Successful collaboration between bottom-up initiatives and local governments
Development of a comprehensive framework

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Abstract
In Northwest Europe, a trend is set in which citizens increasingly organize themselves to deliver services for their community like the maintenance of public spaces, the provision of community centers, and the delivery of social services. This kind of bottom-up initiatives can contribute to deal with societal challenges.

Because of the strong governmental involvement in this kind of public tasks, these initiatives need some kind of governmental support or facilitation. This support can be rather modest, in terms of getting permission for organizing activities. But more often also financial or policy support is needed, in combination with supporting activities from public officials and regulatory provisions. And even a more enduring and formalized relationship between a community initiative and governmental agencies can be necessary to unlock the potential of bottom-up initiatives.

Several studies showed that this kind of bottom-up initiatives could add public value and support from the local government can enable even more public value creation. However, public value creation by collaboration between citizen initiatives and local governments, is anything but self-evident. Many initiatives stagnate and citizens become disappointed because of time-wasting decision-making processes, bureaucratic standards they cannot meet, or because the government hijack their initiative.

This gives rise to the question: which kind of factors foster collaboration between bottom-up initiatives and local governments, in such a way that this collaboration enables public value creation? To answer this question, we present in this paper a comprehensive framework of factors that foster the collaboration between bottom-up initiatives and local governments. We link this to the outcome in terms of public value. This framework is based upon a large-scale research program we currently execute.

The comprehensive framework consists of three sets of factors. The first set has to do with the local government itself and the way in which it is organized and behaves. This comprehends organizational factors as well as individual factors of the civil servants involved. The second set has to do with the bottom-up initiatives. Examples of these factors are the urgency of the provided service,
the social capital of the people involved, and the presence of boundary spanning leadership. The third set of factors to take into account, are contextual characteristics like neighborhood characteristics, and the political and institutional tissue of the collaboration.

In this paper, we present a comprehensive framework, in which we describe the factors for successful collaboration between bottom-up initiatives and local governments. We illustrate this framework with findings from a large-scale research program on citizen initiatives, and give some directions for further research.

1. Introduction

In Northwest Europe, a trend is set in which citizens increasingly organize themselves to deliver services for their community (Alford, 2002; Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen et al. 2015). Increasingly public tasks like the maintenance of public spaces, the provision of community centers, and the delivery of social services are picked up by groups of citizens who want to take responsibility for their own neighborhood. This trend is stimulated by governments that want to reduce their tasks and activities, and foster communities and civic entrepreneurs to get involved in the provision of public goods and services. Examples are the ‘Big Society’ paradigm in the United Kingdom and the ‘participative society’ concept in the Netherlands (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013).

Because of the strong governmental involvement in this kind of public tasks, these initiatives need some kind of governmental support or facilitation. This support can be rather modest, in terms of getting permission for organizing activities. But more often also financial or policy support is needed, in combination with supporting activities from public officials and regulatory provisions to enable initiatives. And even a more enduring and formalized relationship between the initiative and governmental agencies can be necessary to unlock the potential of bottom-up initiatives and enhance their durability.

Several studies showed that this kind of bottom-up initiatives could add public value and support from the local government would be a valuable strategy (cf. Korosec & Berman, 2006). However, public value creation by collaboration between citizen initiatives and local governments, is anything but self-evident. Many initiatives stagnate and citizens become disappointed because of the time-wasting decision-making processes, the bureaucratic standards they cannot meet, or because the government hijacks the initiative.

This gives rise to the question: which kind of factors foster collaboration between bottom-up initiatives and local governments, in such a way that this collaboration enables public value creation? To answer this question, we present in this paper a comprehensive framework of factors that foster the collaboration between bottom-up initiatives and local governments. We link this to the outcome in terms of public value.

This framework is based upon a large-scale research program we currently execute. In this research program, various studies have been conducted. Firstly, literature reviews have been executed on co-creation and co-production (Voorberg et al. 2015), and on bottom-up initiatives (Igalla et al. forthcoming). In our research program, various conditions of bottom-initiatives have already been studied, like the relation between government and self-organization in society (Edelenbos et al. 2016a; Nederhand et al. 2016), the evolution and durability of bottom-up initiatives (Edelenbos et al. 2016b; Igalla & Van Meerkerk, 2015; Van Meerkerk et al. under review), and the position of citizens in initiatives (Voorberg & Bekkers, 2016). Various cases of bottom-up initiatives have been studied and
several are still running. These cases are especially in the field of urban development (Edelenbos et al. 2016a; 2016b; Van Meerkerk et al. 2013; Nederhand et al. 2016), health (Nederhand & Van Meerkerk, forthcoming), water, and energy (Hufen & Koppenjan, 2015). In the water domain, different citizen initiatives are studied in relation to regional water board authorities (Duijn et al, in progress). Also fifteen case studies are done on urban garden initiatives and the factors that explain their success (Hagen et al, in progress). In the city of Rotterdam, we evaluated a specific instrument to provoke citizen initiatives, the so-called Right to Challenge (Van Popering & Van Buuren, 2017).

Based upon this large-scale research program, we present in this paper a comprehensive framework and set the research agenda for further research on this topic. We start this paper by our perspective on bottom-up initiatives and on the public value of bottom-up initiatives. After that, we elaborate the factors – governmental factors, factors of initiatives and context factors – that foster a productive relationship between initiatives and local governments. The findings are integrated in a comprehensive framework and in a research agenda.

2. A collaborative governance perspective on bottom-up initiatives

2.1 Bottom-up initiatives from different perspectives

Studies on active citizenship, community governance and localism, distinguish various perspectives on bottom-up initiatives (Igalla et al. forthcoming; Jones & Ormston, 2014; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008). To position our studies, we will mention the most important perspectives.

Historically, a community perspective is most used. Based upon the long tradition of communities in the USA, bottom-up initiatives in Europe have been studied from the same perspective. This community perspective starts from the social capital, and the resources and capacities that are embedded in the community (Igalla et al. forthcoming). Bottom-up initiatives are a trend in which the local government creates room for these community capacities.

The importance of New Public Management in Northwest Europe, makes that bottom-up initiatives are also studied from a more economic perspective. The focus is than on the trend in which citizens are not only the client but also become producer of public services. It is supposed that, because client and producer became closer to each other or even are the same, public services could be delivered for less budget and with higher quality.

A different perspective on bottom-up initiatives is a democratic one. The rise of initiatives impacts, besides its direct impact on public services, also the relationship between citizens and government. Successful initiatives could enlarge the trust of citizens in the government and could reduce the democratic deficit (Marschall, 2004; Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010).

From a public administration view on initiatives, these perspectives could be enriched by a governance perspective. On a higher level, this perspective is about the way governments and self-organization from society contribute to the coordination of activities around collective issues. Bottom-up initiatives are a way of societal self-organization and could contribute to a more effective and legitimate coordination around collective issues (Van Meerkerk et al. 2013; Nederhand et al. 2016).

2.2 Collaborative governance perspective

From a governance perspective, the way in which the relation between the bottom-up initiative and the government is organized and functions, is crucial. Voorberg et al. (2015) mention this as the organizational side versus the citizen side of co-creation, with for instance the feeling of ownership as
an important factor at the citizen side to establish productive co-creation and the administrative culture as factor at the organizational side.

Like many scholars around the concept of collaborative governance argue, governance is about the activities of many different stakeholders and the result of governance is based upon their collaboration and less on the separate activities (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al. 2012; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001). Therefore, we start in this paper and the research program this paper is based, from a collaborative perspective on bottom-up initiatives.

2.3 Public value creation by bottom-up initiatives

As citizen initiatives rapidly gain popularity, the question becomes more and more urgent, how to define the added value of such an initiative. Of course, this is first and foremost depending on the specific goals that the initiative tries to obtain and the specific context in which the initiative is rooted. However, on a conceptual level it is also important to solidify what the benefits of such initiatives can be. In order to define the benefits of initiatives, the concept of public value can be useful.

The academic discussion about public value in the public administration literature, finds it starting point in the seminal work of Mark Moore (1995). From that point, scholars have an ongoing debate on public value. In our development of a framework on bottom-up initiatives, we will not be reviewing this debate, but some elements are valuable to mention especially in relation to bottom-up initiatives.

As said, the work of Moore, is an important starting point in public administration. However, strictly taken, he never defined public value, but explains that it depends on a given situation. Therefore, he proposed to practically operationalize public value as “Rooted in the desires and perceptions of individuals – not necessarily in physical transformations and not in abstractions called societies. Public sector managers must satisfy some kinds of desires and operate in accord with some kinds of perceptions” (Moore, 1995: 52).

Other authors have in line with the work of Moore, attempted to be more specific about what public value is. For instance, Stoker (2006) stresses that public value is more than a summation of the individual preferences of the users or producers of public services. It is depending on the judgment of stakeholders and is collectively built through deliberation. Whether public value is achieved relies on the building and maintaining networks of provision, and the engagement and exchange between the relevant stakeholders and government officials (p. 47).

Such a deliberative and social notion of public value is also found in the work of O’Flynn (2007) and Bozeman (2002). The latter even goes one step further, arguing that public value is not a given, but represents how in a pluralistic society there is a strong cleavage between public values (p.150). He mentions for instance that manifestations of religious and classes cause great differences between societal groups. Therefore, public values are never obsolete but need to be reconciled in conflict with other values (p. 148). In that vein we also find the approach of Alford and Hughes (2008), saying that the determination of what constitutes public value depends on two factors: 1) the particular circumstances in the social and natural environment of public managers and 2) what is valuable is registered in the desires and judgments of people (p. 133). As such public value creation is not so much about gaining a specific goal, but seeking the most appropriate approach for different circumstances. This is what these authors called public value pragmatism. The latter conception can also be found in the work of Van der Wal et al. (2008: 468) saying that public value accords to “important qualities and standards that have a certain weight in the choice of action”.
This deliberative and social notion fits within the context of citizen initiatives. Once entered the public domain, citizen initiatives become collaborations with other actors from other domains (government, business or civil society). Consequently, discussion about the added value of a citizen initiative takes place in a new social context and demands new kinds of deliberation. However, in the public domain, added value has always a collective notion, i.e. determining the added value of citizen initiative is depending on how it serves larger groups.

Citizen initiatives strive for the creation of public value. Most often this is not only defined in terms of specific public goods or services, but also in terms of values like cohesion, belonging and meaning. At the same time, they often need the support and collaboration of public governments to be able to do so. These governments do have their own conception of public value, most often more strictly defined in terms of the products they are responsible for. Public value creation than requires a process of dialogue and learning in order to construct a shared conception of what public value is, which fit into the motives and ambitions of initiators and also helps governments to legitimize them why they support and enable those initiatives.

3. Factors of bottom-up initiatives

The literature on citizen initiatives is heavily engaged in exploring the capacity to build and maintain initiatives, especially in situations which recently saw new policy agendas, and actors coming in to play in a ‘shared-power world’ (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Healey, 1998). In this ‘shared-power world’ citizens take up tasks, in many cases to create public value in a certain realm, whether it is health care, energy, or water management. The literature points us towards the fact that such initiatives have to build up and maintain capacity to create this public value. Recurrent factors that contribute to creating such value are: the content on which the initiative focuses, the resources at its disposal or which it can gather (both soft and hard), the extent to which an initiative is organized and institutionalized, and factors which relate to the individuals active in these initiatives (cf. Han et al. 2015; Healey 2015; Igalla et al. forthcoming; Van Meerkerk et al. 2013).

3.1 Purpose

Whether or not the initiators, partners and the target group feel that it is purposeful to provide a service, mostly depends on the (perceived) urgency of the provided service for the community (Kleinhans, 2017). This sense of urgency is not only needed to give an initiative purpose, it is also important for the further development and the sustainability of the initiative. An initiative can either connect to a topic that is seen as urgent, or it can ‘reinvent’ its own urgency by reframing the societal discussion and stipulate why it is of great importance to take action at that moment (Van de Wijdeven and Hendriks, 2010). This way, the purpose helps to connect the citizen initiative to the mission of other organizations or individuals in its environment.

The purpose of an initiative has an effect on multiple levels: on the development of the provided service, on the group of initiators and on the target group. At the very first beginning, a shared and concrete purpose connects the first group of initiators. Whereas their collective motivation can be understood by the expected public value creation, the individual motivation can also partly be explained by the expected efficiency: the expected outcome - the (progress towards) achievement of the purpose - is weighted against the expected investment (Verba et al. 1995). Citizens who set up the
initiative thus need to perceive the purpose as achievable, and as such worth investing their time in, and, vice versa, they need to believe investing their time will result in a significant and valuable contribution to the public value. Furthermore, the purpose of the initiative is an important resource for building up an internal organization, getting funds, resources and attracting partners and a certain target group.

3.2 Resources
Regarding resources, we consider social capital and (democratic) legitimacy as key factors for bottom-up initiatives. Like most research on citizen initiatives, we conceptualize social capital with Putnam’s terminology, distinguishing among bonding, bridging, and linking ties (Putnam, 1995).

Having a diverse network with a motivated core group linked by trustful relationships (strong bonding ties), being imbedded in the community (bridging ties), and having strong relations with public institutions (strong linking ties), contributes to achieving public values (cf. Bertotti et al. 2012; Newman et al. 2008; Uitermark 2014). Based on qualitative case studies, research shows that social capital helps to mobilize resources, like funding, knowledge, advice, volunteers, and support (cf. Van Meerkerk et al. forthcoming; Bailey 2012; Bertotti et al. 2012; Newman et al. 2008). On the one hand, these resources help to increase the performance and durability (continuation of services and goods in the long run) of the initiatives itself, and on the other hand resources help to achieve outcomes related to society, such as enhancing environmental livability and investing in social interactions in the neighborhood. However, this resource-based mechanism explaining relationships between network ties and public values, is mainly derived from narrative and descriptive case study research (Igalla et al. forthcoming).

Our second factor is democratic legitimacy: the way a bottom-up initiative organizes its internal structure according to democratic principles, such as the quality of representation, the source of legitimacy, and transparency (Skelcher et al., 2011, Igalla et al. forthcoming). Since citizen initiatives are sometimes seen as forms of renewal and revival of democracy and as such, they can strengthen local democracy. At the same time, citizen initiatives can provide public services outside of state control and as such, threaten representative democracy (Lowndes & Sullivan 2008). In practice, perceived legitimacy and support initiatives receive from community actors and institutions can help to achieve the mission of the initiative and create public value. This factor helps realizing ideas, mobilizing people, energy and other resources, creating a fitting organizational structure, and maintaining relationships with community members (cf. Torri and Martinez 2011). However, research on how legitimacy hampers or strengthens citizen initiatives is lacking (Igalla et al. forthcoming).

3.3 Organization
A business model, assets, a legal form and a strategy help to increase both internal and external outcomes such as a durable development and the creation of community ties (cf. Han et al. 2015; Igalla et al. forthcoming).

An important aspect of a well-functioning business model is having different sources of funding, income and revenues. Such a varied business model can increase the durable development of initiatives, because it makes them less vulnerable for changes in public funding and less dependable on one type of income source (e.g. Van Meerkerk forthcoming; Igalla & Van Meerkerk 2015; Sharir & Lerner 2006).

In addition, having a location (or other physical assets) where the bottom-up initiative operates, could help increase its visibility or exposure, which helps sustaining the organization for the long-run.
(cf. Van Meerkerk et al. 2013) and embody democratic values, such as openness. Moreover, such a meeting place enables collective engagement and interaction among citizens (cf. Specht & Van der Zwaard 2015).

Another organizational factor is the formalization, by adopting a legal form, for instance a cooperation, association or foundation. A legal form is often required for public funding and it improves the appearance and legitimacy of citizen initiatives as social ‘good doers’. As such, legal forms help citizen initiatives to gain more resources to carry out activities, which can increase their contribution to the common good (cf. Hassink et al. 2013; Igalla & Van Meerkerk 2015).

A final organizational factor is the strategy bottom-up initiatives use to interact with external actors, and to mobilize people and resources (cf. Anguelovski 2015; Igalla et al forthcoming). Little is known about this condition, but Saegert (2006) mentions the importance of the right approach, in the right place, and with the right people. Future research could examine effects of consensus/cooperation-oriented or confrontation/competition-oriented approaches on the creation of public values during different stages of citizen initiatives.

3.4 Individual
At the individual level, leadership- and civic skills contribute to the amount and type of public values self-organization can produce. Leadership is often considered an influencing factor on the effectiveness and efficiency of self-organization, and therefore on its professional public values. However, there is a lack of empirical research on the actual effects different leadership styles – such as transformational, connective or transactional leadership – have on the outcomes of these citizens initiatives (Igalla et al forthcoming). A leadership style that has been researched in the context of self-organization is boundary spanning leadership. Boundary spanners are able to make the connection between citizen initiatives and relevant organization(s), gather relevant information on both sides, and translate and disseminate the information from one group to the other (cf. Thusman & Scanlan, 1981). Based on Dutch case study research, we see that boundary spanning activities, such as connecting the initiative’s goals with policy, needs, and agendas of local governments, enhance the legitimacy of bottom-up initiatives, and the receptivity of public servants to facilitate initiatives (cf. Van Meerkerk, 2014; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014). As such, boundary spanning leadership strengthens the relationship between initiatives and government and contributes to outcomes.

Apart from leadership skills, citizens also bring so called civic skills or competences. Citizens succeeding in self-organization have certain skills, ranging from public speaking, organizing events, encouraging fellow citizens and communicating with government officials and other relevant professionals, which they apply to achieve the purpose of the initiative. They know the local institutional framework and how to navigate within it. Because these skills are more commonly found among people with high social and economic standing, this group tends to be overrepresented in citizen initiatives (Lowndes et al. 2006; Jager-Vreugdenhil, 2014; Van de Wijdeven et al. 2013). In terms of public values, both types of skill sets yield similar results: the skills can strengthen the internal functioning of the citizen initiative, but they can also be employed to strengthen the ties with the community and other social and/or governmental actors and thus strengthen the position and influence of the initiative in the community. The overrepresentation of people with high social and economic standing, however, could threaten the democratic value and legitimacy of self-organization, because a possible consequence is that the needs of this group – that is already well-off – are better heard and tended to than those of people with lower social economic standing.

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4. Governmental factors

Citizen collectives operate in a complex institutional environment of governmental policies, rules and regulations. Governments can help or hinder citizen collectives in dealing with the institutional environment. Government intervention could have many forms, for instance providing starting collectives with subsidies, adjusting rules and regulations and the creation of favorable policy conditions (e.g. Igalla et al., forthcoming). However, given that governments are (fragmented) bureaucracies (Peters, 1998), collaborating with collectives is often difficult for governments. Government’s cooperation with citizen initiatives commonly involves different organizational pillars and multiple hierarchical levels.

Different types of factors influence how governments respond to citizen initiatives, and whether governments are able to cooperate successfully with citizen initiatives. Based on our knowledge of the current literature and our own empirical work (in progress) we come to the following factors. Important note is that these types of factors are interrelated and could impact on each other.

4.1 Government policies and instruments

A first important factor addressed in various literature concerns the policies and instruments of governmental organizations (Creamer, 2015; Korosec & Berman, 2006; Voorberg et al., 2015). Policies can provide specific instruments and incentives for supporting citizen initiatives or stimulating cooperation with citizen initiatives in the provision of public services (Lowndes et al., 2006; Denters, 2016).

A classic perspective on policy instruments is Hood’s NOTA-categorization (1983). N (nodality – information, knowledge), O (organizational capacity), T (treasure – financial resources), A (authority – legislative framework). These instruments can all be deployed to shape the interactions between government and citizen initiatives. Information supply shapes the cognitive aspects of the interaction. What is the problematic issue? How can both government and citizen initiatives contribute to its solution? Organizational capacity of governments is necessary to employ activities in the collaboration with citizen initiatives (who, in turn, must dispose of organization capacity as well; see par. 3). Financial resources are therefore an important factor to 1) facilitate citizen initiatives to perform public services (e.g. subsidies), and 2) support the interaction process itself, by (co-)financing meetings, events, or materials. Lastly, authority influences the (formal) boundaries of interactions between government and citizen initiatives. It impacts the scope of these interactions, and which tasks are ‘transferred’ to citizen initiatives or remain the responsibility of government.

Of course, Hood’s categorization into four main types of policy instruments does not reflect the hybrid instruments that can be developed to initiate and support the interactions. Moreover these hybrid forms of policy instruments might be the result of government – citizen initiatives interactions themselves, changing them from ‘vertical’ to ‘horizontal’ instruments, developed and applied in a policy network. These are often referred to as ‘second generation policy instruments’ (De Bruijn & Ten Heuvelhof, 1991; Salamon (ed.), 2002). This type of policy instruments presupposes a subtle, but vital change: instead of government deploying ‘vertical’ instruments to shape the interactions, government ‘negotiates’ with citizen initiatives on what might work or is deemed necessary for establishing and guiding the desired interactions.

Furthermore, policies can also be a barrier for support or collaboration. For example, because of NPM inspired policy, local governments in the Netherlands have reduced their financial support to welfare organizations. Welfare workers are cut back in their work hours while still being assigned with
the same task to support community initiatives. In combination with a strong focus on performance targets and indicators imposed by local governments, the willingness and ability of traditional civil society organizations to support citizen initiatives decreases (De Wilde et al., 2014).

4.2 Boundary spanning
Various case studies on citizen initiatives show that the quality of boundary spanning between citizen initiatives and the internal organization of local government is an important factor in mobilizing resources for citizen initiatives (Nederhand et al., 2016), but also for developing collaboration and coordination between citizen initiatives and local government (Edelenbos et al., 2016; Van Meerkerk et al., 2013; Kleinhans, 2017). Boundary spanning activities refer to connecting or linking different people and processes across organizational boundaries, building relationships and creating trust, collecting and selecting relevant information within the organization, and translating this information to the other side of the boundary (Tushman and Scanlan, 1981; Van Meerkerk and Edelenbos, 2014; Williams, 2002).

This factor is about the presence of individuals within the governmental organization who employ boundary spanning activities and competences. Boundary spanning competences refer to the capabilities needed for performing such activities. Williams (2002) mentions empathy, information processing capabilities, networking and brokering skills in this respect. As citizen initiatives often cross different policy domains and organizational units, this can hamper citizens to gain resources or to collaborate effectively with local governments. How the relationship evolves and whether supportive and collaborative relationships emerge thus depends on the capacity of government officials and politicians to cross and connect different pillars within local government (Nederhand et al., 2016; Edelenbos et al., 2016).

Some local governments formalize boundary spanning positions with regard to neighborhood developments and community initiatives, for example by installing community or neighborhood managers. Such boundary spanning organizational roles could enhance coordination and facilitate interaction with citizen initiatives if officials occupying such positions have boundary spanning competences.

4.3 Administrative leadership
A third factor relates to attitudes of individual public officials and how administrative leadership can affect these attitudes. Lowndes et al. (2006) refer to the specific informal rules of use in local governments as a determining factor in how they deal with citizen participation.

In this respect, Voorberg et al. (2015) and Kleinhans (2017) point in particular at risk-averse attitudes which can be rooted in negative experiences with citizen initiatives or citizen participation. Working with citizen initiatives often requires public officials to deviate from the standard way of working, and thus taking risks.

Part of the consideration of individual civil servants to collaborate with citizen collectives, and take risks, is the support they expect from their superiors. Namely, this collaboration process often involves taking risks and deviating from the standard paths. Do public managers encourage public officials to work with citizen initiatives or do they focus on achieving predefined targets that often leave little room for adjustment to local needs of initiatives?

With regards to administrative leadership we hypothesize on the basis of earlier empirical findings that specifically entrepreneurial leadership and facilitative leadership are of importance (see Nederhand et al., 2016; REF). Entrepreneurial leadership focusses on initiating change through
reshaping organizational routines and (re)mobilizing resources (Ricard et al., 2016). Facilitating leadership focuses on the mediating task of leaders. According to Ansell and Gash (2008) a facilitating leader mediates between actors in the collaboration process. This leadership style can empower public officials in dealing with citizen initiatives and the needed intra-organizational coordination activities as a result of their interaction with initiatives (Van Meerkerk and Edelenbos, 2017). Based on three in-depth case studies Van Maasakkers et al. (2014) conclude the facilitative leadership requires 1) conducting an stakeholder assessment as basis for process design, 2) the acceptance by the other stakeholders to play a role in decision-making, based on expertise, fairness and focus on process instead of content, and 3) the ability to collaboratively select, develop and apply (technical) tools to support the interactions between stakeholders concerned.

5. Contextual factors

A one-size-fits-all approach to bottom-up initiatives does not exist and work. The actual form and the collaborative process of bottom-up initiatives depends on the context in which the initiative is shaped (Edelenbos and Van Meerkerk, 2016; Johnson et al., 2012; Gigerenzer, 1996; Bliese & Britt, 2012). On individual level, the orientations and behaviors of individuals are dependent on the context in which they are situated (Marschall, 2004). At collective and/or institutional level, research showed that differences in state and governance traditions may explain why citizens and/or governments respond differently to the introduction of new phenomena, in our case bottom-up initiatives (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999; Skelcher et al. 2011; Jepperson, 2002). In different fields of inquiry scholars found that context matters a lot, explaining working conditions, collaborative processes, and outcomes (Johnson et al. 2012; Gigerenzer, 1996; Bliese & Britt, 2001).

The context is however not easy to define and not easy to study. It is constantly evolving, it changes over time and is largely unpredictable (Innes & Booher, 1999). Moreover in line with the structuration theory of Giddens (1984), structure (context and institutions) and agency (people bringing about change) are interdependent (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). In this paper, we focus on the success of bottom-up initiatives, interacting with local governments. The neighborhood is often identified as an important context in which bottom-up initiatives emerge (Marschall, 2004; Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010; Moulaert et al. 2010) and we therefore take the neighborhood as the starting point of the context. While we acknowledge that the neighborhood cannot be understood as an isolated context (cf Manzini, 2010) but rather as one that is embedded in contexts at other levels (Moulaert et al, 2013) including the city, the national and the global level and thus it is connected to larger networks and flows (Castells 1996).

To achieve further focus, we look at a specific dimensions of the context that are embedded at all kind of scale levels including the city and (trans)national level and that materialize at the neighborhood level. The dimensions are: 1) political and public discourse; 2) institutional tissue 3) socio-economic, cultural and spatial characteristics.

5.1 Political and public discourse

One of the main contextual factors that influences how citizen initiatives contribute to generating public value is the momentum provided by the political and public discourse. The political discourse is understood as the way the national or local government talk about participation and citizens’ initiatives. This has an impact on the extent to which citizens feel encouraged to organize and maintain bottom-up initiatives that can contribute to public values (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013). Media and
the public opinion influence political discourse and it can give stimuli to initiate new policies or change existing policies to be more open for citizen initiatives or to regulate citizen initiatives in a more active way (Korthagen & Van Meerkerk, 2014).

The public discourse is concerned with how the larger public (society) talks and communicates and, like political discourse, it can enable or disable citizens to develop initiatives. Currently, in North Western Europe there is a strong public discourse around “Do It Yourself”, sharing and crowd-funding, that sends out a message that citizens can take care of themselves. This creates a perspective of ‘smaller government’ and ‘bigger society’ (Kisby, 2010) in with increased attention for civil society’s self-reliance, self-help and self-organizing power.

Discourses can be favoring bottom-up initiatives, but they can also hold them back. In reality, there is rarely one discourse, but rather a dominant discourse, since various discourses co-exist. There are neighborhoods, cities and (trans)national regions in which conflicting rationalities and political values and ideology produce conflicting discourses and those then form an important contextual challenge that bottom-up initiatives have to deal with (cf. Watson 2012; 2014). Lastly, discourse does not only influence bottom-up initiatives, it also influences the facilitating role of the government as well as how talk and think about public value.

5.2 Political, administrative and institutional tissue

The institutional tissue of associations and foundations surrounding a citizen initiative is of great importance and Uitermark (2015) suggests it is even more than the background characteristics of the population. Van de Wijdeven and Hendriks (2010) explain institutional tissue as the presence, typically at neighborhood level, of societal and/ or public organizations (including the local government) with professionals who know the community and can support citizens and their initiatives and who can provide empowerment, stimulate self-assurance and help navigate the (complex) networks of government bureaucracies. We add to this that non-professional actors (community members) can also form an important component of the institutional tissue as they also form formal and informal associations, organizations and networks that can play an important supportive role for bottom-up initiatives. The institutional tissue can be understood by looking at various dimensions: resources, social capital and social networks; infrastructure for community development; history; and the culture of governance.

The institutional tissue is important for the emergence and evolution of citizen action and initiatives (Putnam, 1995: 319). Tangible (e.g. number and quality of public spaces) and intangible (e.g. the “DNA of the neighborhood”) resources are dimensions of the institutional tissue that influence whether bottom-up initiatives can be successful. The presence of many resources in a neighborhood could positively influence the emergence and evolution of bottom-up initiatives. Furthermore, social capital is central to the study of community behavior (Putnam, 1995). Social capital distinguishes between bonding (reciprocal trust relations within a group of people with a similar background), bridging (links between different groups in society), and linking social capital (links between citizens and institutions) (Smets, 2011). The assumption is that civic engagements with strong social capital will lead more likely to public value. These civic organizations and groups have strong bonds, they are able to bridge to other communities and they can link to formal institutions for assistance and support (e.g. resources and collaboration).

Another important dimension of institutional tissue is the infrastructure for community development, such as umbrella organizations and professional support for residents in general and minority groups in particular. Investing in it can contribute to creating a context in which citizens
initiatives can flourish (Uitermark, 2015). This is an enabling-factor (Lowndes et al, 2006) and a dimension of the tissue that goes beyond neighborhood resources. It is concerned with developing platforms and providing access to professional support that gives citizens the opportunity to participate and initiate.

The tissue is defined by its history. The legacy of cooperation between community and local government, previous experiences can facilitate or hamper their collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The history of a citizen initiative also matters, their level of experience has an influence on the type and degree of public value that it contributes to (Edelenbos, 2005). History also informs tradition and favorability of local governments. A supportive attitude towards civic engagement is more likely when there is a governance tradition with participation and citizen initiatives. While traditionally ‘authoritative’ city governments seek to develop policy in a more exclusive manner and retain as much control as possible (Skelcher et al. 2011).

Another, related, dimension is the culture of governance. Governance culture can be understood as a continuum ranging from ‘rule of law’ to ‘public interest’ orientations (Pierre, 1995). In rule of law-oriented governments, government actions are aimed at the preparation and enforcement of laws (Pollit and Bouckaert, 2004). Public interest oriented governments are less dominant, and its position is best characterized as a ‘chair’ or ‘referee’ that safeguards the fair distribution of resources.

The institutional tissue thus consist of various dimensions that shape the context in which bottom-up initiatives emerge and where citizens and local government engage with each other. In this process it also shapes public values including the discourse and this is likely to have a strong impact on the organizational attitude and capacity of bottom-up initiatives and local governments and also on the incentive structures of the latter (Brandsen et al. 2015; Kisby, 2010; Verhoeven and Tonkens, 2013).

### 5.3 Neighborhood characteristics

The characteristics of a particular neighborhood are also part of the contexts that influences bottom up initiatives. One of these characteristics are the socio-economic conditions, which, according to different studies influence the degree of social organization in the neighborhood (Marschall, 2004). Examples of socio-economic conditions are income and education. Cohen & Dawson (1993) demonstrated that residents of poor neighborhoods are less likely to be engaged in public activities, like voluntary work and attending public meetings. Putnam (2000: 186) shows that education says something about how ‘well-off’ people are, they have more ambition, energy and have more skills and resources to participate. Putnam stresses that free time and financial leeway (which are both resources) have a positive effect on engagement.

Socio-economic characteristic cannot only be described by average figures but are also expressed in the asymmetry in power-resource and knowledge. For a productive relationship within a community and between bottom-up initiatives and local governments it is important that resources are equally dived between involved actors, otherwise there is a chance that the relationship will become disrupted through manipulation by stronger actors (cf. Arnstein 1969; Innes & Booher, 1999; Healey, 2003; Hamdi, 2004). A geographical characteristic of neighborhoods and cities is their spatial structure and quality. The spatial structure of a city might enhance or temper social and spatial segregation (Watson, 2012; 2014). For example a river, or a ring road can be a spatially dividing element that makes certain institutions less accessible for communities living on ‘the wrong side’. Additionally certain parts of the city can be impoverished and this often goes hand in hand with social stigmatization and poor quality of physical infrastructure, including housing, roads and public spaces. This limits the access that a community has to resources.
Another characteristic is a *cultural* one; in some neighborhoods, cities, countries or regions citizen initiatives are more ‘business as usual’ than in other (cf. Jepperson, 2002; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). As mentioned earlier, this evolves from the specific geographical conditions, the historically grown relation between government and population and/or the dominant political system at hand. Subsequently, this factor has a self-reinforcing effect. Van de Wijdeven et al. (2013) described that an active civil society can contribute to the emergence of new citizen initiatives. Additionally there can be conflicting rationalities and a collaborative culture among various civil society and public actors can be absent (Watson, 2012; 2014) and this can be counterproductive in achieving success of bottom-up initiatives.

6. Comprehensive framework

6.1 Framework

This paper started with the question how interaction between bottom-up initiatives and local governments contributes to public value creation, and which kind of factors foster this productive collaboration. As discussed above, we found in our research program various factors, which we have integrated into a comprehensive framework, see figure 1. Table 1 presents a summary of these enabling factors.

![Figure 1. Comprehensive framework](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors of successful collaboration between local governments and bottom-up initiatives</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Factors of bottom-up initiatives</strong></td>
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Civic skills that are necessary for self-organization

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<tr>
<th>Governmental factors</th>
<th>Governmental policies and instruments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy instruments which are horizontal and hybrid</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Information supply on problems and solutions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Capacity to organize the collaboration with citizens</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Financial resources to facilitate citizen initiatives and to support the interaction process itself</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Authority to scope the interactions between government and citizens</td>
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<th>Boundary spanning</th>
<th>Boundary spanning competences of government officials and politicians</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Formalize boundary spanning organizational roles</td>
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<tr>
<th>Administrative leadership</th>
<th>Administrative leaders with risk-adverse attitudes</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The support civil servants experience from their superiors</td>
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<td>Combination of entrepreneurial and facilitative leadership</td>
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<th>Context factors</th>
<th>Discourse</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Political discourse in which bottom-up initiative is encouraged</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Public discourse in which bottom-up initiative is encouraged</td>
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<tr>
<th>Political, administrative and institutional tissue</th>
<th>Resources, social capital and social networks in the neighborhood</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existence of infrastructure for community development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>History and previous experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Public interest-oriented culture of governance</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Neighborhood characteristics</th>
<th>Socioeconomic conditions</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equally divided power, resources and knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spatial structure which tempers segregation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Culture in which citizen initiatives are ‘business as usual’</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Factors that contribute to successful collaboration between local governments and bottom-up initiatives

6.2 Directions for further research

The framework we presented in this paper opens up many avenues for further research. Both more quantitative and qualitative research can help us to increase our understanding how public value results from the interaction between bottom-up initiatives and governmental action. First of all, it is important to conduct more systematic case studies of interaction processes between bottom-up initiatives and local government, in order to specify the (configuration of) factors that result into productive collaboration and thus public value creation. In addition, more systematic comparisons between instances of interaction in different (administrative, socio-economic, policy) contexts are necessary to clarify the impact of context conditions on this interaction. For example, it will be very helpful to compare this interaction in the context of classical public tasks (like flood risk management) and civic goods (like the provision of local care).

The framework also helps us to detect a couple of gaps in the current research on citizen initiatives and their relation to governmental action. For example, much is known about motivation and collaborative skills, while less is known about the way interactions between citizens and officials arise and evolve over time. Socioeconomic conditions and access to resources got attention in various studies, while power asymmetry especially in the context of northwest Europe is hardly studied. Also the way initiatives organize themselves, like their legal form and their business model, are factors about which knowledge is missing. The same holds true for the role of the discursive context and the neighborhood characteristics.

The most important message of the framework is that – in order to understand how bottom-up initiatives succeed in creating public value – we cannot only suffice with focusing upon specific aspects of their internal way of working or certain elements of their interaction with local governments or
building blocks of the context in which this interaction emerges. We have to study these factors in
their mutual interaction. This implies that we have to develop more holistic and multidisciplinary
analytical lenses to study the evolution of public value creation by citizen initiatives. These lenses have
to combine both more structure-based elements (like institutional and legal aspects, organizational
factors, policy-related issues) and more behavioral and agency-based insights (about leadership,
motivations, et cetera). That brings forward important methodological challenges, because more
holistic approaches asks for methodological triangulation and thus combining methods that are
normally applied in completely different settings (for instance discursive analyses of policy and
statistical tests). At least it asks for conducting more systematic meta analyses but also developing
more inclusive and collaborative research practices based upon the principles of open science (and
thus open data).

6.3 Reflections
In many cases, governments try to provoke and enable public value creation by citizen initiatives by
appraising the virtues of civic entrepreneurship and welcoming initiatives to enter the public domain.
This kind of discursive strategies however underestimate the fact that public value creation occurs in
a much more complicated context in which both the internal qualities of an initiative, the
receptiveness of the public bureaucracy and the way in which the interaction is organized, matters.

The variety and amount of factors that influence the interaction between citizen initiatives and
governments emerge, is quite striking. It implies that realizing public value in this relationship not only
depends upon the internal characteristics of both the initiative and the agency dealing with it, but also
upon the interaction they develop and the context in which this happens. At the one hand this seems
to make ‘public value management’ in the context of bottom-up initiatives a mission impossible. If
there are so many factors that impact upon the ultimate outcome, managing this interaction seems
to be a hopeless task. At the other hand it also provides as many buttons that can be used to improve
the conditions for public value creation. The palette of possible interventions is as colorful as are the
factors that matter. More systematic research can help to develop more comprehensive assessment
tools and accompanying “dashboards” civic entrepreneurs and local governments can use to find out
which type of interventions fit into which context and trigger which effects.

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