waarschijnlijk wat buitensporig is. Het onderzoek toonde aan dat een meer genuanceerde kijk, waarin burgerinitiatieven een aantal waarden maar ook een aantal onvermijdelijkheden belichamen, veel beter past.

Een tweede bevinding, uit hoofdstuk drie, is dat het verdringingseffect zeer gecompliceerd is. Op basis van de theorie was te verwachten dat er—vanuit initiatievenfondsen—sterke controle en discipline zou zijn die het verdringingseffect teweeg brengen. Maar die heb ik niet gevonden. De initiatievenfondsen van gemeenten stelden de initiatiefnemers in staat om hun doelen (beter) te bereiken, maar maakten hen ook afhankelijk van de fondsen. Het onderzoek suggereerde dat de initiatiefnemers mogelijk 'geactualiseerde voorkeuren' hadden. Met deze voorkeuren bedoel ik dat ideeën over het maatschappelijk middenveld, het nemen van initiatief en de werking van beleidsinstrumenten—zoals subsidies. En ik suggereerde dat deze voorkeuren op opvallende manieren veranderd zouden kunnen zijn. Een concreet voorbeeld van zo'n mogelijk veranderde voorkeur is dat de initiatiefnemers min of meer verwachtten dat de fondsen er zouden zijn en dat een serieuze verantwoording van de subsidie niet meer dan terecht is. De inzet van beleidsinstrumenten had gelukkig geen negatieve verdringingseffecten, maar het waren wel vrij 'botte' instrumenten geworden.

Dit is relevant omdat de bevindingen laten zien dat het mogelijk is om als overheid op een positieve manier burgerinitiatieven te ondersteunen. En dat het mogelijk is om dat te doen zonder de motivatie te verdringen. De fondsen zorgen echter voor 'morele afhaking' omdat ze een situatie creëren waarbij initiatiefnemers steeds meer moeten focussen op de financiële aspecten van hun initiatief. Ten tweede lijkt het erop dat burgerinitiatieven en lokale overheden in een 'alledaags' spel met elkaar verwikkeld zijn, waarvan iedereen precies weet hoe 'het' gespeeld wordt. Dit betekent dat als een initiatief financiering krijgt, bepaalde procedures en verantwoording onderdeel van dit spel zijn. Niemand stelt de structuur van het spel ter discussie. Dit alledaags spel, dat prima werkt maar ervoor zorgt dat burgerinitiatieven actief op zoek gaan naar en afhankelijk zijn van subsidies, maakt dat de geïdealiseerde verwachtingen van initiatieven moeilijk tot uitdrukking komen.

In hoofdstuk vier ontdekte ik dat als je goed kijkt naar de gepercipieerde waarde van burgerinitiatieven, er een hele wereld open gaat. Ik vond vier verschillende perspectieven. Burgerinitiatieven als:

- *idealistische immaterialisten* die vooral immateriële uitkomsten creëren;
- *pragmatische partners* die een hands-on mentaliteit hebben;
- *persoonlijke zingevers* die plezier en zingeving mogelijk maken; en
- *democratische ontwikkelaars* die organiseren, uitdrukken en handelen vanuit hun eigen (groeps)belangen.

Een overeenkomst tussen de vier visies was er en heb ik 'zelfzuchtig collectivisme' genoemd. Dit zelfzuchtig collectivisme bestaat uit de opvattingen dat burgerinitiatieven handelen omdat ze iets belangrijk vinden én de opvatting dat burgerinitiatieven niet altruïstisch hoeven te zijn. Volgens zelfzuchtig collectivisme is het prima dat initiatieven een beetje zelfzuchtig zijn en opkomen voor hun eigen (groeps)belangen.

Dit is relevant omdat het onderzoek aantoonde dat er verschillende waardeopvattingen zijn die met elkaar kunnen botsen en dat burgerinitiatieven niet als wondermiddelen bestempeld moeten worden. We kunnen ze niet zien als simpele oplossingen voor alle, complexe problemen. De hoop en verwachtingen die mensen van burgerinitiatieven hebben, zijn op een dieper niveau verschillend en specifiek. De vaak onontdekte en verschillende waardeopvattingen kunnen leiden tot gespannen scenario's die voortvloeien uit die verschillen: vermoeiend, riskant en demotiverend voor iedereen die betrokken is. Burgerinitiatieven kunnen onderworpen, gecontroleerd en bestuurd worden op een manier—geïnspireerd door een specifieke waardeopvatting—die niet in lijn is met hoe ze naar zichzelf kijken.

In hoofdstuk vijf vond ik dat collectieve actieproblemen van burgerinitiatieven opgelost worden door de bereidheid om samen te werken 'om te roepen'. Dit onderzoek onderstreepte eerdere bevindingen dat communicatie het grootste, positieve effect op collectieve actie laat zien. Financiële interventies, zoals subsidies en sancties, hadden ook invloed op collectieve actie, maar op meer onvoorspelbare manieren. Sommige groepen reageerden goed op sancties en andere niet. Sommige groepen waren echt blij met een subsidie, terwijl andere groepen er nauwelijks op reageerden.

Deze bevindingen zijn relevant omdat het eerdere vondsten in dit proefschrift bevestigde. Subsidies zijn geschikt voor het verbeteren van resultaten en uitkomsten—goed voor het opwaarderen. Subsidies zijn nuttig voor activiteiten die er al zijn. Maar subsidies zijn nogal slecht in het aanwakkeren, stimuleren of verbeteren van coöperatief gedrag. Tot slot heeft dit onderzoek aangetoond dat collectieve actieproblemen diepgaande problemen zijn voor burgerinitiatieven (net als in hoofdstuk 2). Maar de problemen zijn niet altijd zo erg omdat de deelnemers in het experiment al coöperatiever waren dan verwacht. En ze kunnen collectieve actieproblemen oplossen met maatregelen die bekend zijn uit de theorie: door andere individuen te vinden die bereid zijn om samen te werken.

Wat heb ik geconcludeerd?

Om te beginnen is er een pluraliteit aan waardeopvattingen van burgerinitiatieven. Dit onderzoek toont aan dat er op een fundamenteel niveau sterke verschillen bestaan in opvattingen over de waarde van burgerinitiatieven. Er is echter een gemene deler tussen de verschillende waardeopvattingen: zelfzuchtig collectivisme. Omdat de waardeverschillen vaak onbekend en/of uiteenlopend zijn, creëren ze het speelveld voor veel misverstanden en spanningen die in dit proefschrift werden beschreven en herkenbaar zijn in de praktijk.

Ten tweede concludeer ik in meer algemene zin dat zelfzuchtig collectivisme, communicatie en exclusiviteit een *package deal* zijn. Zelfzuchtig collectivisme gaat over het ondernemen van collectieve actie met een enigszins naar binnen gekeerde oriëntatie op de eigen groep. Vandaar het zelfzuchtige. De naar binnen gekeerde oriëntatie is van nature exclusiever en dit helpt weer bij het overwinnen van collectieve actieproblemen. Communicatie, als het beste instrument om problemen met collectieve actie te overwinnen, werd gebruikt om de juiste deelnemers te vinden, een vorm van vertrouwen op te bouwen en acties te coördineren. De manieren waarop communicatie gebruikt werd, overlapten sterk met de theoretische drijfveren van exclusiviteit.

Ten derde concludeerde ik dat elk instrument (om in te grijpen in collectieve actie) zijn eigen profiel heeft in termen van welke waarden het signaleert en in hoe het collectieve actie beïnvloedt.

Sancties (maar in de praktijk vaak andere controlemaatregelen) kunnen aangeven dat burgerinitiatieven een vorm van correctie nodig hebben omdat ze meeliftgedrag in de hand werken, gedeeltelijk exclusief zijn, of op zichzelf niet de juiste dingen produceren. Controlerende randvoorwaarden of eisen kunnen ook de behoefte aan structuur en hiërarchie verklaren omdat een serieuze organisatie van een initiatief nodig is om aan de sancties of eisen te voldoen.

Subsidies kunnen een signaal zijn van waardering voor burgerinitiatieven, maar een waardering voor specifieke soorten eigenschappen (die beschreven zijn in de voorwaarden van de subsidie of in ander beleid). Daarnaast kunnen subsidies ook een signaal zijn dat het produceren van publieke goederen en diensten een wereld is die draait om geld.

Communicatie kan een signaal zijn dat een overheidsorganisatie vrede heeft met het zelfzuchtig collectivisme. 'Los het zelf maar op' en 'het is oké om niet puur altruïstisch, inclusief en open te zijn, want dat is nodig om je eigen regels en afspraken te maken.' Maar het creëren van communicatiemogelijkheden en de rest loslaten, zou ook een signaal van apathie kunnen zijn: burgerinitiatieven zijn zelforganiserende entiteiten, dus ze moeten zelf maar uitzoeken wat ze moeten doen. Overheden kunnen signaleren: 'we doen niet mee'.

Praktische lessen

Mijn onderzoek leidde tot een paar lessen iedereen die praktisch betrokken is bij de thema's in dit proefschrift.

1. Het onderzoek heeft een makkelijk over te nemen manier opgeleverd om een moeilijk onderwerp zoals publieke waarde te bestuderen met de Q-methodologie. Deze manier is ook toepasbaar op andere onderwerpen zoals (representatieve) democratie, burgerparticipatie, overheidsprogramma's en grote maatschappelijke vraagstukken zoals klimaatverandering, vluchtelingen of economische modellen.
2. Zelfzuchtig collectivisme is een belangrijke overweging om overeenstemming te bereiken in de discussie over wat te verwachten valt van burgerinitiatieven, hoe erover gedacht kan worden en hoe ermee om te gaan.

3. Begin niet halverwege met het 'gewoon ondersteunen' van burgerinitiatieven of met specifieke instrumenten (zoals het Uitdaagrecht, in het Engels het *right to challenge*). Begin met wat als waardevol wordt gezien. Dit proefschrift heeft laten zien dat onderscheidende waardeopvattingen over burgerinitiatieven onvermijdelijk aanwezig zijn. Verken ze en ontdek ze, want dat is belangrijk voor een realistischer beeld om toekomstige teleurstellingen te voorkomen en het kan een vruchtbaar startpunt zijn voor praktische samenwerking die met verschillende instrumenten vormgegeven kan worden.
4. Wees waakzaam voor het moreel afhaken van initiatiefnemers en deelnemers of hen te ver *pushen* met opgelegde, bestuurlijke belangen. Omarm hun eigen manier van organiseren en het mooie waar ze aan bijdragen. Ik denk dat het verstandig is om buitengewoon voorzichtig te zijn met het instrumentaliseren van burgerinitiatieven.
5. Voor initiatieven is het waardevol om ervoor te zorgen dat er een norm is waar het bekendmaken van welwillendheid—het collectivisme—mogelijk is en gewaardeerd wordt. Dan moet naast het collectivisme ook het zelfzuchtige aangesproken worden. Een genuanceerde vorm van regels en structuren die voortkomen uit een gezamenlijk opgesteld perspectief, kunnen nuttig zijn voor slimme oplossingen die collectieve actieproblemen aanpakken.
6. Met de huidige aandacht voor het versterken van burgerparticipatie en gemeenschappen op lokaal niveau, zal meer bewustwording op dit thema's binnen overheden waarschijnlijk landen. Maak de kleine groepjes met welwillende ambtenaren om de beste coöperatieve strategieën te spelen en de andere, minder open en gastvrije strategieën te overtreffen.

About the author

Steven Blok (1992) studied sociology at Utrecht University. After his bachelor he did the two years program “Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science” offered by Universiteit Utrecht, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Vrije Universiteit, Radboud Universiteit, Universiteit Twente Tilburg University.

In 2017 Steven started his PhD, part time, at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS) at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. His doctoral research was about how collectives of citizens overcome the notorious collective action problem and how these collectives are valued by governments and society. He presented parts of his research at ECPR panels (2018), at the Policologen Etmaal (2018) panels and for non-scientific audiences such as Dutch mayors (2019) and many civil servants (2019—2023). His published parts of the doctoral research in The American Review of Public Administration, Local Government Studies and The Journal of Civil Society.

He completed several NIG (Netherlands Institute of Governance) courses. He also taught tutorials for courses for third year bachelor students, was a lecturer for third year Dutch and international bachelor students and supervised tens of master theses. He also co-edited a one time magazine from the research group “RePolis” called “Initiatief” (*Initiative*) and coordinated a course for practitioners given by various colleague researchers called “*The art and skill of public participation.*”

Steven did his PhD part time. The other half of work week he worked at Berenschot, a renowned consultancy firm in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Berenschot financed part of his PhD. He worked on public questions relating public participation and democratic renewal. He provided services to many municipalities, provinces, water agencies and other public bodies. He organized a ‘Lecture Tour’ for Dutch mayors, supervised numerous municipal councils, gave workshops and masterclasses to various civil servants and managers, wrote broadly used guidelines such as ‘Participation Ordinances’, ‘Village and Neighborhood Democracy’, ‘Development Model Data-driven Municipality’, and developed training

programs for the larger municipalities. Notable contract research was done for the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations such as “The Effects of Covid-19 on Citizen Involvement and Public Participation” (2020) and a combination of legal and empirical research on “Public Participation on the National Level” (2023). In 2021 he published the co-authored book “Leren in Participatieland” (*Learning in the land of Public Participation)* with two Berenschot colleagues. The book was based on roughly 25 cases, 100 interviews, tens of learning assemblies and extensive desk research.

Based on either his research or experiences in practice, Steven wrote numerous professional articles in for Dutch audiences in outlets such as Platform O (*Platform Government*), Publiek Denken (*Public Thinking*) and Sociaal Bestek (*Social Specifications*).

Since the beginning of 2023 he works part time as a researcher at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology, continuing his research on citizens’ initiatives and coordinating the activities of the Erasmus University in the European Commission financed project DEMOTEC into participatory budgeting. He works as senior consultant at Berenschot.