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Relationships between green urban citizens' initiatives and local governments

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Abstract: It is often challenging to establish a good relationship between the green initiatives of urban citizens and local governments. Our aim is to gain a better understanding of how citizens and local authorities interact and how they can establish good relationships, relationships that contribute to the realization of the aims and interests of citizen initiatives and local governments. We analysed these relationships for five different initiatives, including the perspectives of initiators and civil servants. We hypothesized that an important challenge is to connect the initiative's informal world and the formal world of local governments. Relationships can be problematic due to a lack of recognition and appreciation for the initiators on the part of the municipality, diverging ambitions or ideologies between the initiative and municipality or unreliable behaviour of initiatives in the view of civil servants. The results showed that a willingness to work together and developing trust are key conditions in developing good partnerships. Our study provide insight into how mutual trust can be developed. Developing a trustful relationship requires social competences. Trust building involves several social practices: establishing an emotional connection, ability and integrity, and aligning to each other's expectations. Formal aspects of local governments, like rules and procedures, are not a major problem in the development of initiatives when a trustful relationship has been established. The civil servants and aldermen (City Council Members) involved are then able to overcome formal obstacles, such as mismatch with regulations.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

We studied the relationships between green urban citizens' initiatives and local governments by interviewing initiators and civil servants. For some of the initiatives it is difficult to bridge the initiative's informal world and the formal world of local governments. Relationships can be problematic due to a lack of recognition and appreciation for the initiators by the municipality, diverging ambitions or ideologies between the initiative and municipality or unreliable behaviour of initiatives in the view of civil servants. Willingness to work together and developing trust are crucial for developing good partnerships. Developing a trustful relationship requires social competences and involves several social practices: establishing an emotional connection, ability and integrity, and aligning to each other's expectations. Formal aspects of local governments, like rules and procedures, are not a major problem in the development of initiatives when a trustful relationship has been established.

Subjects: Urban Studies; Health & Society; Public Health Policy and Practice; Social Work and Social Policy

Keywords: green urban citizens' initiatives; collaboration; government; informal; formal; trust

1. Introduction

An increasing number of citizens are active in shaping their neighbourhoods and working within the public domain (Humphrey, 2001; van Dam, Salverda, & During, 2014). They are examples of what we call citizens' initiatives (Cis). Cis are collective activities by citizens aimed at providing local public goods or services in their street, neighbourhood or town, in which they themselves determine both the aims and means of their project and in which local authorities play a supporting or facilitating role (Bakker, Denters, Oude Vrielink, & Klok, 2012). Many Cis have clear social goals in the immediate neighbourhood, triggered by dissatisfaction with current developments or plans (Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker, 2001; Van Stokkom & Toenders, 2010) or because citizens enjoy being active with people in their neighbourhood (Faulk, 2009). In many cases, Cis collaborate with public authorities (Hurenkamp, Tonkens, & Duyvendak, 2006). Cis are generally embraced, because they are expected to provide a cheap alternative to costly governmental urban development programs, which can effectively contribute to the safety and liveability of neighbourhoods and communities (Marschall, 2004). In addition, they are believed to empower and educate citizens and reduce the extent to which individuals and social organizations rely on state bureaucracies (Bakker et al., 2012). They are illustrations of the changing relationship between governments and citizens, which can be seen as a transition, often referred to as the shift from government to governance (Kooiman & van Vliet, 1993), in what can be considered as a form of collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008), a model of governance that brings multiple stakeholders together in common forums to engage in decision-making processes.

Generally speaking, local governments have to find a balance between stimulating, facilitating and coproducing initiatives, depending on the type of initiative (Denters, Tonkens, Verhoeven, & Bakker, 2013). The interaction between citizens and government is important to the development and success of Cis, as many of them are dependent on support from public authorities, which can contribute to their success (Fung, 2004; Hendriks, 2003; Putman & Feldstein, 2004). Earlier studies have shown that a long-term partnership between Cis and local governments is crucial to the success of Cis (Specht, 2012). Although governments generally encourage Cis, there are many examples in which politicians and public administrators find it difficult to engage with Cis adequately (van Dam et al., 2014). Relationships between Cis and local governments can be cooperative or full of conflicts (Ansell & Gash, 2008). In practice, it is often difficult for public authorities to allow citizens space and to facilitate instead of initiate (Van de Wijdeven, de Graaf, & Hendriks, 2013). The wide variety of Cis make them pluralistic in their manifestation and challenging when it comes to adequate governance responses (van Dam et al., 2014). Although the subject of Cis has received a lot of attention in recent years, normative and empirical analysis of the government's role in relation to Cis is rare (Bakker et al., 2012). There are no clear guidelines and theoretical foundation for what public authorities should do to stimulate citizen initiatives (Van der Graaf, Nieborg, Oudenampsen, & Wentink, 2006; Van Stokkom & Toenders, 2010). We focus on green urban citizen initiatives. Green urban initiatives are generally acknowledged as valuable by local governments as they are places where people feel welcome and can interact (Cheatham, 2001). They can contribute to social cohesion and quality of life and well-being of urban citizens (Wetheridge & Morris, 2016).

This study is an exploration of the interaction between Cis and local governments. As it is often challenging to establish a good relationship between Cis and local governments it is important to develop a better understanding of how Cis and local authorities interact and how they can build up good relationships. The paper is organised as follows: first we describe our theoretical background. In the next section we describe our research design and then we present and discuss our main findings. We conclude by summarizing our main findings and outlining some recommendations for Cis and local governments.

2. Theoretical background

Although Cis generally originate from and operate in an informal world (e.g. with fellow residents), they interact with the formal world, like the political and institutional context of local governments (van Dam et al., 2014). Informality entails “loose”, spontaneous, more casual social interactions and behaviour. Formality, by contrast, designates “tighter”, more deliberate, impersonal modes of conduct and settings that occasion such conduct (Morand, 1995; Salverda, van der Jagt, & During, 2012). The informal and formal worlds each have their own logic. Characteristics of the informal world are personal relationships, informality, values and voluntariness (Habermas, 1987; Van den Brink, van Hulst, de Graaf, & van der Pennen, 2012). Characteristics of the formal world are formal rules and procedures, functional hierarchy, rationality, paid employees (Van den Brink et al., 2012; Weber, 1922). In recent decades, tensions between both worlds have increased, due to higher education of citizens and an increasing demands from citizens with regard to public services (Van den Brink et al., 2012). An important challenge for Cis and local governments is to bridge the divide between the informal world and the formal world and to develop good relationships between people who operate in the formal world of local government and those who operate in the informal world of Cis (van Dam et al., 2014; WRR, 2012).

2.1. Factors that influence collaboration

Two main types of key factors have been identified in the interactions between Cis and local governments that affect the collaborative process and success of Cis (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bakker et al., 2012). The first type involves process-related aspects, like the development of interpersonal contacts, the creation of trust and shared understanding, and a sense of commitment (Bakker et al., 2012). These interpersonal aspects are associated with the informal world of Cis. The second type includes structuration aspects, like rules, regulations, procedures and arrangements (Marschall, 2004; Ostrom, 1996), which are aspects that are generally associated with the formal world of local governments. Both local governments and Cis can incorporate and connect characteristics of both the formal and informal world. Local governments can adopt more personal approaches, which can influence the relationship with Cis (Oude Vrielink & van de Wijdeven, 2011). Attention and recognition from local government are important to the morale of initiators (Hurenkamp et al., 2006). Cis can incorporate elements of the formal world, for instance by establishing a reliable formal organization (van Dam, Duineveld, & During, 2015). Initiatives institutionalize themselves (e.g. by establishing a foundation) in order to be taken more seriously by surrounding actors (van Dam et al., 2014). In general, governmental organizations like Cis, which have objectives that are politically justified, have a formalized organizational form and are organized according to the logic of governmental discourse (van Dam et al., 2015). Based on the formality-informality dichotomy, different coordination mechanisms can be identified, focusing on common values and norms, trust and reciprocity or on rules, agreements and contracts (Salverda, Slangen, Kruit, Wejschedé, & Mulder, 2009; van Dam et al., 2014).

2.2. Phases in characteristics of partnerships

The relationship between initiatives and local governments is not a static one. Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) identified different phases in partnerships. Initially, in the phase of pre-partnership collaboration, establishing an informal relationship based on trust and willingness to work together is crucial. In later phases, informality is often replaced by more formalized procedures and structures. The key challenge facing partnerships lies in managing the more informal and more formal modes of governance (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998). The initial quality of the relationship between partners is connected to level of trust and the extent to which interaction is seen as providing mutual benefit (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998). Since trust is the basis of a good relationship, understanding how trust can be developed is important (Nikolova, Möllering, & Reihlen, 2015). Trust involves in the first place predictability in the behavior of others (Luhmann, 1979). It emerges through the evaluation of the motivation of others and believing that it is in alter's interest to be trustworthy in a particular situation. Emotional attachment and intimacy and knowledge about the other's righteousness, building a personal relationship, one that transcends individual interest is a powerful basis for trust (Torche & Valenzuela, 2011). Consultant and organizational literature has dealt with how trust-building relationships are developed and how boundaries between different worlds can be crossed. Trust reflects an aspect of predictability and expectation that the trusted party's actions will result in positive

outcomes (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Bhattacharya, Devinney, & Pillutla, 1998). Steps and behaviour that avoids threatening the goals, aspirations, values and identity concerns of others is helpful to develop goodwill and trustworthiness (Williams, 2007). It requires social competences like being able to take the other's perspective and reflecting on one's behaviour (Williams, 2007). Trust is a process that involves different social practices: (i) establishing emotional connection (ii) signalling ability and integrity and (iii) aligning to each other's expectations (Nikolova et al., 2015).

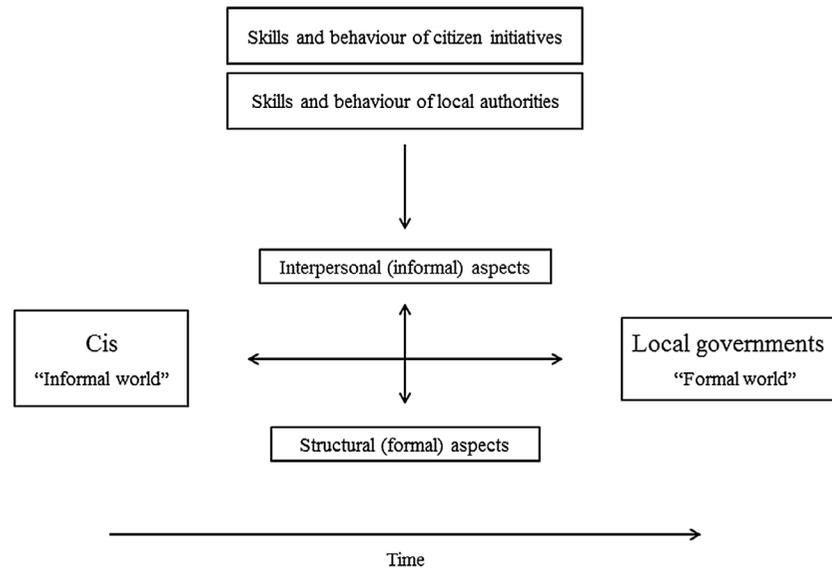
2.3. Social network theory: how to make relationships work

Social network theory and the concept of embeddedness offer a holistic approach to analysing relationships between different worlds (Mohe & Seidl, 2011). The informal world of Cis and the formal world of local governments can be seen as two communication systems, each with their own logic and different meanings through the network of other communications within the same system (Luhmann, 1995). Problems appear to arise when there are different expectations or understandings of what is required for a particular task (Kitay & Wright, 2004). When the roles of the actors involved are open-ended and flexible, they are able to adapt to situations (Werr & Styhre, 2003). One possibility to cross the boundaries is that of social ties, in which formal boundaries become less distinctive (Kitay & Wright, 2004). This means building a relationship of understanding, collaboration and trust (Kubr, 2002; van Dam et al., 2014). Actors can learn how to cross boundaries. Participation in the other world is an important way to transfer knowledge (Handley, Clark, Fincham, & Sturdy, 2007), which is also the case with Cis. In many cases, skills and resources, and approaches of initiators and initiatives and local governments are not static. They can learn from their experiences and become more socially reflexive, and develop trust and social and bureaucratic skills (Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2012). In many cases, an individual or small group of citizens will take the lead and keep initiatives alive (Duijvendak & Uitermark, 2006; Hendriks & Tops, 2002; WRR, 2012). These so-called best persons or boundary spanners often possess specific skills, such as social entrepreneurship and boundary-spanning skills (Salverda et al., 2012; Van de Wijdeven, 2012). Boundary spanners link two or more organizations whose goals and expectations are likely to be, at least partially, conflicting (Miles, 1980). They interact with other people inside their organization and negotiate system interchanges with another organization (Steadman, 1992). A successful boundary-spanner is a leader and entrepreneur who deploys effective relational and interpersonal competences, with the aim of developing mutual understanding, trust and respect (Williams, 2002). The challenge facing boundary-spanners is to maximize opportunities in the structured context in which they find themselves (Williams & Sullivan, 2009). In many cases, boundary-spanners are trained, socialized and embedded in two cultural worlds, with a hybrid professional identity and two sets of values and practices (Keshet, 2013). They are capable of maneuvering among the constraints of institutional structures, while using these structures as a platform for launching new practices and values. In other words, they could exercise dual embedded agency, a term proposed by Keshet (2013).

Based on this theoretical exploration, we can conclude that, in order to develop a successful collaboration, representatives of the initiatives and of local governments must be able to overcome the divide between the informal and formal world, with the abilities and competencies needed to connect the two different logics. In the starting phase of a collaboration, they need the skills, motivations and resources to develop a trustful relationship, while, in later phases, establishing more formal arrangements can become important. We have identified many factors that influence the relationships between Cis and local governments. We consider a relationship good or bad not as a given or absolute figure, but in terms of proximity to a desired position and when its contribution to the realization of aims and interests of organisations and persons involved (Hienerth & Kessler, 2006; Pretty & Smith, 2004). Our study builds upon the work of Bakker et al. (2012) distinguishing between process-related and structuration aspects of the interactions between Cis and local governments and the work of Nikolova et al. (2015) identifying the social practices involved in trust building in a client-consultant relationship.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the main factors affecting the relationship between Cis and local governments.

Figure 1. Factors affecting relationship Cis and local governments.



3. Methods

3.1. Overall research design

The methodology is characterized by a qualitative, multiple case-study approach. Case studies are particularly useful for exploratory studies, when the object is to gain a holistic understanding of how dynamics unfold in real life settings (Yin, 2009). Case studies offer deep and detailed insight into contemporary events (Rowley, 2002). By selecting contrasting cases, linking the case studies to a theoretical framework and using different data sources we tried to optimize validity, reliability and generalization of our case study findings (Yin, 2009). In this exploratory study, we examine the interplay between Cis (initiators and their actions) and local governments. We focus on green urban initiatives as these types of initiatives are popular and examples of very concrete citizen initiatives aiming to improve the direct living environment of urban citizens (van Dam et al., 2014). We selected green urban Cis with different experiences in their relationship with local authorities. The Cis involved had more limited location-based objectives, like developing a community garden, or more extensive, interest-based initiatives, like developing a new society. Because we are interested in the perspectives of Cis and local governments, we interviewed the initiators of five Cis and the local administrators involved with these Cis, with a total of ten respondents. We asked all respondents of Cis to reflect on their relationship with local authorities, and all local administrators to reflect on their relationship with the Cis and how this developed in time. The interviews took place in 2014 and were guided by our theoretical framework. In the interviews with Cis, we focused on the interaction between Cis and local governments. We asked about their experiences concerning the relationship with the local government, distinguishing informal and structural/formal aspects, interpersonal relationships, skills and resources, learning experiences and strategies. In the interviews with local civil servants, we focused on their experiences with the Cis in which they are involved and their ideas and expectations in relation to Cis in general. Table 1 provides an overview of the selected cases.

Table 1. Short description of the five cases

Initiative	Starting year	Description of initiative	Type of organization	Characteristics of initiators
Case 1: Rotterdam	2010	Neighbourhood opposing building plans. Development of local community garden	Foundation with 20–30 active volunteers	Diverse group including artists
Case 2: Culemborg	2000	Developing urban farm as part of ecological neighbourhood	Foundation, entrepreneur and 30 active volunteers	Diverse group, including entrepreneur, manager
Case 3: Arnhem1	2008	Contributing to the quality of the public space; developing green initiatives, debates	Foundation 5 active members	Experts in urban planning, like architects
Case 4: Delft	2010	Initiating and supporting green social projects in the city to increase resilience	Foundation with mix of volunteers and entrepreneurs	Experts in urban renewal and green spaces
Case 5: Arnhem2	2010	Overarching aim of sustainable society	Foundation with director and 50 volunteers	Experts in ecological farming, permaculture

3.2. Data analysis

The data analysis was an inductive, iterative process using techniques and procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). First, all transcripts were re-read. Instead of using a pre-determined category scheme, themes were allowed to emerge from the subjects' own words, as recommended for exploratory research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A constant comparative method allowed us to simultaneously code and analyze the data, and to categorize them into developing themes representing recurring patterns of behavior and meaning. Once themes had been identified, we mined the data for representative elements. To maximize the inter-relator reliability in the data analysis, the transcripts were double-coded and compared.

4. Results

4.1. General findings

There is a consensus among the initiators of green urban Cis and local authorities that the initiatives are valuable to society. In their vision, it is a good development that citizens take more responsibilities in a time of budget cuts. The activities of Cis are an addition to the activities of local governments. They are acknowledged as initiatives with an important function at the local level, where urban citizens and their environment benefit from their activities. All initiatives attract a diversity of urban citizens and organize activities that transcend the possibilities of local authorities. Civil servants value the social function of the initiatives and recognise that green urban Cis contribute to interaction in the neighbourhood and other policy objectives, like reintegration, care, consciousness about local food and spatial quality. They appreciate the involvement of the initiators and acknowledge that citizens generally speaking have more faith in the power of Cis than in that of government initiatives. One of the added values civil servants mentioned is that citizens are more pro-active and start without the lengthy discussions that often characterise the institutional world. Initiators of Cis stated that important benefits are that citizens become more involved when an initiative comes from Cis rather than from the local authorities. One of the Cis stated: "initiatives from local authorities are never successful. Civil servants have no idea what happens in the neighbourhood. That distance is huge".

All initiatives established a formalized organization (foundation), which is an example of the more formal actions taken by the initiators. All initiators stated that a good interpersonal relationship with local authorities is important to them and that they invest in developing such a relationship. Trust, appreciation and recognition were the most important issues mentioned by the initiatives. In spite of their intentions, not all initiatives developed a good relationship with local authorities. In fact, only two initiatives stated that they had a good relationship, while, in three cases, the relationship was problematic.

We now describe for each of the initiatives how, from the perspective of one of the main initiators and that of the local administrator involved, the relationships between the initiative and local authorities are valued and how they develop over time.

4.2. Initiatives with a good relationship with local authorities

Two of the initiatives express that they have a good relationship with the local authorities.

Case 3: Arnhem1

In the case of Arnhem1, the relationship with the local authorities has been good from the start. The main initiators are experts in the area of urban planning, urban development and innovation sciences. This initiative benefits from ongoing relationships between the initiators and local authorities, which started many years ago. One of the local administrators has even applied for a position with the initiative in the past. The key people involved in the initiative combine a professional background in urban development and architecture with their work for the initiative. They can benefit from their professional network, which include many local administrators and areas of expertise. The respondent indicates that, in some periods, he has contacts with administrators three times a week, due to his professional activities. He also indicates that he can help administrators and connect them to each other, because he has a good overview of the activities of different administrators. The respondent is very positive about his prime contact in the municipality, as illustrated by the next quote.

I hope that all cities have a contact like her. She is very approachable and constructive. She always searches for ways in which the initiative and municipality can enforce each other. You need civil servants who are in contact with entrepreneurial citizens and who are also able to connect different departments in the municipality.

She also asked the initiators to help the municipality to develop a policy on urban farming. The initiative has become an organization from which the municipality can obtain advice and information. The initiator indicates that they sometimes function like an outboard motor, speeding up processes in municipal projects. These experiences are illustrations of a trustful relationship between the initiative and the municipality, and a recognition of the initiative by the municipality. The initiator mentions that the alderman for spatial affairs is also a fan of them because they bring up with innovative ideas. Although the initiative was not happy with the initiation of a transition team by the municipality to tackle issues similar to the ones they were tackling, they are now talking about how they can enforce each other.

The initiator indicates that their way of working is not very different from that of the municipality. The main differences are that there is no hierarchy and that, because they are a lean organization, the total budget can go to projects.

The initiative has also made some formal arrangements with the municipality, including renting an abandoned building from the municipality for free where they started their office and organize activities for the citizens to realize innovative solutions for abandoned places in the city. Several civil servants participated in these meetings, contributing to a joint development of creative ideas, which in turn led to joint projects. The realization of green projects, like a communal garden in the centre

of the city, takes place in collaboration with several partners, including local authorities, with the civil servants taking care of all legal formalities.

The local administrator we interviewed is an advisor in the municipality. She is an influential senior administrator with a solid internal network and direct access to the aldermen. She has adopted a “free role” to support sustainability in the area of policy and strategy. In her view, citizens should take the lead in initiating sustainable projects and play a key role in developing policies that can be checked by the municipality. She indicates that the municipality should build sustainable links with citizen initiatives. Most of the time, she is outside the town hall to stay in touch with different types of initiatives in the city. She is very positive about the relationship with the initiative. She indicates that the initiative is a good partner for her and that she likes to collaborate with them in order to reach common objectives. In her words:

They are a reliable partner. They know how the game is played and have a realistic view of what is possible. If things are not possible, they accept that and we look for another option together.

She also appreciates the networking role of the initiative, which resulted in the establishment of a core group of organisations involved in green urban initiatives. She is actively involved in this core group and supports them with small subsidies to organise events.

Case 1: Rotterdam

In Rotterdam, the relationship between the initiative and the municipality developed from initial distrust towards a good relationship. The initial distrust was caused by the opposition on the part of the initiative to building plans for the location. After it became clear that the building plans could not be realized, the municipality became more open to an alternative use of the location. This did not immediately improve the relationship. The initiators had the impression that the municipality saw them as a strange group of local citizens. The initiators found it difficult to develop contacts with local administrators. In their words:

I think that the municipality saw us as a group of five lunatics who wanted to do something strange with the location and wanted permission from the municipality. Initially, there was no development at all. Whenever we called one of the local administrators, they never called back.

The initiators became frustrated with the lack of speed, progress and bureaucracy. Initially, the alderman’s assistant was their contact in the municipality. She mentioned new people all the time whom we had to ask for permission. Later on, she found out that this was not necessary. The initiative realised they needed help and decided to ask for support from the Science Shop of Wageningen University. In a joint project, they developed a solid plan for a garden that would be beneficial to the entire neighbourhood and they learned how to improve their communication with the municipality. It was an eye-opener for them that the Science Shop took them seriously. One of the lessons they learned was to be less distrustful towards the municipality and to look for ways to work together. Other lessons they learned were not to show their irritation towards the municipality, to be more self-confident, to continue communicating, to be more flexible and to adapt their plans when necessary and be persistent. This learning process was very important to the initiative:

We were very distrustful towards the municipality because we were not taken seriously. It was so important that the Science Shop took us seriously, that they came to Rotterdam and that we laughed and had dinner together. From then on, we learned that our approach was not productive. There are ways to cooperate, but none of us has experience with this.

The relationship with the municipality also improved when the initiators identified local administrators who were supportive and when the alderman became involved. The alderman is a fan of the initiative and her support is important to keep things going. The support from a health professional

in the neighbourhood was also important. She persuaded local administrators to support the initiative, which was very helpful. The respondent indicates that, nowadays, many local administrators are very positive about the initiative. The municipality supports the initiative by providing materials, and helping with obtaining funds and subsidies.

The initiator pointed to the huge difference between the world of the municipality and that of citizens. She indicated that civil servants have no idea what goes on in the neighbourhood. “The world of the citizens in this area is fundamentally different from their world. The distance is huge. Sometimes a civil servant is coming and uses formal language talking about participation and the empowerment of the people. They have no idea how a poor person can be made happy”. The initiative had to deal with civil servants who stuck to formal regulations. It took years to arrange an official contract that permitted them to use the land. The chairman of the initiative had to become really angry to finally obtain the contract. To obtain an environmental permit for a blockhouse was another problem when the civil servant wanted to follow the official trajectory. After the alderman intervened, asking the civil servant to issue a permit as long as there were no complaints from the neighbourhood, the problem was solved.

The alderman we interviewed has been involved with the initiative for the last five years. She is positive about Cis in general and very positive about this initiative. In her view, the development of the community garden is a very nice use of the neglected spot. The people in the neighbourhood meet each other, they participate in activities and become involved in improving the quality of the area. In her view, it is a very nice way for more vulnerable citizens to become involved and participate. “It is a nice example of what we aim for with the participation society”.

She indicates that it is important to establish and sustain good relationships and that the initiative has done this very well, e.g. by inviting the mayor of the city. This increases support from the municipality. She acknowledges that some municipal departments find it difficult to deal with citizen initiatives. They see problems with responsibilities and regulations. She considers it her responsibility to stimulate Cis and to find solutions when they encounter obstacles.

4.3. Initiatives with a problematic relationship with local authorities

Case 4: Delft

The initiative in Delft has a problematic relationship with the municipality. The objective of this initiative is to develop several green projects in the city in collaboration with the municipality, housing organizations and welfare organizations. The initiative wants to establish a formal collaboration with the municipality. The respondent is disappointed about the lack of support, interest and enthusiasm for their initiatives, and states that the municipality is very hesitant in giving them the status of being a partner and involving them in green projects. After political lobbying by the initiative they became a partner in one of the new green projects in the municipality. However, they are disappointed about the collaboration. Collaboration is also blocked by changes in the positions of project leaders in the municipality. In the respondent’s words:

The project leader does not inform us about the planning of our joint project. The change in project leader and in rules and ideas also harms a trustful relationship. We have been working on this project for a long time. In collaboration with the previous project leader from the municipality we have chosen trees without fruits. When the project leader was changed, these plans were no longer possible.

The respondent indicated that there is no quarrel with the municipality, but that things are not going smoothly. She also mentioned several other problems in their relationship with the municipality. The project leader of the municipality does not acknowledge the expertise and knowledge of the initiative, for example when hiring an external professional, when all the necessary expertise is available

in the initiative. There is a lack of trust. “Based on our experiences, we do not always trust civil servants. They are not always open and keep information to themselves”. Another problem is that the initiative is much more ambitious than the municipality. Some of the administrators see the initiative as a threat to their position and their work. This contrasts with the experiences the initiative has with the welfare organizations, who see the initiative as a welcome addition to their work. One final issue that was mentioned is that of the differences in interest between aldermen, some of whom are not interested in the initiative at all, while others support it. With such diversity in opinions and changes in interests and positions after each election, it is difficult to build up good relationships and support.

The local administrator is the team leader of nature and environmental communication, and she is responsible for a support regulation for green initiatives available to small initiatives. She is positive about citizen initiatives in general and about this particular initiative as well. She considers it a fly-wheel that stimulates development. In her view, the activities of the initiative are additional to those of the municipality, and the value of the initiative is that they can carry out activities much faster than the municipality, and they invest in developing a network. The municipality has no time to develop such a network. She finds it difficult, however, to work together with the initiative, which operates at a different level. They opt in favour of paid projects and unpaid activities. The municipality can provide subsidies to Cis, but is not allowed to assign paid projects to entrepreneurs from this source. To her, this is a joint search. She opposes what she sees as the monopolistic behaviour of the initiative:

Sometimes they are very angry when we have not informed them about a new initiative, but they don't have the monopoly (they behave like a municipality). Not everything has to be permaculture. We like diversity.

The local administrator emphasizes that she is a business-like person who will not support one specific initiative. She and the alderman stimulate the establishment of networks. The municipality has initiated a sustainability network of 35 organizations, including big companies and a university. The network's focus has recently changed to local products, in line with the preferences of the new alderman.

Case 2: Culemborg

This initiative has resulted in the development of an urban farm that was realized 10 years ago and is part of the development of an ecological area. The farm delivers various services to the municipality, including education and care. Initially, the municipality was enthusiastic about the integral concept of the area. The respondent of the initiative indicates that the municipality has become more hesitant about the farm and questions its economic viability. The respondent is disappointed about the lack of interest from the municipality when, in his view, the farm provides many services to the community, as illustrated by the following quote:

The initiative is something outside the municipality. All initiatives to build a relationship have to come from us. They are not really proud of the initiative and they don't really know what to think about it. We have invited the municipal council and the mayor and alderman. We have given information but you feel no connection. I miss the recognition for what we are doing.

The respondent indicates that they have to beg for support and action from the municipality, to solve problems like the poor quality of the farmer's housing or the height of the rent of the land. He experiences a lack of respect for the initiative. “I am the manager of a company and do all this work for the initiative in my spare time. We have proven to be capable. I expect the municipality to work harder and have more respect for our efforts”. Until recently, the initiative had no structural contacts with the municipality, no fixed contact. The respondent indicated that civil servants change positions all the time. The lack of a relationship contrasts with the relationship between the municipality and an established care organization, where deals are made between the alderman and this organization.

The initiator also complains about civil servants who hide themselves behind formal rules. In his view, this is an obstacle for their initiative. When there are problems, the municipality only leans back and does nothing to help solve the problems. He also complains about the high rent the initiative has to pay for the land and the farm. In this view, the relationship with the municipality becomes more and more business-like. Also, he thinks that civil servants with whom they had contact lacked vision with regard to the importance of green urban citizen initiatives:

There is no one in the city council who has the vision how this farm can contribute to solving challenges.

The project leader of the municipality who was interviewed has been involved with the initiative for the past years. She is an external project leader hired by the municipality for one day a week. She indicates that the municipality is positive about the initiative. In her view, financial issues put pressure on the relationship. She knows that the initiative considers the municipality to be slow and un-supportive. She indicates that the municipality has become more business-like and professional in relation to the initiative. She also mentions the challenge she faces that basically all citizens have to be treated equally. Some initiatives ask for support, but why should they be given preferential treatment? An example is the increase in rent the initiative has to pay:

It is difficult to explain why they should pay a lower rent than other companies. We have given a reduction; they don't see this as support but we get a lot of questions in the municipal council.

She mentioned that the initiative has not always had a good image in city hall:

The farm was not functioning very well. We had the impression that they did too many different things at the same time, they did not focus enough. I have seen other farms that were more successful. When I asked them about the reason they always complained about the bad soil. But they knew the quality of the soil beforehand.

The support for the initiative is also dependent on the political parties in power. "We had a stable period with the aldermen from the PvdA and D'66. When we got the alderman from the liberal party, financial issues became more important. He became negative; he thought it was a mess on the farm and a costly project".

She indicates that not all of the initiative's actions are helpful to their relationship:

Sometimes the initiative approaches the alderman directly behind my back. That kind of actions damages our relationship and it is not clever, as the alderman will never do something without the civil servant. He can call me. It is problematic when the municipal council follows the indignation of the initiative.

She knows that the initiative has doubts about her involvement. She responds that she does not live in the municipality and that it is only her work, and that she has different interests in her spare time.

Case 5: Arnhem2

The second initiative in Arnhem envisages a more human, healthy and sustainable type of society. They tried to start a living working community to realize their ideals. When this was impossible to realize, they decided to initiate all kinds of sustainable green initiatives. They could use an empty building as their office. The main initiators have been educated in sustainability issues. This initiative was unable to develop a good relationship with the municipality and other established partners, due to major differences in ideology and the approach of the initiative, which is based on the idea that

society as a whole has to change. They blame the local authorities for not wanting make principal choices to change the world, like kicking out all big companies from the networks that frustrate fundamental changes in society:

We have asked the municipality over and over again to make principle choices for a totally different policy. What happens is that the lobby of established partners protect the market. When it becomes interesting, the commercial partners step in and that is the end of the initiators.

Civil servants give off different signals. The initiator mentions a project where one of the civil servants was very positive about their idea for a garden with a yurt. However, when a neighbour complained, other civil servants demanded them to stop their activities immediately and threatened them with severe financial punishments. The respondent has the impression that the municipality wants to change but that it has to tackle its own bureaucracy.

They are in transition, they get a new role and have to accept more instead of taking the lead.

The initiator stresses that developing trust is very important and that the art of networking and sharing ideas is crucial to developing a good relationship. He indicates that he has developed a good relationship with a teacher at one of the schools. However, after this teacher became ill, contacts with the school stopped. Although the initiative was active in becoming part of local sustainability networks, they never felt accepted by the other organizations. The initiator complains about the municipality and companies in the network who have arranged things in an old boys' network in secret, and local administrators who have no interest in their activities and never respond to their phone calls or letters. In addition, the initiator blamed the local authorities to take over their plans without giving them credit:

Last year, we made a plan and an application for the minima garden. The municipality included it in the poverty policy paper and got a lot of publicity. We have helped the municipality with interviews and guided tours. We were looking for a location to start the minima garden and now the municipality has initiated the garden with another organization without informing us and without getting any credits.

The respondent also has the impression that established organizations and the municipality oppose the initiative:

We are never invited to meetings and always get rejections to our funding proposals.

The civil servant we interviewed is the same one as in the Arnhem1 project. As indicated above, she is positive about and involved with Cis. She has, however, become quite critical about Arnhem2. In her view, they may have many dreams and plans, but not enough in terms of concrete actions. When they experience problems, they do not take responsibility, but expect the municipality to solve their problems. In her perception, they still live in the seventies and need to be more realistic and business-like. She is disappointed, because they are not reliable and do not learn, as illustrated by the next example:

I organized a booth for them and then they do not show up. That is not smart. I also tell them that that is not smart. The same with the minima garden. They did not show up. We took another direction than they wanted. Then I think: is it your ego or do you want the project to be realized? If they do not take responsibility, it stops.

She always checks with her colleagues to make sure she is not negative due to her negative experiences. She likes to keep an open mind.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of our study was to gain a better understanding of how citizens' initiatives and local authorities interact and how they can build good relationships and collaborate successfully. We analysed cases with great diversity in terms of their objectives and approach. Our study confirms that local governments value citizens' initiatives, as they contribute to the liveability of neighbourhoods and policy objectives (Bakker et al., 2012; van Dam et al., 2014). Although local governments and citizens' initiatives consider it important to establish good mutual relationships, our study shows that they often find it difficult to do so (Ansell & Gash, 2008; van Dam et al., 2014). Our study shows that being willing to work together and developing trust are the key conditions for developing a good partnership between initiatives and local governments (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998). Only in one of the cases (case 3), a trustful relationship was involved from the start. In one, case a trustful relationship developed (case 1) and in three cases, the relationship between the Cis and the local authorities remained problematic.

5.1. Developing a trustful relationship

Our study sheds light on how and why, in some cases, trust-building relationships between initiatives and local governments were established, while that did not happen in other cases.

Case 3 is an example where the relationship between the initiators and the municipality was good from the start. This was due to the background and skills of the initiators. They have a hybrid identity: as professionals they are trained, socialized and embedded in the formal world of the municipality. In their role as citizens, they benefit from their dual identity. Their interaction with civil servants leads to mutual benefits (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998). The civil servants used the initiators to realize their own projects. With their hybrid identity and embeddedness in the municipality, they are well equipped to be successful boundary spanners (Keshet, 2013). They deploy effective relational and interpersonal competences to develop mutual understanding, trust and respect (Williams, 2002). Participation of the initiators in the world of civil servants is an important bridge in terms of connecting their own objectives to those of the municipality (Handley et al., 2007). The initiators can be considered creative and strategic boundary-spanners who are able to maximize the opportunities in the structured context in which they find themselves (Williams & Sullivan, 2009). This initiative also benefits from the personal involvement of the civil servant of the municipality and the ambition of the city to experiment with green urban initiatives. The way of working of the initiative is in line with the view that citizens should take the lead in initiating sustainable projects and should play a key role in developing policies that can be checked by the municipality.

Case 1 shows how a trustful relationship can develop over time. The initiators were frustrated about the lack of progress and cooperation on the part of the civil servants. They realized that they had to change their strategy to become successful. They learned to change their behaviour and were able to develop a cooperative relationship with the municipality. This confirms earlier findings that it is important that initiatives can reflect and learn to build good relationships (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Tonkens and Verhoeven, 2012). Another important supportive factor was the involvement of an alderman, who helped the initiators find solutions when the initiative faced regulatory obstacles. Consequently, the changes in behaviour of both the initiators and the local authorities resulted in the development of a trustful relationship.

5.2. Reasons for failing relationships

We identified different reasons for the failure to develop a trustful relationship in the other cases. In case 2, a major problem in developing a trustful relationship is the lack of a personal fit between the initiative and the responsible persons of the municipality. The project leader and the alderman have an ambivalent attitude towards the initiative. On the one, hand they appreciate the efforts while, on the other, hand they are critical about their achievements and their activities. The lack of personal involvement of the representatives of the municipality is a major obstacle to establishing a good relationship. The experienced lack of appreciation for the initiative leads to frustration and puts

pressure on the vulnerable relationship. In addition, the initiators and civil servant have different expectations and different views about what is reasonable. They find it difficult to place themselves in each other's position and there does not seem to be a real exchange of ideas.

In two cases (4 and 5), the expectations and ambitions of the initiative did not match the ambitions of the municipality. In case 4, the initiator's objective was to become a formal and structural partner of the municipality in the development of green urban projects, which was not the ambition of the local project leader, the alderman and the civil servant in charge of citizens' initiatives. The ambitions and entrepreneurial attitude of this initiative was threatening the goals and aspirations of established organisations and civil servants and evoked opposition and obstacles for developing a trustful relationship (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Williams, 2007).

In case 5, the behaviour of the initiative frustrated a trustful relationship with the municipality. A good relationship between the initiative and the municipality and other organizations could not develop due to the large difference in ideology and approach of the initiative and other more institutionalised organisations. This initiative stuck to a principal philosophy that society as a whole has to change. They blamed the local authorities for being unwilling to make principal choices to change the world. Although this initiative became involved in local sustainability networks, it never felt accepted by the other organizations. This initiative is a clear example that active networking does not lead to good relationships when the initiators do not act as boundary-spanners. The initiators lack the interpersonal competences to develop mutual understanding, trust and respect (Williams, 2002). A major obstacle for developing a trustful relationship was the lack of ability to reflect and take the others' perspective and the non predictable behaviour (Williams, 2007). The civil servant became very critical about this initiative, as she considers the initiators to be unreliable and unable to take responsibility. In spite of the involvement of this civil servant with citizens' initiatives (see case 3), a personal fit is not established. Differences in personal fit between initiators and local governments can only be explained by differences in ideology and lack of ability to reflect on one's actions and take the others' perspective. We did not find differences in class or cultural background as all initiators were highly educated native citizens.

Our results show that building trust is the key challenge in developing a good relationship and successful collaboration between a Cis and local government. The results confirm insights from management and consultant literature, that building trust includes three main social practices (i) establishing emotional connection, (ii) ability and integrity, and (iii) aligning to each other's expectations (Nikolova et al., 2015). It shows that these three social practices important for trust building in client-consultant relationships, are also important in the process of building trustful relationships between Cis and local governments. We found that personal involvement of civil servants is very helpful in establishing a trustful relationship. Table 2 provides an overview of the realization of these three identified social practices for the different cases and the personal involvement of civil servants. By focusing on the development of trustful relationships and using insights from client-consultant literature, our study expands our understanding of the relationships between Cis and local governments.

Table 2. Quality of different social practices contributing to trust between Cis and local government

	Emotional connection	Ability and integrity	Matching of expectations	Personal involvement civil servants
Case 1	+	+	+	+
Case 2	±	±	±	-
Case 3	+	+	+	+
Case 4	±	+	-	-
Case 5	-	-	-	+

Notes: + = present; ± = partly present; - = absent.

Our cases illustrate that initiators motivated to reflect on their behaviour can learn to develop a more trustful relationship with local governments (Williams, 2007). When initiators are unable or unwilling to reflect on their own role in the process of building a trustful relationship, they will become stuck in behavioural patterns that prevent the development of trust.

This paper shows that building a trustful relationships depends not only on the behaviour of citizens' initiatives, but also on the role and attitude of civil servants and aldermen. Our cases show that building a good and trustful relationship has to come from both sides. In line with previous studies, we found that initiatives demand and expect appreciation and recognition from local government and from the civil servants involved (Hurenkamp et al., 2006; Oude Vrielink & van de Wijdeven, 2011). We found there are major differences between civil servants in the way they approach initiatives. Some are enthusiastic and happy as the initiatives come up with innovative ideas, while others seem not really interested. Differences in attitude to a large extent depend on the personal interests of civil servants. A similar experience is expressed in the relationship with aldermen and town councillors. Some are interested because it is a topic that in which they are personally interested, while other officials are less interested. The attitude towards initiatives and interest of civil servants and aldermen for their work has a great impact on the relationship. When civil servants approach citizens' initiatives in a formal, bureaucratic way and are not willing to invest in a more personal connection to the initiative and their interest, it is difficult to develop a trustful relationship, as cases 2 and 4 have shown.

Some of the initiatives (especially case 4) opted in favour of a formal and structural partnership with the municipality. However, without matching expectations and a personal fit leading to a trustful relationship, establishing a formal partnership is impossible. When initiatives and municipalities develop a good interpersonal relationship and share joint objectives, structural or formal aspects do not seem to be a major problem in the development of initiatives. In this case, the civil servants and aldermen involved are able to solve formal obstacles, like a mismatch with regulations (see case 1).

5.3. Different attitudes of local governments

We found major differences in the way civil servants and aldermen approach initiatives. Some are involved and supportive, while others are more reserved and formal. Some civil servants stick to a more formal top-down approach. They are hesitant to give space to initiatives and step back when there is opposition against certain initiatives. Some civil servants are not interested in citizen initiatives and fail to understand the importance of green urban citizen initiatives. These examples are exponents of the traditional formal world of municipalities.

Several initiators indicated that municipalities are in transition. They found that many of the new young people in the municipalities are enthusiastic and involved. They connect to the initiatives and support them, for instance by linking them to other initiatives. Some municipalities encourage civil servants to be creative with regulations in order to support initiatives. These are examples of municipalities that make a transition and are able to link the formal the informal world. The initiatives see this as a hopeful development and an indication that local governments are searching for their role and are in a process of transition. The problem indicated by initiatives is that many of those newcomers leave the organisation after a short time due to budget cuts in the organisation.

The changing power relations between initiatives, local governments and established organisations is also an issue for some of the initiatives and part of this transition process. Initiatives 2, 4 and 5 want to build up a more equal relationship with the local government. Their goal is to become a formal partner to the local government and established organisations in realizing social and green objectives. There was opposition to this from established organisations and civil servants, which confirms earlier findings that increasing competition between partners will damage trustful relationships (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998).

Initiative 3 developed an influential position in their relationship with the local government without claiming it. This was possible due to their expertise, excellent network and previous results. They had better contacts and more knowledge than most civil servants, which helped them obtain support in a very harmonious way and realise their objectives. These changing power relations can be part of the transition. It shows that developing an influential position can be the outcome of building a trustful relationship

6. Conclusion and recommendations

We have increased our understanding of how Cis and local authorities interact and can build good relations and collaborate successfully, and why these relationships sometimes fail. Appreciation and recognition are important to initiatives. Trust is the basis of an effective partnership. Trustful relationships do not build themselves. Matching expectations of initiatives and local government, the ability and integrity of initiatives and the presence of a personal fit between initiator and civil servant are the cornerstones for developing trustful relationships. The strength of this study is that it provides detailed insight in the interactions between Cis and local authorities. Potential limitations of the study are the limited number of cases and respondents and the heterogeneity in class and cultural background of the initiators. This might limit the generalizability of our findings. Based on this study, we recommend Cis to invest in relationships with local authorities, to be positive, enthusiastic, reliable and flexible, to take objectives and challenges of local governments into consideration and connect to civil servants who are involved and supportive. We advise local governments to show initiatives sufficient appreciation and recognition, and to invest in boundary-spanning civil servants who are able to establish good contacts with initiators and different departments in the municipality. Future study could focus on the impact of differences in class and cultural background of Cis on their relationship with local governments.

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