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# CITIZEN INITIATIVE AND CIVIC SELF- ORGANISATION FOR URBAN GREENING PROJECTS

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## Abstract

Involving citizens in the development and management of spatial planning projects is on the rise. The spatial planning field is getting interested in the topic of citizen initiatives, and how these could be used to improve the quality of planning projects. Considering the recent interest of spatial planners for citizen self-organisation, knowledge needs to be acquired on its functioning in different specific contexts. This thesis research aims to determine which success factors and which relevant meta-governance strategies ensure the success of urban citizen initiatives. Based on several semi-structured interviews, a desk study research, and the use of action research, this thesis analysed two different case studies to illustrate citizen initiatives in specific contexts.

The first case study is localized in the city of Brussels, where the Agnès Varda urban community gardens initiated their self-organisation. This case study shows that without a true support from their surrounding public authorities, citizen initiatives are not able to last over time. The second case study selected takes place in the city of Rotterdam, where residents of the neighbourhood the “Oude Westen”, together with their formal citizen organisation “the Aktiegroep”, lead local sustainability projects. This second case study enabled the present thesis research to acknowledge how the combination of all success factors identified and the application of relevant meta-governance strategies, enables a citizen initiative to co-create durable outcomes.

At the end, the success factors that citizen initiatives require are: presence of a trigger, trustworthy relations, focus in interaction, locus in interaction, boundary spanning, adaptive capacity, and time availability. On the other hand, public authorities need to assist its citizens by selecting the relevant meta-governance strategies to be applied in their specific context, the strategies identified are: suggesting strategic frameworks, monitoring, framing and storytelling, presence of supporting actions, formulating playing rules, and direct interaction. The “time availability” success factor and the “direct interaction” meta-governance strategy were discovered during the case study analysis and then added to the final conceptual framework, which is based on the work from Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015).

***Keywords:*** *civic self-organisation, citizen initiative, spatial planning, public authorities.*

## Preface

I elaborated the present thesis research on “citizen initiative and civic self-organisation for urban greening projects” as part of the completion of a Masters’ programme in Spatial Planning; specialisation in Cities, Water & Climate Change at the Radboud University in Nijmegen.

My interest for sustainable development and spatial planning was raised during my Bachelor’s degree in “Trade and Sustainable Development” that I followed in the city of Brussels, at the HE2B. This interest was further specified during the Pre-Master’s programme and Master’s degree in Spatial Planning that I followed at the Radboud University, in the Nijmegen School of Management. The focus on local scale development and bottom-up initiatives was then raised through the many interesting courses that I could follow. I certainly believe that spatial planning and sustainable development are key to face the effects of climate change that are already occurring all around the world. Furthermore, considering the exponential demographic grow, I believe that to ensure the durability of projects and the appropriation of projects by citizens, it is important to involve these from the beginning and listen to their needs. This research thus aims to bring further understanding on how citizens could influence the planning practices and general projects developed at a local level.

The thesis research was conducted from April 2021 until September 2021, and was elaborated simultaneously with an internship at the Regional public organisation of Brussels Environment, in the city of Brussels. I thank the Water Department of Brussels Environment, and especially Miss E. Lavender and Mr. F. Mayer, for coaching and mentoring me during this three month internship (April-June 2021). Despite the complicated Covid-19 situation, the confidence they gave me during this period of time enabled me to get closer to the Agnès Varda urban community gardens’ case study and gather very valuable information for this thesis and my education in general.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the Radboud University for the two wonderful educational years I have been able to follow in the city of Nijmegen. I would like also to specifically thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. S. Meijerink, who has mentored me through the whole elaboration of this thesis research with very relevant comments and discussions, and without whom this thesis would not look the same.

Finally, I would like to thank all the respondents from both case studies who devoted some time to answer my questions in live or online interviews, despite of the Covid-19 situation. Their very human and ambitious projects have shown me how appreciated and respected citizen initiatives should be in our modern societies.

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## 1. Introduction to the research

Citizen initiatives is a relatively new development that is rising in modern societies. It aims at well-developed democratic decision-making processes by involving citizens on a local level. The concept of citizen initiatives refers to projects, movements, ideas, etc. initiated by citizens in the first place. This means that projects originate from a local level, where people witness an issue or develop an idea that might improve their own local living conditions. This concept relates to democratic movements that emphasize the need to empower people on a lower/local scale. Indeed, by creating local communities committed to the goal of improving their own living conditions, a new rush of innovative ideas and sustainable movements can create “good practices” that consequently can be developed and spread on a larger scale to enhance better cities. Citizen initiatives can thus be beneficial to society as a whole.

In a society that is growing fast and developing an unlimited amount of new ideas, the importance of local self-organising communities is acknowledged by public authorities. Indeed, public authorities have a direct impact on projects developing on their territory, however, they might face difficulties to manage citizens and communities on a very local level. This is why public services tend to search innovative ways to collaborate with its citizens, to produce better project developments (Bekkers & Tummers, 2018). One of these collaborative innovations is how public authorities tend to support and assist local initiatives from a distance. Civic self-organisation initiatives can be considered as dependent on the public authorities’ help to develop and grow over time. Indeed, citizen initiatives are often low-budget and informal at its beginnings, which is why they require external help.

As a result, self-organising communities must take into account external rules and limits, and respect these in order to gather strong and sustainable (public) support. The process of citizen initiatives does not only focus on the citizens themselves but also on external stakeholders that might have an influence on the shape and the ideas that are developed on a local scale. The partnership between civic self-organising communities and public authorities is thus of paramount importance.

The concept of citizen initiatives has been applied in different fields of study and more recently in the spatial planning field. It does fit spatial planning ideas as it emphasizes the need for citizen involvement, which can easily be applied to spatial planning projects initiated at a community level. The importance of citizen involvement in spatial planning projects is increasingly being recognised as it brings legitimacy to the projects and ensures the appropriation of projects by the local citizens. Until now, spatial planners have adopted techniques to increase citizen participation in a kind of top-down approach. Civic self-organising communities change this perspective towards a bottom-up approach. The role of spatial planners is essential in these projects because they ensure the link between citizens and public authorities.

Through the present thesis research, enabling and constraining factors for the success of civic self-organisation initiatives will be identified. The goal is to expand the knowledge available on citizen initiatives by considering a new and recently developed case study of community gardens. By comparing this early stage case study with an already elaborated case study that takes place in Rotterdam, common factors will be identified and analysed.

## **1.1. Research problem statement**

Participation and citizen involvement in project development and management are current challenges faced by societies all around the world. The democratic societies aim to take decisions in function of the direct preferences of its citizens and/or in their biggest interest. Bottom-up initiatives have flourished around the world for some time and are now getting increasing attention, putting forward the capacity of local actors to ensure quality projects and possibly general guidelines to be transferred and implemented at higher levels of authority. It is true that until recently, primarily top-down approaches were adopted for the development of spatial planning projects (and it is still the case in a lot of countries). The necessity to take into account all the relevant actors and initiatives for the sustainable development and management of spatial planning projects is part of a general strategy adopted by the United Nations (UN). Indeed, the UN elaborated an agenda adopting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fixing 169 targets to get the world back into the path towards sustainability (SDGs.be, 2021). These SDGs are present in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which highlights the necessity to combine bottom-up and top-down approaches in order to ensure the best quality of project management (Jiménez-Aceituno, Peterson, Norström, Wong, & Downing, 2020). Consequently, central governments are opening up in a wide range of different societies, providing a multiplicity of citizen involvement techniques for the development and management of spatial planning projects (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). This multiplicity of projects are all dependent on local contexts, which shape the possibilities for citizens to develop their own projects. The difficulty faced by public institutions and spatial planners is to find common characteristics and concepts in different projects, which all refer to different contexts. It is thus difficult to conceptualise citizen initiatives because each citizen initiative reflects a different context situation which is shaping the projects developed by citizens.

Citizen initiatives are recently being developed in our societies and need to be experienced in different contexts in order to evaluate its real added value and create general conceptual models to guide citizens, spatial planners and public authorities through the process of project development and management. Citizen initiatives, and more specifically civic self-organisation, is a poorly developed concept that requires further research and development of associated concrete examples (case studies) to conceptualise relevant characteristics and dimensions that could be generalised to other civic self-organisation projects (Rauws, 2016). Furthermore, citizen initiatives are getting an increasing attention because of the support obtained by structural arguments, highlighting the economic, social, environmental, political, and spatial benefits of these types of initiatives (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). The notion of self-organisation emphasizes the necessity for citizen communities to initiate collaboration and participation processes in order to bring change in the spatial planning processes and the management of urban green areas (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011).

Citizen initiatives are considered to improve our living environment:

- Qualitatively: by involving citizens from the start, they are likely to appropriate the project to their community, which ensures to take care of the initiative on the long run (ensures longevity). Additionally, as the central authorities can delegate some responsibilities to the local level, they obtain more time to provide quality guidelines and special attention to other more time-consuming projects.
- Quantitatively: by delegating responsibilities to the local levels and citizen communities themselves, a great variety of different projects taking place in different contexts do take place at the same time.

For these reasons and other possible benefits of citizen initiatives, policy makers and public authorities themselves are favourable to the transfer of some responsibilities towards, and the empowerment of, local citizens to foster bottom-up initiatives (Mattijssen, et al., 2017).

Furthermore, as urban areas tend to increase over time with the development of economies and the demographic explosion that is expected to happen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, provoking increasing migration flows towards cities, it is of crucial importance for public authorities to find ways to manage their territories efficiently (United Nations P. D., 2019; United Nations D. o., 2018). One solution for central governments may be to delegate some managerial responsibilities towards the local authorities and communities. Moreover, the urban expansion is often grabbing ground on natural environments that are not replicated in cities, losing thus an important area for biodiversity and other environmental services (water absorption, temperature regulation, recreational activities, etc.) (Shibu, 2009). Hence, by considering the role of civil society for the development of green areas in an urban environment, citizen initiatives might represent a unique opportunity for the sustainable development of cities (Mattijssen, et al., 2017).

The two case study that will be analysed in this thesis research represent a good opportunity to understand how citizen initiatives are developed and what limits are encountered by its members. More information on the selection of each case will be presented in Chapter 3.

To sum up, in this research, it is expected that citizen initiatives in urban areas:

- Represent an opportunity for citizens to get heard and develop project they really need on a local level
- Represent an opportunity for the governmental institutions to improve the quality and quantity of their work
- Seem necessary given the upcoming worldwide challenges of urbanisation expansion and population growth
- May be environmentally, socially and economically beneficial for society as a whole



## **1.2. Research aim and research question(s)**

### ***1.2.1. Research aim***

The aim of this research is to identify what elements are likely to ensure the successful outcome of a civic self-organisation project. In other words, this research aims to find out which characteristics of citizen initiatives are essential to produce a positive outcome. Furthermore, by considering the public authorities in the process of citizen initiative development and management, the present research aims to understand which role can be embodied by public authorities to facilitate and carry citizen projects towards success.

To a larger extend, this study will consider the place and impact of citizens living in an urban area, on their surrounding system. Bottom-up initiatives are increasingly being used to involve citizens and ensure a certain sustainability to new projects. The cases selected for the present research will consider two concrete examples of such situation. The analysis of the Brussel's case study will associate the concept of citizen initiative with the general theme of urban agriculture, which represents a sector with huge development potential and increasingly presented as the future of urban food production (Bruxelles Environnement, 2015). The analysis of the Rotterdam's case study will emphasize a larger citizen initiative, capable to lead different projects over a same neighbourhood (green, energy, etc.).

### ***1.2.2. Research questions***

The main research question of this thesis is: ***“What factors ensure the success of civic self-organisation projects, and how may public authorities enable such projects?”***

Its sub-questions are:

- How can community initiatives be defined?
- How can community initiatives be evaluated?
- What are success and failure factors for community initiatives?
- How can governments enable community initiatives?

### **1.3. Scientific and societal relevance**

#### **Scientific relevance**

This research proposal can be considered as scientifically relevant because, up until now, there has been few research that focuses on citizen self-organisation processes in the contexts of green space development (Mattijssen, et al., 2017). Considering the association of self-organisation with urban projects will provide a concrete analysis of how citizen initiatives are developing nowadays, what elements constrain such initiatives and what elements enable them. The shift from government to governance represents an opportunity for citizens to take control back at a local level, developed in function of their needs and ambitions (Taylor, 2007). The use of different case studies enables this study to consider different contexts and identify differences and similarities. Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) expressed the need for more empirical research on the topic of self-organisation in different specific contexts. According to Börzel and Risse (2010), little attention has been paid to the contribution of civic self-organisation by non-state actors. More specific knowledge should thus be developed on what enables citizen initiatives to develop in modern societies. Manzo and Perkins (2006) emphasize the need to understand the connection that citizens have with their community places, which ensures their participation and self-organisation to preserve but also develop their environment. It is essential for planners to consider specific citizen self-organisations to understand this connection between people and places.

The present thesis research will thus fill the scientific gap on citizen initiatives and the development of civic self-organisation theories in urban contexts. By studying the dynamics of civic self-organization this study also seeks to understand how spatial planning practice and the role of spatial planners are evolving in an urban environment. As explained by Mattijssen et al. (2017) spatial planners seem to be increasingly positioned between the central public authorities and the civil society networks. Following Booher and Innes (2002) power is increasingly being redistributed among different networks to enhance collaborative processes.

#### **Societal relevance**

The rising activities initiated at local levels highlight the necessity to carry out more research so as to identify the real purpose and added value of citizen-led bottom-up initiatives in an urban context. Therefore, the societal relevance lies in the idea that bottom-up initiatives are on the rise and need further exploration in different contexts (here urban green context). This research also extends the modern idea that central public power needs to be partially delegated to lower scales of authorities in order to reach the best possible outcomes on a local level.

Moreover, two cases selected and followed in Brussels and Rotterdam fit the idea of self-organisation among citizens from a same neighbourhood taking advantage of the state's incapacity to address all its governed areas. The current situation of both of these citizen initiatives reflects the idea that some central authority support is needed to the durability of the citizen self-organisation. The Brussels' case study is an ongoing case that offered good possibilities for participatory observations. On the other hand, the already completed project in Rotterdam has been selected to expand our knowledge. Both case studies give insight in the process of citizen initiatives and address their key success and failure factors.

The knowledge developed through such analysis may be used by government agencies to facilitate such initiatives, and may also be used by citizens to improve their self-organisation.

## 1.4. Chapter guide

Now that this thesis research has been fully introduced, the following chapters will address citizen initiatives from a theoretical perspective, the research methodology chosen, the analysis and its associated results, and a conclusion.

### A. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, citizen initiatives as perceived in this thesis are approached theoretically. Concretely, this chapter develops on the citizen initiatives' characteristics, on success and failure factors for citizen initiatives, on how governments perceive citizen initiatives, and what selection criteria are taken into account to evaluate these. A conceptual framework based on this theoretical information is developed at the end of the chapter and is taken as a basis for the future case study analysis.

### B. Methodology

This chapter develops information on what research strategy is used in the thesis research and how the analysis is addresses (based on what data gathering). The methodology section helps the reader understand what kind of methods are used to analyse data. The general research strategy is the case study approach.

### C. Case studies (or result chapter)

The chapter addresses the analysis and results of the present thesis research. Based on the elaborated conceptual framework and the research methods used, two citizen initiatives are analysed and compared. Thus, each component present in the conceptual framework is analysed for the two selected case studies.

### D. Discussion and Conclusion

A final chapter addresses a discussion and a conclusion to discuss the results and limitations of the present thesis research. Also, recommendations are also formulated for the two selected citizen initiatives and future researches.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Characteristics of self-organisation

Citizen initiatives can contribute to the environmental, social, and institutional resilience of cities (Buijs, et al., 2016). The concept of citizen initiatives has recently been applied to spatial planning field and has the potential to develop new organisational systems in our societies, working at a lower scale (Buijs, et al., 2016). In the literature, the term “active citizenship” can also be used to refer to citizen initiative, expressing to the ability of citizens “to organize themselves in a multiform manner, to mobilize resources and to act in the public [...] in order to protect rights and take care of common goods” (Buijs, et al., 2016, p.1).

Historically, citizen initiatives exist since the 1960s and evolved from a consulting and participating aspect towards initiatives concerned with self-organisation practices, whereby collectives of citizens develop and implement their own initiatives (Meijer & van der Krabben, 2018).

Self-organisation has an influence on the process and outcome of the citizen initiative project. In the literature, we can consider different conceptualisation of citizen initiative that all refer to the self-organisation characteristics: bottom-up development, grassroots initiatives, or tactical urbanism (Rauws, 2016). Self-organisation is also a concept which has been applied to a wide range of different fields as biology, sociology, and more recently spatial planning (Rauws, 2016). For Boonstra and Boelens (2011, p.99) self-organisation refers to “initiatives that originate in civil society itself, via autonomous community-based networks of citizens outside government control which participate in developing the ‘urban fabric’ too”. Boonstra and Boelens (2011) thus add the importance of a community-based network to launch a strong citizen initiative.

Self-organisation is not to be confused with self-governance, which focuses on interaction and decision-making processes, meanwhile the former refers back to the adaptive behaviour of urban systems and networks (Rauws, 2016). However, both concepts can be seen as different types of citizen initiatives. The concept of self-organisation can be further specified as the “spontaneous emergence of urban transformation stemming from uncoordinated and relatively independent actions by individuals or groups of citizens” (Rauws, 2016, p.352). However, citizen initiatives can change over time and shift from a more self-organisation mode to a self-governance focus.

For Boonstra and Boelens (2011) self-organisation is linked to the complexity theories, of which key features are: non-linearity, coevolution and self-organization. By linking the two concepts/theories, Boonstra and Boelens (2011) emphasize the complexity of today’s societies. For them, modern systems are composed of a large variety of different components (actors) and, as a result, need to be managed in an adaptive way. Their reasoning led them to the following definition of self-organisation: “initiatives that originate in civil society from autonomous community-based networks of citizens, who are part of the urban system but independent of government procedures” (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p.113). Again, the independence from the public authorities is thus a characteristic that is essential to the creation of a citizen initiative.

Nowadays, citizen initiatives in the spatial planning field seem to be operationalized in a sort of collaboration with public authorities. Indeed, by empowering citizen initiatives, public authorities are able to delegate some management task at a local level (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). Nevertheless, for Boonstra and Boelens (2011, p.105) the citizen initiatives keep on being “framed within the regimes and conditions of the government”. Thus, citizen initiatives tend to grow apart from the influence of direct public decisions, but it is important to remember that there is always some kind of external influence of the government on the framing of (allowed) projects.

As mentioned above, one of the most important characteristics that can be found in the concept of self-organisation is the spontaneous or unplanned aspect of the projects developed. It is conceptualised in the “self” term, as referring to a “by itself” aspect (Rauws, 2016).

Rauws (2016, p.144) defined four main characteristics of the concept of self-organisation in an urban development:

- “The actions of actors evolve without central coordination or external control into collective results
- The actions of actors are based on their individual intentions. Actors do interact and may adjust their own actions in response to the actions of others, but a collective intent is missing
- These actions can transform an urban system’s structure and functions as the assembly of uncoordinated and relatively independent actions by actors on a lower scale gives rise to spontaneously emerging reconfiguration on a system level
- The emergence of a change on a system level is very hard, if not impossible, to predict”

The type of participation can also be analysed with the “ladder of participation” developed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. This conceptualisation of participation ranges types of participation from high to low (Arnstein, 2019). Her ladder is composed of 8 levels, 1 representing no participation at all (manipulation) and 8 representing full participation (citizen control). The ladder emphasizes who has power when important decisions have to be made (Dobson, 2021). Civic self-organisation clearly belongs to the “Citizen Control” levels shown in figure 4. Thus, civic self-organisation could be representing the following levels (Dobson, 2021):

- Partnership: power is redistributed between citizens and power holders through negotiation processes. Joint committees ensure the sharing of planning and decision-making responsibilities
- Delegation: citizens possess delegated powers to make important decisions, citizens hold a majority in the committees and public authorities adopt an accountability role.
- Citizen Control: citizen’s organisations handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing programme; e.g. there are almost no intermediaries between citizens and sources of funding.

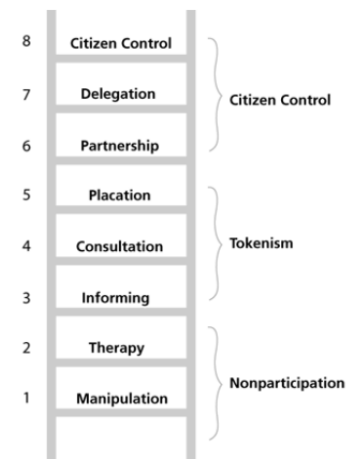


Figure 1 Arnstein's Ladder (1969), degrees of participation (Dobson, 2021)

The 8<sup>th</sup> level of Arnstein’s ladder is the closest to the thinking of Maier (2010), who considers the citizen initiatives to be a totally different alternative to the mainstream development led by the central government. Maier is thus dissociating the self-organisation of citizens from the public authorities’ and institutions’ decisions. Maier (2010) emphasizes the opposing and protesting aspect of these citizen initiatives that stand as a reaction movement to manipulative developments led by the central government. More than protesting against public authorities, citizens are then taking responsibility of the direct management of citizen projects, not depending on public actors’ involvement.

In the spatial planning field, active citizenship has been contributing to the environmental resilience development in urban environments (Buijs, et al., 2016). Greenspace creation, restoration, enhancement and maintenance efforts are some examples of citizen initiatives acting for environmental resilience. These citizen initiatives for greening projects of urban environments are also ways to express concretely citizens’ expectations for planning practices in modern societies. In many cases, these citizen initiatives have focused on the resilient maintenance of urban green spaces (Buijs, et al., 2016). In other words, citizens have been able to carry out the management of an urban green area by themselves, thanks to

their self-organisation. This focus can also be associated to the place-keeping of green spaces, which is important to ensure the long term preservation of social, environmental and economic values of these places. The green active citizenship developed by Buijs et al. (2016) is related to one of the case studies selected for this: the urban community gardens in Brussels. Indeed, as will be developed later on, these community gardens manage an urban green area by themselves, using self-organising principles.

Furthermore, Boonstra and Boelens (2011) distinguish spatial development from citizen initiatives, which are initiated by the intended end-users, meaning that the project itself is developed for the self-interest of the community. On the contrary, in the case of a usual spatial development, the initiators tend to be actors not per se involved in the original situation (e.g. external planners and authorities).

Boonstra and Boelens (2011) express the idea that the phenomenon of path dependency tends to influence the planners, which makes it difficult for them to think beyond government's ideas and involve citizens in the planning processes. Nevertheless, considering community based ideas represent an opportunity and a necessity for current spatial planners aiming to develop the most suitable urban environment to its citizens. Practices to develop this citizen involvement are taking off and represent the next step to complete in the spatial planning field.

In short, two basic understandings of citizen self-organisation/citizen initiative can be identified among the literature:

- a. **A broad definition:** emphasizing the delegation of public authorities' competences towards the citizens at a lower level. Specific tasks and responsibilities are then transferred to the local level.
- b. **A narrow definition:** emphasizing the initiating role of the citizens. The citizens are then initiators, who self-organise their community and are able to function by themselves. In such a context, public authorities are able to empower this citizen initiatives later on, once the self-organisation is well functioning.

The narrow definition of citizen initiatives is used for the purpose of the present thesis research. The case studies selected are closer to this narrow definition. To help the reader better understand this concept of citizen self-organisation, different essential characteristics of it are further developed in the following subsections.

#### ➤ Individual ambitions and rebellion

Citizen initiatives often embody a project as a reaction to context specific characteristics. A citizen initiative thus represent the individual ambitions of a specific group of people (community) as a reaction to a context specific situation.

Rauws (2016) emphasizes the emergence of new spatial configurations driven by the actors' actions themselves, which are based on individual ambitions. Taking the focus back on the "self" part of self-organisation, Rauws (2016) associates it to a "do-it-yourself" perspective, citizens fostering networks, interest groups or entrepreneurs to take action independently from the state authorities. These initiatives could result in a transfer of responsibilities from a central government towards a local citizen network. Rauws (2016, p.340) takes an interesting example to develop this idea by writing that "urban self-organisation as 'do-it-yourself' could, for example, include a group of citizens constructing a community garden for urban farming". Maier (2010) joins Rauws in his reasoning and asserts that citizen initiatives also represent an alternative to the mainstream developments directed by the central government. Citizen initiatives are thus emerging from very local and specific situations, and highlight the importance of the role played by its local individuals in the construction of a project (Maier, 2010). In that case, experts are used to initiate and mediate during the project but are not the central part of it. Thus, there is a shift in the role of local individuals, who need to accept and endorse a more active part in planning, involving more responsibilities for the planning actions (Maier, 2010).

In the same way as these individual ambitions grow among a group of citizens, there is also a possibility that the citizen initiatives adopt a rebellion approach towards the central government decisions. This rebellious character of citizen initiatives can be included in the “do-it-yourself” aspect of projects developed by Rauws (2016). The same reasoning appears in the work of Meijer and van der Krabben (2018), who address the reactive aspect of citizen initiatives. Citizen initiatives can be developed as a reaction to earlier events, a kind of shift of trajectory to move towards alternative solutions in specific contexts (Meijer & van der Krabben, 2018). In other words, people who do not agree with the central government’s decisions can create an alternative solution/project they actually believe in.

➤ Informality

Informality is another characteristic of citizen initiatives. Indeed, self-organisation processes are not based (at first) on any kind of formal rules and processes. Although informality can have a negative connotation in Northern countries, as it is associated with illegality and corruption for instance, this term also entails the reality that formal institutions are not able to provide a concrete framework for every interactions happening between policy-makers, politicians and citizens (Meijer & van der Krabben, 2018).

Practices of citizen initiatives are informal in nature but also address the informal side of governmental planning processes. Thus, in spatial planning projects, both formal and informal worlds collaborate to create the best output possible. It is important to explain both formal and informal aspects of projects (Meijer & van der Krabben, 2018):

- On the one hand, informality is needed in planning initiatives as it will have an impact on the longevity of the project. Informality can be considered important to initiate the project (the citizens expressing a need) and after the project. Indeed, if citizens can appropriate the project for their community after its materialisation, the project is likely to last over time thanks to the informal practices and uses the citizens will make of it.
- On the other hand, formality is always needed to develop spatial planning initiatives. The formal practices have, sooner or later, an impact on the recognition and conceptualisation of a project. Without formal support, citizen initiatives will not be able to last over time, as their project needs to be recognized by the public authorities and these projects also often require public funding to be realised. These conditions thus act as enabler or constrainer for citizen initiatives, which need to comply with formal norms and rules to be accepted.

➤ Spontaneous and non-linearity

The spontaneous aspect of citizen initiatives is an important dimension as it emphasizes the unpredictable aspect of these projects (from a government’s point of view). The spontaneous transformation of society emerges from the dynamic interactions that occurs among different actors in society (Rauws, 2016). The difficulty for public institutions stands in its incapacity to predict such spontaneous and non-linear character of self-organisation processes.

Boonstra and Boelens (2011) complete this idea by emphasizing the endless and continuous movement and interaction that occurs in society between people, places and institutions. All these interactions create processes of change that appear as not being controlled by any sort of institutions, resulting in spontaneous, non-linear citizen initiatives.



## ➤ Resilience

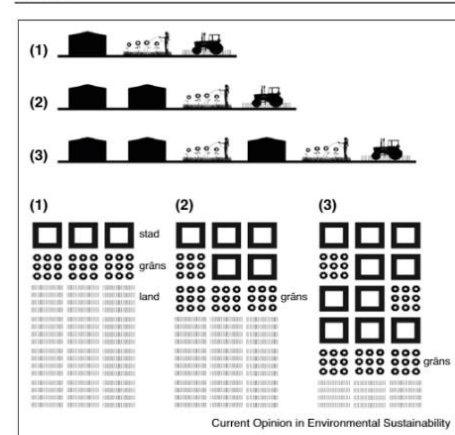
At the end, citizen initiatives under the form of self-organisation processes may increase the resilience of our societies on the environmental, institutional and social level. Environmental resilience may be reached through green space creation and maintenance efforts, which increases the diversity of urban ecosystems, resulting in increasingly resilient urban environments to climate hazards (Buijs, et al., 2016). Different forms of citizen initiatives for environmental resilience exist but the most spread practice of active citizens is take possession of an unoccupied area and to carry the maintenance of it. In the sense of the narrow definition of citizen initiatives developed for this research, it refers to the fact that citizens initiate the management of an (green) area by themselves. This sort of initiative is not understood as delegation but as citizens initiating the management of an unoccupied/not in use area. The Brussels' case study reflects this idea as it represents urban gardens that took over the management of an abandoned green site. Such practice of urban green maintenance is also referred to as “place-keeping”, and is important to apply in urban environments to ensure the continuity of social, environmental and economic values of a specific place (Buijs, et al., 2016).

Historically, place-keeping of green urban areas has been carried out by public authorities, but citizens seem to be taking over this responsibility (Mattijssen, et al., 2017). According to Mattijssen et al. (2017, p.79) place-keeping is defined as “responsive long-term management which ensures that the social, environmental and economic quality and benefits a place brings can be enjoyed by present and future generations”. Moreover, place-keeping practices take into account the different stakeholders that are involved in different projects. Involving these different stakeholders and acknowledging the complexity of each context helps citizen initiatives to ensure a certain continuity of their projects across time. Thus, place-keeping focusses on the socio-spatial processes happening within citizen communities and keeps in mind that such citizen initiatives are taking place in larger socio-political contexts (Mattijssen, et al., 2017). An interesting example to illustrate place-keeping was mentioned by Buijs et al. (2016) and refers to a project in Amsterdam, where active citizens of the nature association De Ruige Hof (The Wild Court) keep on managing successfully a green space of 13 hectares and protecting it against urban encroachment.

Furthermore, citizen initiatives also promote institutional resilience in our modern societies. Institutional resilience “is the ability of governance systems to withstand and adapt to disturbance in the socio-ecological system” (Buijs, et al., 2016, p.2). External events as extreme weather events, an economic crisis and policy plans from local authorities can disturb the context in which self-organisation processes develop (Mattijssen, et al., 2017). Institutional resilience is important to ensure continuity despite all of these contextual changes. Indeed, by showing the ability of citizens to be self-organised and the ability of communities to develop innovative projects on a local scale, citizen initiatives show resilience characteristics towards external shock-events. Moreover, the low-scale initiatives can provide concrete guidelines to the central authorities to develop their institutional resilience on a long term.

Finally, citizen initiatives put forwards the social dimension often forgotten in urban planning projects. The social resilience of cities and their inhabitants “is the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political, and environmental change” (Buijs, et al., 2016, p.3). Citizen initiatives and self-organisation are based on internal cooperation and management, taking into account the different components of a same group and take advantage of these. Following Mattijssen et al. (2017) the more social capital is included in a same community, the more it

Figure 1



Hyllie, Malmö: institutional resilience through experimentation with dynamic green spaces.

Figure 2 Urban resilience development (Buijs, et al., 2016)



is likely to be resilient to external events. A socially resilient community will thus develop a strong network, which might help if partners bring in additional resources (Mattijssen, et al., 2017). As a result, self-organisation processes can last over time and foster better social resilience in urban environments.

➤ Adaptive capacity

The resilient component of citizen initiatives has to be completed by an adaptive capacity aspect. Indeed, resilience being the capacity to last over time despite of contextual changes, for self-organisation processes, the adaptive capacity specifies that citizen initiatives are also able to adapt and change in function of external shock-events in order to remain present. As mentioned by Mattijssen et al. (2017, p.78) “citizens need to be able to adapt to contextual changes in order to cope with external political, socio-economic and cultural developments over time”.

Developing adaptive capacity is of crucial importance for citizen initiatives as urban environments and processes in society are composed of such a large variety of components and interactions that these are not possibly manageable all together (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). Boonstra and Boelens (2011) refer back to the complexity theory to explain that non-linearity, coevolution and self-organisation are aspects of society that contribute to our incapacity to predict the changes coming up. Creating a strong network, composed of a great diversity of components and based on relational principles, will help create a strong, adaptive and resilient society.

In short, citizen self-organisation is recently and increasingly being used in in the spatial planning field. Citizen initiatives focus on the ability of autonomous communities to develop innovative projects. For the purpose of this research, we consider self-organisation and citizen initiative to refer to the same idea. However, self-organisation cannot be confused with self-governance (even though there are some similarities). The ladder of participation developed by Arnstein (1969) acknowledges the citizen initiatives as reflecting a citizen control in society. Some authors might place citizen initiative at the highest level of this participation ladder, expressing the idea that community initiatives are developing apart from external influences (state, etc.). While other authors might nuance their ideas and acknowledge the fact that external actors and structures always have an influence on citizen initiatives, which is why autonomous communities and public actors need to collaborate. For this research, we consider the citizen initiatives to be initiated directly from the citizens themselves (citizens as initiators), with public authorities that may be involved later on (narrow definition).

## **2.2. Success and failure factors**

Now that a clear basis for the understanding of what a civic self-organisation is, it is important to address what will be the main focus of this research: how can self-organisation reach success? To assess if a self-organisation initiative is able to reach success, a series of factors for success or failure are identified based on relevant literature.

First of all, the framework developed by Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) (Figure 3) is totally relevant to our research. This framework helps us to understand the process and results of self-organisation. The different components of this framework express the idea that self-organisation causes the retreat of government activities in some areas to leave citizens develop their own projects in function of their needs. The concept of metagovernance is present in this framework to emphasize the fact that public authorities do not disappear from such processes, as the government shapes the context in which self-organisation occurs.

Indeed, in their framework, a series of different factors for the success of the civic self-organisation are addressed. Following Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015), self-organisation in the public administration context, “refers to non-governmental actors adapting their behaviour and to the emergence of collective action without governmental interference”. In the framework, Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015) identified several factors from different sources of literature, that shape the functioning of self-organisation (factors of success). These factors are (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2015):

First, the presence of a trigger is needed to generate the interaction between people. The nature of the trigger can be diverse but it is essential to have some kind of event that disrupts citizens and create a reaction.

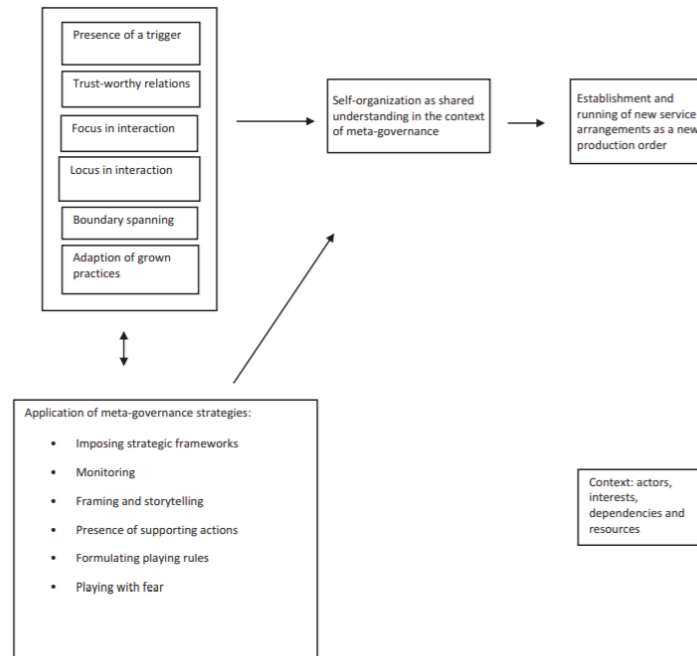
Second, to reach success, trustworthy relations need to be established between the different actors involved (social capital). Networks, groups and contacts are essential components that will help communities of people/citizens to reach their end goal. The trust that exists between individuals encourages them to participate in collective efforts.

Third, an interplay of ideas, information and experiences is needed in self-organisation movements. Moreover, a shared and clear goal is required to guide these interactions on the same path.

The fourth factor refers to the physical and virtual locus of the self-organization process. This matters refers to where the relevant information is located. Generally, we would prefer the information to be shared in order to take better informed and more comprehensive decisions. Information is not likely to be shared if it comes from many different sources.

Fifth, boundary spanning between the internal and external sphere and environment of the project is necessary. This task needs to be fulfilled by key individuals inside of the community. The boundary spanning ensures the flow of information between the local organisation and community with its external environment and surrounding actors.

The sixth and final factor for the good functioning of self-organisation initiatives refers to the possibility of mutual adaptation of practices (roles, procedures, routines, etc.). It emphasizes the need of the different actors to be able to adjust their behaviours thanks to the autonomy and flexibility that is given to them.



**Figure 1: Heuristic theoretical framework to understand process and results of self-organization**

*Figure 3 Self organisation framework (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2015)*

We consider this framework to be very relevant for the present research. However, some other factors found in other literature might be considered as well. These factors are addressed to find new success-factors or expand the scope of the already existing factors. For instance, we consider “enabling and constraining factors around the long-term engagement of citizens in place-keeping” developed by Mattijssen et al. (2017). For them, three citizen initiatives’ components are important to consider to manage a successful project, these are:

- The formalisation and institutionalisation of citizen initiatives: this can be associated to the “establishment and running of new service arrangements as a new production order” component developed by Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015). The idea is that citizens create their own organisation within the limits of the rules set by public authorities. This way, citizen initiatives can connect with the authorities and get their support. This support appears as crucial to further develop their projects and internal organisation.
- The adaptive capacity of citizen projects: which can be associated to the “adaption of grown practices” component of the reference framework by Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015). Mattijssen et al. (2017) emphasize the need for citizen initiatives to be able to adapt to external shock events that do not necessarily have a direct relation with where the self-organisation is taking place, for instance: economic crisis, local socio-demographic changes, and other global trends. Citizen initiatives need to adopt dynamic roles to adapt to such changes and evolve through time with society as a whole. It also refers back to the resilience characteristic that needs to be present in civic self-organisation projects. In the framework of Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015), the adaptive capacity can be associated to the “adaption of grown practices” factor, which is part of this citizen/community adaptation idea.

- The role of authorities to be held as a supporter acting for the success of citizen initiatives: this factor is seen as more external to the citizen initiative in itself. It is relevant to the role of public authorities to maintain self-organisation projects over time. In the framework developed by Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015), it can be associated to government strategy of “presence of supporting actions”.

This last factor identified by Mattijssen et al. (2017) is thus related to the idea that public institutions have a role to play in order to maintain citizen initiatives over time. Rauws (2016) emphasized the same believe by asserting that the surrounding authorities and institutions are perceived as enabling or constraining forces that influence the citizen initiatives. For him, these public forces are able to support and stimulate initiatives or urging groups to govern themselves. In the next section, an explanation of the role of public authorities and the identification of enabling and/or constraining factors to successful citizen initiatives, will be developed.

### 2.3. Role of public authorities

It has been addressed indirectly in the sections above, the relation of citizen initiatives with central governments and public institutions is changing and evolving in a way which guarantees more freedom and responsibilities for citizen communities and networks at a local level. However, questions remain on how involved the public authorities still are in the processes and projects developed on a low-scale.

The issue of scale is thus important and requires our attention. To analyse citizen initiatives and self-organisation it is important to take two different scales into account (Rauws, 2016):

- The lower scale: where global structures or patterns emerge from local interactions among different actors
- The larger scale: the classic governmental structures in society

In the context of citizen initiatives, the general governmental structures function as enabler or constrainer to the development of citizen projects. Public institutions are thus involved at a distance but not directly involved in the creation and management of citizen initiatives. In this logic, public authorities do not have an influence on the project themselves, but they do have an influence on the governance of the “self”, according to Rauws (2016). Indeed, by influencing individuals separately in their everyday life, public institutions maintain an indirect influence on the formation of self-organisation processes.

For Boonstra and Boelens (2011), the public institutions and the government stay in charge of the development of citizen initiatives. Indeed, governmental authorities decide about who is involved in projects, and determines the procedures to follow in order to carry out such projects (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). The term “procedural inclusion” refers to the idea that these initiatives and participation processes are defined exclusively by the government regimes. According to Boonstra and Boelens (2011), the only way out of government’s influence is self-organisation, which creates spontaneous movements and dynamics in a society composed of an endless variety of people, places and institutions. The society in itself is composed of heterogeneous networks, capable to imagine and develop new ideas to specific local contexts. In the same logic, Meijer and van der Krabben (2018, p.751) present self-governance as a possible way out of path dependency, which is defined as “the inheritance of professional, bureaucratic and political institutions that constraint current practices and perceptions about the future”. The self-organisation processes help to create non-linear events, as opposed to an institutional stability and inertia that occurs otherwise.

Taking a realistic governmental perspective, it is not possible to adopt a “one-size fits all” engagement policies to manage and develop greenspaces in an urban environment (Buijs, et al., 2016). It is thus logical to think that citizen initiatives and low scale projects are more capable to manage greenspaces in their specific locations. As a result, governments need to adopt another role, shifting from an initiator and manager role towards a supporter or constrainer role. The supporting role of public institutions, especially regional authorities, is key to the sustainable management of self-organisation processes. Authorities can ensure such support by “providing security via stable policies, formally protecting the involved spaces, allowing long-term management contracts and contributing resources” (Mattijssen, et al., 2017, p.78). This way, bottom-up initiatives might ensure a more sustainable project management of greenspaces’ place keeping, always adopting a partnership relation between public institutions and self-organised communities. Buijs et al. (2016) interestingly define the openness and sensitivity of governance towards the diversity and dynamics of active citizenship, including informal and local networks across scales, as mosaic governance (figure 4):

“Mosaic governance demands a context-sensitive approach to planning, acknowledging relations and interdependencies not only between ecological and social scales, but also between

the geographically distinct urban landscapes, community identities, and specific practices of active citizen groups across the city” (Buijs, et al., 2016, p.5).

The goal of such process is to consider each different context and actors to create the best relationships possible across scales of governance. A crucial challenge in mosaic governance is to ensure balance between the autonomy attributed to the individuals involved in the projects and the strengthening of social and ecological connectivity across all different actors (on different scales) (Buijs, et al., 2016).

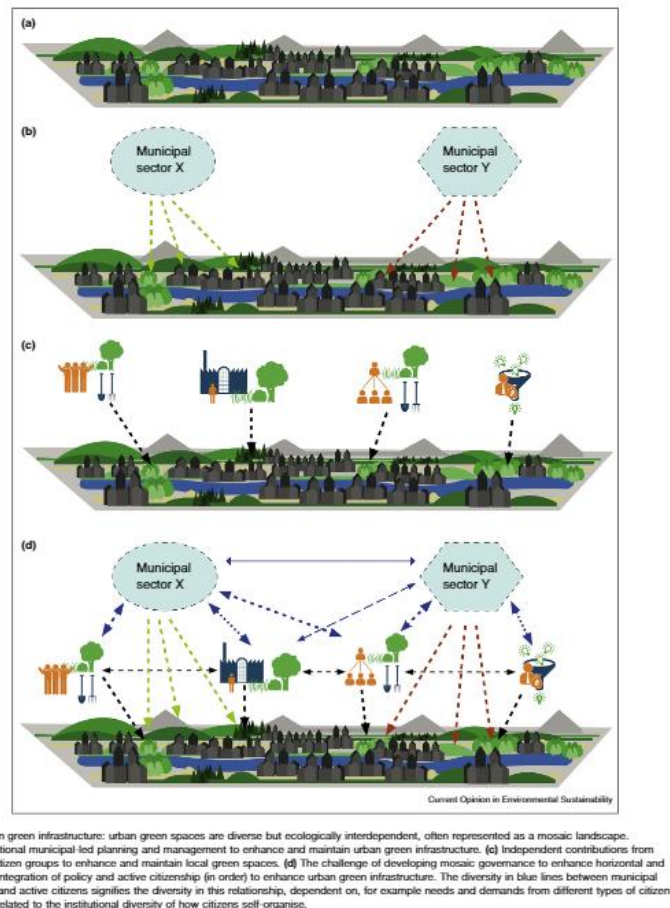


Figure 4 Mosaic governance's multiple interaction illustration (Buijs, et al., 2016)

Furthermore, Mattijssen, et al. (2017) emphasize the important role of local authorities because without their support, citizen initiatives would not be able to initiate or sustainably develop their projects. Thus, we can acknowledge a mutual dependency on cooperation between local communities, who need external support in order to succeed, and local authorities, who need constructive projects to be imagined and developed according to every local contexts. This is particularly true for the management of green spaces, which are often managed by public authorities (Mattijssen, et al., 2017).

A shift for more cooperation and partnerships between the central authorities and local communities is needed in the spatial planning sector. Indeed, for some years, participatory planning practices have tried to emerge in different urban projects but governments tend to not be open enough to adapt to initiatives coming from civil society itself (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). Such changes in citizen initiatives are needed but it is important to keep in mind that citizen activities are always being framed within the regimes and conditions of the government, which means that the government will always have a role to play in bottom-up initiatives (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). However, as expressed by Meijer and van der Krabben (2018), the context and situations of modern societies are evolving, and citizen initiatives are capable of influencing the norms and values of higher scales (e.g. government authorities). Thus,

although government regimes tend to have an influence on local initiatives, self-organisation has the potential to change government ideas, norms and values too.

### **Authorities' meta-governance strategies**

Following the framework of Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015), governmental institutions can adopt different strategies to support and/or constrain civic self-organised communities. Indeed, this framework (Figure 3) is composed of meta-governance strategies component. "Meta-governance is concerned with how political authorities promote and guide the self-organization of governance systems through rules, organizational knowledge, institutional tactics and other political strategies" (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2015, p.1066). Meta-governance acknowledges the idea that the state needs some forms of power beyond itself to sustain a government. Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg (2015) developed six meta-governance strategies which will shape the development of self-organisation initiatives.

First, strategic frameworks need to be developed for self-organising communities to comply to administrative rules ('selfregulation in the context of regulation').

Second, the state must develop procedures to monitor self-organisation processes and assess its outcomes using performance and benchmark systems.

Third, governments need to ensure shared beliefs and discourses to emerge among individuals. To reach this, governments need to use storytelling and framing to create a shared discursive context (sensemaking of actors).

Fourth, governments need to provide vital resources and support to self-organising communities, for instance: relevant information, legal assistance, financial support, a meeting place, etc.

Fifth, governments formulate the rules-of-play for the self-organising communities (which remain independent from public authorities). Governments can do so by "designing the institutional settings in which self-organisation takes place" (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2015, p.1067).

Finally, the sixth and last strategy of meta-governance for self-organisation processes "is to discipline the self-organizing process by playing with 'fear'" (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2015). The use of fear aims to scare the involved actors from taking a direction opposed to the one suggested by the central government ('shadow of hierarchy'). It emphasizes the capacity of the central government to keep its state powers even in the context of networks and non-hierarchical structures. Thus, the state can still use authority, money, information, and knowledge as means of pressure to intervene in a hierarchical way. Such pressures are expected to work because of the dependency of other actors on those state's resources.

## 2.4. Intersection and co-creation

The previous sections addressed the general ways in which the citizen initiative can be elaborated. This co-creation section highlights the intersection and the process happening between citizens and public institutions when developing citizen initiatives. Without the “co-creation” phase, citizen initiatives are not able to generate sustainable outputs.

Citizen initiatives might have the general goal of changing their surrounding institutions by disrupting the institutional work with spontaneous and innovative projects (Bisschops & Beunen, 2019). Civic self-organisation might thus play a disrupter role of the public institutional balance by involving multiplicity and pluralism perspectives in the interpretation of local contexts and understand the systems in an increasingly relational way (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). In other words, self-organisation is capable to bring key dimensions as multiplicity and relational processes to the development of new planning practices.

However, Bisschops and Beunen (2019) express the idea that citizen initiatives are still being influenced by the surrounding institutional system, which is simultaneously evolving across time. It is thus still the responsibility of public actors to foster active citizenship and its associated projects as civic self-organisation. This is especially true in the environmental sustainability sector, as it is increasingly being associated with integrated governance models (Buijs, et al., 2016). As Buijs et al. (2016) assert, local and regional authorities appear as sustainable and logical partners for the co-creation of citizen initiatives. This way, partnership and cooperation processes become more important than simply erasing the government institutions from planning processes, ensuring thus the sustainable development of planning practices in modern societies.

Co-creation, as presented by Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015), conceptualizes the idea of citizen involvement working on the same level as public institutions. Co-creation represents the need to involve inhabitants and all relevant actors in low-scale project development and implementation. Brandsen and Honingh (2018) join Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015) in their definition of three types of co-creation processes that depend on the role played by citizens, these are:

- ***Citizens as co-implementer***: the assistance of citizens is required to complete the project
- ***Citizens as co-designer***: while local governments initiate the project, citizens decide how service delivery is designed and maintained
- ***Citizens as initiators***: the government is then considered as an actor that follows and citizens take the initiatives of the projects following their local needs

Of course, one project can constitute some characteristics of these different types. The difference between co-production and co-creation concepts is not obvious, however, Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015) tend to assert that co-creation processes are related to the idea of citizens as co-designers and citizens as initiators.

In the end, the goal of co-creation process is considered to be the involvement of local citizens in project development and management. It can thus be seen as part of a democratic and transparent approach linked to modern project management practices. It is also a way for politicians and public authorities to acknowledge citizen necessities and demands, creating innovative public services that can meet citizen expectations (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2015). Co-creation emphasizes the “partner” role embodied by the civil society in public projects and the redefinition of public services.



## **2.5. Spatial planning field development**

The evolution of citizen involvement towards self-organisation in spatial planning projects tends to redefine the role of spatial planners. According to Rauws (2016), modern spatial planners should adopt different behaviour as:

- Discovering emerging patterns and global trends that will have an influence on future planning practices
- Responding to development by imagining and implementing new rules and regulations to create positive dynamics in the planning field
- Developing monitoring, evaluation and learning activities to orient the dynamics between self-organisation and planning rules

The mosaic governance concept conceptualised by Buijs et al. (2016) also modifies the context in which spatial planners are working. As a result, spatial planners need to understand and consider every different part of society “acknowledging relations and interdependencies not only between ecological and social scales, but also between the geographically distinct urban landscapes, community identities, and specific practices of active citizen groups across the city” (Buijs, et al., 2016, p.5). Thus, every project is likely to be specific to a different local context.

Participatory planning has not had great results until now (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011), which is why the added value of citizen initiative and self-organisation needs to be considered. Citizen initiatives enable projects to be: socially coherent in an increasingly fragmented society, increasing the spatial quality of the citizen’s environment, and enhancing economic robustness on the long run (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). Today, spatial planners need to consider their projects to be built in partnership with local populations, delegating some tasks to local capable community individuals. Collaboration is thus necessary between the national or regional level with the local level, emphasizing here the necessity of both governmental and citizens to get involved. The interaction between both levels has, until now, aimed at making citizens participate and was used as an instrument of progress in the political sphere (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011), which considered the government’s role as leading actor to transfer its objectives into spatial planning processes. The issue with this reasoning is that spatial planners then suffer from path-dependency and are not able to think beyond the government’s rules. Citizen initiatives and self-organisation’s ambition is to reverse this idea, taking into primarily account the objectives of the citizens, without a total abolition of government-led planning (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). Spatial planners, thus, in their approach, need to leave the public administration comfort zone in order to fully understand citizens’ expectations. The work of the planners is then to consider the appropriate way to handle the planning projects with an unbiased mind and reach the best outcome possible taking into account self-organisation principles.

“By acknowledging self-organization, planning will open up to all the multiplicity and pluralism present in society, and thus move away from the dilemmas concerning participation, geographical, institutional and procedural inclusion” (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p.117).

## 2.6. How can citizen initiatives be evaluated?

Criteria to evaluate the outcome of citizen initiatives can vary in function of the specific cases studied. For the present research, we aim to evaluate the citizen initiative as being successful or not. The notion of success can appear as relatively subjective. One way to perceive it is to consider a citizen initiative to be successful over time if it actually goes through and reaches its goal(s) (e.g. greening of a street or placing of solar panels). The success of citizen initiatives could also be evaluated based on the population's opinion and perception (Marlow, Miller, & Pitts, 2007). Indeed, a civic self-organisation can be evaluated by asking every person individually if he/she believes that the citizen initiative is a success or failure. Considering the data available for the two citizen initiatives selected, this research will evaluate them based on two different evaluation criteria.

In fact, identifying the dependent variables for the conceptual model of the present thesis research enables us to define how the two selected citizen initiatives can be evaluated. It is important to know how a citizen initiative can be evaluated in order to identify what a successful outcome is considered to be for civic self-organisation. The two dependent variables that are identified to evaluate the citizen initiative itself are:

1. *Formalisation and institutionalisation of a citizen initiative*

The citizen initiative is formalised and institutionalised as a result from the interaction between citizens and public authorities, and the co-creation processes. This variable is taken from the work of Mattijssen et al. (2017) and can be linked to the idea of Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015, p.1064), who state that: "self-organization can be defined as a process of shared understanding that results in the emergence of ordered structures". It reflects the idea that the interaction between citizens and public institutions tends to introduce rules and shape self-organizing communities in a more formalised organisation recognized by the state.

2. *Production of new spatial planning service arrangements*

Spatial planning service arrangements (tools, methodologies, etc.) are developed and could be used for future citizen initiatives' development and management. This second dependent variable is the product of my own thinking, taking a spatial planning perspective. It is true that in the context of spatial planning and citizen initiative management, new knowledge is currently being developed, with a lot of different methods and tools available to assist civic self-organised communities. As a result, depending on the specific context, new spatial planning service arrangements (tools, methodologies, etc.) can be developed and applied to other similar projects.

To sum up, many evaluation criteria could be used to evaluate the success or failure of a citizen initiative. For the purpose of this research, if a citizen initiative does generate formalisation processes and new spatial planning service arrangements, it will be considered as successful. Consequently, this research will try to find out which success factors (taken from the literature and developed above) do (or do not) have an influence on these two dependent variables.

## 2.7. Conceptual Framework

Based on the different elements and concepts developed in the previous section, I was able to elaborate a conceptual framework that will guide the rest of my research and analysis of the case studies. Through this conceptual framework, the idea is to understand and verify what factors of self-organisation and understand what strategies followed by the public authorities lead to a successful citizen initiative. As you can notice, this conceptual framework is largely based on the framework developed by Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015). However, analysing different literature also related to self-organisation, I decided to add and/or replace some concepts in their framework.

The first component of this conceptual framework is related to the success factors of self-organisation citizen initiatives. This component was taken from the framework of Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015). Citizen initiatives need to acknowledge these factors and make sure to respect them in order to reach a successful outcome. The following factors are identified:

- Presence of a trigger to generate interaction between relevant actors.
- Trust-worthy relations to establish and build a strong social capital.
- Focus in interaction: set a clear and shared goal.
- Locus in interaction: centralize and share the information and knowledge available.
- Boundary spanning between the internal and external environment of a citizen initiative.
- Adaptive capacity: need for flexibility and autonomy provided by external organisations. This factor has been slightly modified from the framework from Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015), which identified an “adaption of grown practices”. In the present conceptual framework, I will refer to the factor of “adaptive capacity” originating from the work of Mattijssen et al. (2017). This change has been made because the “adaptive capacity” seems to include the “adaption of grown practices” notion. Furthermore, the “adaptive capacity” seems to be very relevant for civic self-organised communities, as these need to adapt their organisation to their surrounding context.

The second component of this framework relates the different strategies used by the public authorities to ensure the success of civic self-organisation projects. These strategies are applied following a meta-governance approach adopted by public authorities in the context of citizen initiatives. All these strategies originate from the framework developed by Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) and entails the thoughts of other literature too. The different strategies are:

- Imposing strategic frameworks to make sure that civic self-organisation follow administrative rules.
- Monitoring and assessing citizen initiatives using performance and benchmarking tools.
- Framing and storytelling to reach shared believes and discourses.
- Presence of supporting actions: public authorities need to support ambitious citizen initiatives to ensure their continuity over time.
- Formulating playing rules: designing the institutional context in which self-organisation takes place.
- Playing with fear to discipline the self-organizing communities and ensure their compliance to the rules.

The interaction between the two components developed above (self organisation success factors and meta-governance strategies) does create, as Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) mentioned in their framework, a shared understanding of civic self-organisation processes in the context of meta-governance. For Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) this component emphasizes the fact that both group of actors, citizens on the one hand, and public institutions on the other hand, share the same

understanding, definitions and organisational ideas concerning the civic self organisation project. In other words, a basic and common understanding of self-organisation is shared among both groups of actors to ensure further functional cooperation and co-creation processes.

Furthermore, following this interaction, I added a component to the framework by Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015): co-creation. Co-creation, as mentioned in the previous theoretical section is important in this conceptual framework because it emphasizes the fact that citizen involvement is working on the same level as public institutions. Therefore, the result of this interaction, cooperation and co-creation between citizens and authorities will create two different outputs conceptualized in this framework.

First, taken from the framework developed by Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015), the co-creation process happening between citizens and authorities will establish new forms of service arrangements on a local level. Indeed, the empowerment of civic self-organisation will create new forms of local set-ups capable to be managed at a distance from the central government. By “establishment of new service arrangements”, it is assumed that Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) aim to emphasize the creation of new official organisational modes on local levels. In the present conceptual framework, these new service arrangements’ idea is included in the “formalisation and institutionalisation” component. The “formalisation and institutionalization” component was developed by Mattijssen et al. (2017) and refers to the processes through which the citizen organisations respect external rules set by the public authorities in order to be recognized and eventually get support. By formalisation and institutionalisation, Mattijssen et al. (2017) join Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) in their idea that new organisations are existing on the local level. The formalisation and institutionalisation of citizen initiatives that, at first, might appear as rather informal, enable the public actors to work with and assist these civic self-organisation processes. Formalisation and institutionalisations are thus the result of the citizen initiatives and the co-creation between citizen communities and public actors.

On the other hand, I decided to add another possible outcome which is more related to the spatial planning field. Indeed, when addressing spatial management and organisation on a local level, it often requires the input of spatial planners. The involvement of spatial planners in the process of civic self-organisation help create some concrete link between the citizens and public authorities. Additionally, the spatial planning field will take advantage of these processes to develop new tools and services for future spatial planning projects development in similar situations, cooperating with civil society. The final component is thus entitled: “new spatial planning service arrangements” and emphasizes the idea that citizen initiative project development will help the spatial planning field to develop concrete techniques, services and tools capable to assist the citizens in the best way possible.

Note that, as a Master student in Spatial Planning, I purposely decided to include a spatial planning aspect to this conceptual framework. This decision is concretely conceptualized by this last component mentioned above, but keep in mind that the spatial planning perspective and influence is present through the whole process of citizen initiative development. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the spatial planner is expected to adopt a linking role between actors in order to facilitate the co-creation processes to reach the most appropriate outcome(s).

Finally, as mentioned in the explanation on the public authority component, all the elements present above are considered to be happening in a surrounding context/system, which has an influence on them. This context itself is shaped by the multiplicity of networks interactions who have shaped urban areas over the years. For the meta-governance approach the context has an influence on the importance of

some strategies over others. This contextual component is defined by the historic development of a specific urban environment, and this surrounding system is thus also developing with time.

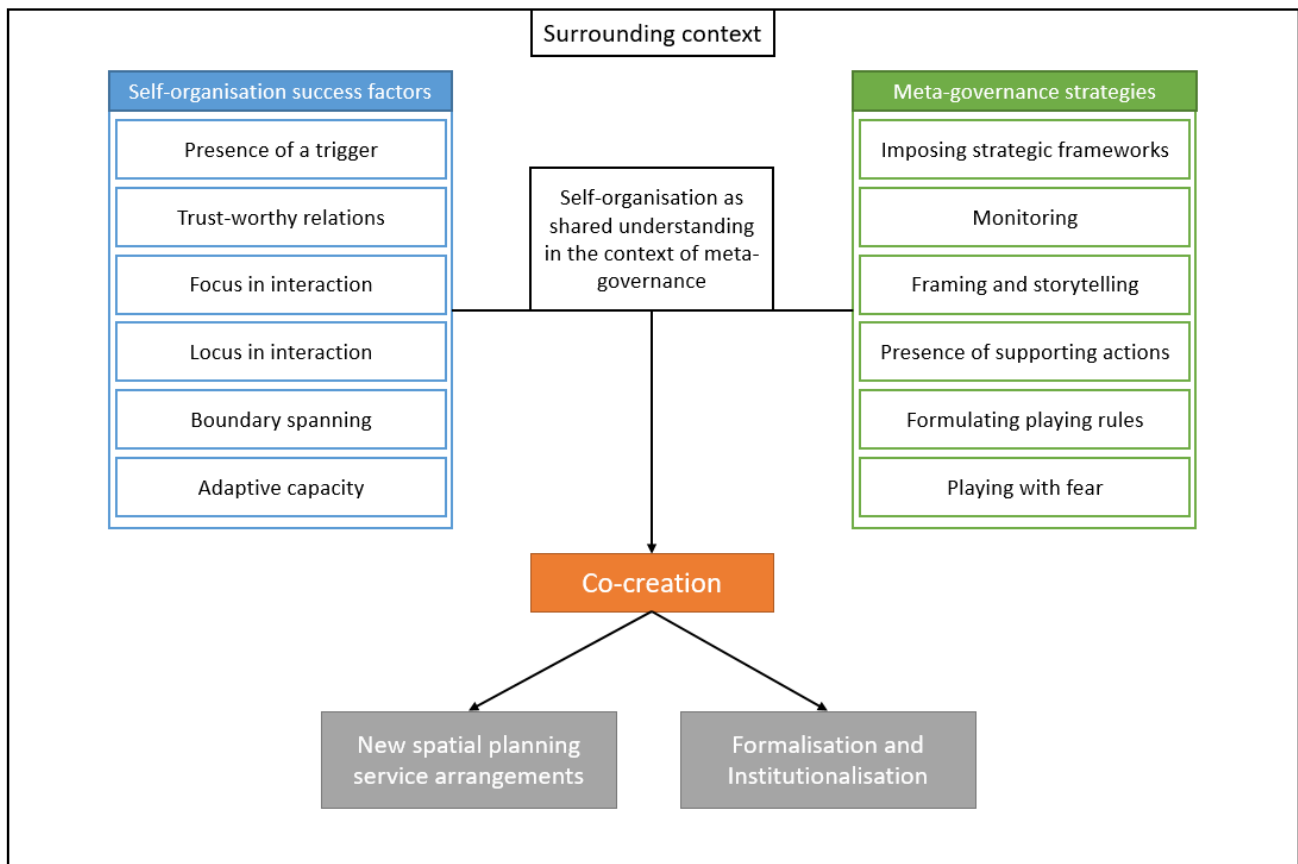


Figure 5 Conceptual Framework

## 2.8. Operationalisation

3. Self-organisation success factor	Operationalisation of the concept
<b>Presence of a trigger</b>	<i>Problem perception (what and when)</i> What triggered the community to self-organise?
<b>Trust-worthy relations</b>	<i>Quality of communication</i> Do community members interact regularly? How is communication managed within the community?
<b>Focus in interaction</b>	<i>Internal interactions</i> Do citizens share thoughts and ideas? Is the problem perceived the same way by all the community members? Is it shared?
<b>Locus in interaction</b>	<i>Centralisation of information</i> Physical and/or online place for interaction? Does everyone have access to the same information?
<b>Boundary spanning</b>	<i>Relation with external (private) actors</i> How is the relation with external actors? How many external actors are involved in the citizen initiative?
<b>Adaptive capacity</b>	<i>Freedom in action</i> Are the citizens free to implement public-guidelines as they want?
Meta-governance strategies	Evaluation criteria's
<b>Imposing strategic frameworks</b>	<i>Organisational models provided</i> What organisational models are the public institutions providing to the citizens? How are these models imposed?
<b>Monitoring</b>	<i>Public institutions' monitoring activities</i> How does the public authority monitor the citizen initiatives? Through what means?
<b>Framing and storytelling</b>	<i>Influence</i> How are the public authorities influencing and framing the citizens in their self-organisation
<b>Presence of supporting actions</b>	<i>Support provided</i> How does the public institution support citizen initiatives? What tools are at the disposal of the citizens?
<b>Formulating playing rules</b>	<i>Rules</i> What rules have to be integrated by the citizen initiatives?
<b>Playing with fear</b>	<i>Public authorities' force</i> How do the public institution ensure the compliance with the rules?

<b>Co-creation</b>	<i>Citizens as co-implementer</i> <i>Citizens as co-designer</i> <i>Citizens as initiators</i>
<b>New spatial planning services</b>	<p>Can planning lessons be acquired during a project development?</p> <p>Does the citizen initiative produce productive outputs that can be used for the management of future citizen initiatives and for future planning projects?</p> <p>Does/did this citizen initiative bring knowledge to spatial planners on how to manage citizen initiatives? E.g. methodologies, identification of needs, etc.</p>
<b>Formalisation and institutionalisation</b>	<p>Organisation of a formal structure for the civic self-organisation</p>

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research strategy

This thesis research will make use of qualitative research methods, more specifically case study research and action research. The goal of my research is to elaborate a research on concrete civic self-organisation projects capable to emphasize the different factors necessary to reach a successful outcome. The present research will refer to two different case studies which are likely to help identify essential success factors.

The case study research strategy is often stereotyped as a non-serious research strategy that is only used for exploratory researches, as a research method which lead to vague conclusions and as a research method that is used as a last resort method. According to Yin (1981) these arguments are irrelevant and avoid all other constructive arguments in favour of case study research methods that address the complexity and relevance of case studies' oriented researches. According to Yin (1992) the case study method is used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, to research on the blurry boundaries that can exist between a phenomenon and a specific context, and/or to use multiple sources of evidence. Yin (1981) ensures that case study methods can be also be considered for descriptive and explanatory researches, thus not only exploratory studies. The explanatory aspects that a case study analysis is composed of can then be used to make causal interpretations.

The case study is expected to be used in order to address topics as: organizational decision-making, community studies, innovative projects, family and individual life histories, economic development, and housing structures and markets (Yin, 1981). The case study methods are also increasingly being encountered in evaluation studies. Furthermore, the need and use of a case study approach arises whenever (Yin, 1981, p.98):

- “an empirical inquiry must examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when”
- “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”

A researcher can adopt a large range of different research strategies, but it is important to consider the multiple development possibilities that can be considered with a case study approach (explanatory, descriptive and exploratory). For Yin (1981) it is important to acknowledge and recognize the case study research strategy with its own set of designs, and thus not as a sort of experimental research strategy. The selection of case studies can follow two basic types of designs: single-case and multiple-case design. The single case design is generally used to test a theory for example, testing the theory in a specific context. On the other hand, a multiple-case study design is appropriate to be used “when the same phenomenon is thought to exist in a variety of situations” (Yin, 1981, p.101). In the multiple-case scenario, different case studies are analysed to draw conclusions from a group of cases treating the same topic. It is important to further specify that within the case design selected (single or multiple) the main topics of research and the types of individuals that are expected to provide further information to the research need to be explicit.

The data collection procedure for a case study research can originate from different sources (Yin, 1981):

- face-to-face interviews with key informants;
- telephone interviews with other informants;
- agency records (including local statistical information);
- project documents and memoranda;
- illustrative materials (e.g., newsletters and other publications that form



- part of an organization's history); and
- on-site observations

Also, the analysis and comparison of the data collected has to take place already during the data collection process itself (Yin, 1992).

For the purpose of the present research, the case study methods aims to:

- Explore the relatively new phenomenon of citizen initiatives and better understand it
- Explain how such citizen initiatives are taking place and are managed
- Describe concretely the context and situation in which such initiatives are taking place

The present research chooses to analyse multiple cases (two) linked to the same topic (civic self-organisation) in order to draw conclusions and learn more about specific contexts and common elements. The research method can thus be further specified as being a case-comparison aiming to explain both cases selected and compare results from one to the other case. It can also be emphasized that the cases will help verify the conceptual framework developed in the previous section, using an already existing framework combined with additional theoretical components.

There are a set of reasons why the case study research strategy is more appropriate for the present research. Considering the recent academic interest for the theme of citizen initiative, case study research seems appropriate as it is used following an exploratory perspective. Indeed, through the cases that will be analysed, this research will find out about specific context having (or not) an influence on the success factors of civic self-organisation projects. The arguments to use case study research for this thesis are:

First, as stated above, the goal is to investigate one or more specific contexts (Yin, 1981), capable to teach a researcher on concrete characteristics and success factors that might have an influence on the outcome of a citizen initiative. Each case reflects a specific surrounding system that is expected to have an influence on the community project itself. The specific context is composed of all sorts of elements: economic interests, geographical location, political interests, etc. The case study research method thus enables the consideration of citizen initiatives being developed in specific local context. By analysing different contexts and different citizen projects, common characteristics and success factors can be identified to guide future researches and future citizen initiatives taking place in the same context.

Second, the case study research enables the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of different projects. By focusing on few cases only, the researcher is then able to get more details than studies considering an important amount of cases. The in-depth understanding takes into account details that might be important to consider in a thesis research.

Third, for the present research, starting from concrete cases of citizen initiative enable the researcher to acknowledge the similarities and identify a set of factors that could be applicable to other future case studies evolving in similar contexts. Having a good knowledge on each case will enable the researcher to identify specific factors influencing the success or failure of a citizen initiative.

Fourth, the present research uses case study research methods because of an access to the data. As the researcher participated to an internship project linked to a community garden project in Brussels, this same project will be analysed. The Brussels' citizen initiative is at a rather early stage of its project development (rainwater harvesting project), which is why a second, more elaborated, case study is selected. On the basis of the analysis of the well-functioning

Rotterdam's case study, lessons will be drawn for the early-stage Brussels' case study. Indeed, the essential success factors and meta-governance strategies used in the Oude Westen's case study will be taken as a basis to consider the Brussels' community gardens case study.

Additionally to the case study research, action research will be carried out for this research. The action research method assumes that the researcher is involved and creates some kind of relation with the participants. The goal of the researcher is to collaborate with the relevant stakeholders in order to gather the best information possible. This research method is chosen to gather the best information in relation to the case study research: by being involved and interacting directly with the citizens, the researcher is able to better grasp the context and the development of a citizen initiative.

## 3.2. Selection criteria

### 3.2.1. *Case studies*

Concerning the choice of the two case studies, some selection criteria were elaborated in order to find relevant cases for this study. The following criteria determine the characteristics of the case studies that had to be selected:

1. Self-organisation: the citizens must be organised internally, leading their projects with an internal organisation, which should be managed independently from external actors.
2. Narrow definition of citizen initiatives: as addressed previously, the narrow definition of citizen initiative is taken as basic understanding for this research. This is to say that the project needs to be initiated by citizens themselves, who self-organise their own community without the involvement of public institutions (at first).
3. European (same functioning system): in order to be able to compare them in some aspects, the aim is to find two cases with similar surrounding systems, the easiest way to formulate this is to find cases from the same geographical region (in Europe). However, the contexts of the two cases cannot be exactly the same, each case is different of course, and analysing such differences and similarities between cases is the whole point of this research.
4. Climate change related project: the central project topics are expected to threat climate change issues in urban areas. The citizen initiatives should have the aim to face climate change issues and find innovative and suitable solutions.
5. One case at an early-stage and another already elaborated: selecting an early-stage case study enables this research to acquire a concrete idea of how such citizen self-organisation develop, and offers opportunities for doing action research. On the other hand, an already elaborated case study brings experience and knowledge to the management of such initiative on the long term. Comparing both case studies could then bring valuable lessons about the initiating and management of citizen initiatives.

The two case studies selected are:

- A citizen initiative taking place in the city of Brussels, Belgium. This citizen initiative consists of an urban community garden which is facing severe drought issues annually and requires the public authorities' help in order to find a solution. This community is self-organised and tried to find solutions on its own, but faced multiple difficulties (financial, organisational, relation with the municipality, etc.). The fact that I realised an internship directly related to these community gardens (during the same period as the elaboration of this thesis) enabled me to have an easy access to relevant information. Furthermore, this internship also enabled me to have direct contacts with the Agnès Varda gardeners and assist to their meetings (action research). Through the identification of some self-organising processes and a series of interviews, this case study represents a good early-stage citizen initiative to analyse.
  1. Self-organisation: Yes, the gardeners developed an internal organisation.
  2. Narrow definition of citizen initiatives: Yes, the self-organisation was initiated by the gardeners to preserve their area.
  3. European (same functioning system): Yes, Brussels.
  4. Climate change related project: Yes, the preservation of a green area, rich biodiversity.
  5. One case at an early-stage and another already elaborated: Yes, early-stage case study.

- A case related to the development of a specific neighbourhood in Rotterdam: het Oude Westen. This neighbourhood, thanks to its very active and engaged citizens, wants to take the lead regarding sustainability initiatives. Their goal is to do so by collaborating with the municipality. Het Oude Westen also developed a program with different themes the citizens want to develop in their neighbourhood: green areas, energy, circular economy, property and community square (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). The aim of this case analysis, is to focus on their self-organising system, on how their self-organisation is working. The Aktiegroep (the citizens' organisation) represents the core self-organising element in this neighbourhood, which leads the residents to develop neighbourhood projects. This Aktiegroep organisation will thus be analysed and compared to the Brussels' self-organisation.
  1. Self-organisation: Yes, the Aktiegroep represents this self-organisation.
  2. Narrow definition of citizen initiatives: Yes, the self-organisation was initiated by the neighbourhood's residents, and, later on, supported by the municipality.
  3. European (same functioning system): Yes, Rotterdam (Belgium and the Netherlands do not have major functional differences in term of citizen initiative).
  4. Climate change related project: Yes, the neighbourhood leads all kind of projects to make it more sustainable.
  5. One case at an early-stage and another already elaborated: Yes, already elaborated case study.

### **3.2.2. Interviewees**

The selection of relevant respondents is crucial to this study, as they bring the most detailed information that is being used for the case study analysis.

#### ***Respondents' selection criteria***

To learn the most relevant information from both case studies, the following interviewees' profiles were contacted:

- I. Relevant internal actor(s), with knowledge on the citizen initiative from the inside (residents of the area, gardeners, etc.). The goal being to obtain the most information possible about the management (from the inside) of the citizen initiative in the past and present.
- II. Relevant external actor(s), who is/are not part of the internal citizen self-organisation, nor represents a public institution. This interviewee must have in-depth knowledge about citizen initiatives in general, or on the specific citizen initiative this study is following.
- III. The qualified public institution employee(s) in charge of managing the specific citizen initiative. Through this/these interview(s), this research will gather relevant information concerning the public institution's point of view. The answers collected will tell more about the meta-governance strategies used by the surrounding public institutions.

Note that, considering the early stage of the Brussels' case study, less information could be found online, during the case study. On the other hand, plenty of relevant information could be found online for the Rotterdam's case study. This explains why more interviews were conducted for the Brussels' case study than for the Rotterdam's case study. The interview guides can be found in the appendix n°1.

## Respondents

	Role description	What is the added value of this respondent's intervention?
<b>Andrea Urbina Padina</b> <i>Brussels</i>	Employee of Brussels Environment (BE), the regional public institution in charge of environment management over the whole city of Brussels (Bruxelles Environnement, 2021). Her role is to set participatory processes up when new green spaces are being developed and planned.	The perspective of BE enables us to get a concrete idea of how citizen initiatives are usually managed in the city of Brussels.
<b>Joelle van Bambeke</b> <i>Brussels</i>	Another employee of BE. She manages some citizens' collective projects, including urban gardens. She manages an annual call for projects called "inspirons le quartier" (inspire de the neighbourhood) (Bruxelles Environnement, 2021), where citizen initiatives are encouraged to develop their own projects with the support of BE.	Her input represents BE's ideas, more specifically how calls for projects are organised to support citizen communities.
<b>Anaïs Camus</b> <i>Brussels</i>	The alderwoman that acts as the owner of the Agnès Varda site, where the community gardens are located. She manages relatively little citizen initiatives as such but she is in charge of the whole Agnès Varda site, thus inherited from the management of the community gardens' initiative too.	Her point of view enables us to identify which strategies are currently being used to assist the gardeners and how the collaboration between the two actors is functioning.
<b>Pauline Lemaire</b> <i>Brussels</i>	Worker for an asbl (a non-profit organisation) called "le début des haricots" (LDDH). Annually, her asbl follows about 10 to 15 citizen initiatives (mainly community gardens) in the city of Brussels.	Her input is important to have a kind of neutral opinion on how citizen initiatives are and should be managed on the ground and within public institutions.
<b>Catherine Montondo</b> <i>Brussels</i>	She is considered as the leader of the community gardens Agnès Varda, she is the one leading the group of the gardeners to organise the citizen initiative and ensure the relationship with the municipality of Ixelles.	Her point of view is very interesting to this study, as she has local knowledge about how things evolved in the community and what the state of the urban garden development currently is.
<b>Alice Schuermans</b> <i>Brussels</i>	A gardener who was previously in charge of the community gardens' self-organisation. She was a very active member of the community after the struggle with the municipality, together with Catherine Montondo.	Her point of view brings us some understanding about how the management of the community gardens evolved during and after the struggle with the municipality.
<b>Dan Wattiau</b> <i>Brussels</i>	A gardener, who joined the community gardens about ten years ago. His plot has been facing some internal (ongoing) conflicts with one of its members for some time.	His point of view can bring knowledge about the conflict management in the community gardens.

<b>Petra van den Berg</b> <i>Rotterdam</i>	Petra van den Berg is a community worker, working at the Aktiegroep for the neighbourhood of the Oude Westen. She has been working as a community worker in the Oude Westen since 1986.	Her interview enables this study to obtain trust-worthy information on the way projects are managed in the neighbourhood of the Oude Westen. The Aktiegroep is the main component of the Rotterdam's case study that interests this study as it fully represent the citizen self-organising aspect of this citizen initiative.
<b>Hans Hazenak</b> <i>Rotterdam</i>	Former project coordinator for the municipality of Rotterdam, in the neighbourhood of the Oude Westen. He has a perfect understanding of how processes of citizen initiatives are being handled by the public authorities and helps the neighbourhood with this types of questions.	His input is very important to this research as he completes the information given by Petra van den Berge by focusing on the relationship established with the municipality of Rotterdam.
<b>Daphne Hoekman</b> <i>Rotterdam</i>	Daphne Hoekman is an urban planner from the municipality of Rotterdam for the Oude Westen, taking over the area for her colleague who was not available. Daphne could not reveal me specific details concerning the evolution of the support given to the Oude Westen, however, she is currently working on another similar citizen initiative that reveal how the municipality deals with citizen self-organisation.	The position of the Rotterdam's municipality concerning citizen initiatives is essential to understand how the Oude Westen is being assisted by public authorities.

### 3.3. Research methods, data collection and data analysis

The two case studies will be analysed on basis on different research methods and data collection:

- I. Action research is carried out for the Brussels' case study.

Approach	Main goal	Key characteristic
Cooperative inquiry	Can be democratization or pragmatic	Division between researcher and practitioner becomes blurred
Participatory action research	Conscientization, enlightenment, and emancipation	Aims to improve the position of disadvantaged groups
Action science	Identifying the theories that actors use to guide their behaviour	Reflection on action strategies (single-loop learning) and mechanisms that underlie action (double-loop learning)
Appreciative inquiry	Contribute to social action through enthusiasm and stressing positive elements	Draws on positive developments (instead of critical reflection)
Learning evaluation	Evaluation and learning	Constant interaction between evaluator and evaluated

*Figure 6 Main differences between five approaches to action research (Van Buuren, van Vliet, & Eshuis, 2014)*

Action research methodology is seen as a combination between practice-driven research, meaning that the stakeholders are the primary source of information and the researcher approaches them in a collaborative way, and theoretically informed scientific research (Van Buuren, van Vliet, & Eshuis, 2014). The scientific quality and scientific knowledge development of such research differentiates action research from general consultancy methods. As a result, the goal is to co-produce scientific knowledge by interacting with and involving relevant stakeholders. Action theory is a relatively recently developed methodology that finds its roots in Marxists theories (understanding the world and changing it), Lewin's research on organisational change, and other theories such as critical theories (aims at social change), constructionist theory (people learn most effectively by doing and engaging in action), systems thinking, complexity theory, etc. (Van Buuren, van Vliet, & Eshuis, 2014). Hence, action research aims to improve a real-world situation and acquiring knowledge, it does so by building "theories within the practice context itself and testing them through intervention experiments" (Van Buuren, van Vliet, & Eshuis, 2014, p.4). The partnership between action researchers and participants/ members of a system, is of prior importance for to carry out action research. The involvement of practitioners in action research processes do facilitate the gathering of relevant data in a relatively easy way. Different approaches to action research are possible to adopt, for the case study selected, a combination of Participatory action research and Appreciative inquiry seems the most logical.

Different levels of interaction and involvement during action research do exist, taking into account the stakeholders participating and the depth of interaction (information, consultation, co-decision, and co-production). For the Brussels' community garden case study, level 1 and (through the present research) level 2 (Figure 7) are describing best my activities as action researcher:

Action research method has been carried out during the whole period of my internship and the elaboration of this thesis research. I assisted to formal meetings between the gardeners and Brussels Environment (public institution for the management of the environment in Brussels), and to formal and informal meetings between the gardeners themselves. During these meetings I adopted an observation role when discussions were held about their internal organisation. When the topic of water was addressed, I tended to ensure the link between the gardeners and Brussels Environment.

Level	Action		Explanation
	Width of interaction	Depth of interaction	
<b>Level 0 (not action research)</b>	Selected co-researchers	Observation	There is no actual intervention but only (unobtrusive) observation of what is going on
<b>Level 1</b>	Selected expert administrators	Participatory observation	Researchers take part in the practices they observe, but they do not explicitly intervene in the situation to change practices and processes
<b>Level 2</b>	Selected professional stakeholders (incl. administrators)	Reflection	Based upon their observations and analysis researchers give their feedback to practitioners in order to improve practice
<b>Level 3</b>	Selected professional and lay stakeholders	Intervention	Researchers develop theory-based interventions in order to test hypotheses and assumptions
<b>Level 4</b>	Interaction open to all actors (self-selection by actors)	Experimentation	Researchers develop theory-based interventions in order to test hypotheses and assumptions

Figure 7 Levels of involvement during action research (Van Buuren, van Vliet, & Eshuis, 2014)

- II. Desk research and semi-structured interviews. These different qualitative research methods used for this case studies complete each other in order to fully prepare the data to the comparison between cases.

The data collection consists of two different sources in order to analyse properly the different case studies. First, a desk research is carried out in order to find out relevant information about the both cases. Second, I conducted several interviews with relevant actors involved in each project. Those interviews aim to gather more specific information to this thesis research, and gather data that might be more difficult to encounter during the desk research. The interviews are semi-structured so that the interviewees can develop their own thinking and own perspectives. The interviewees are selected and represent different competences in the projects analysed. Combined with the action research method, the data gathered is composed of a diverse set of different points of view. Following the conducted semi-structured interviews, the information gathered might be completed with new sources of information suggested by the interviewees. These interviews are then transcribed and coded in a Word document for the final analysis. The interviewees' answers are categorized following each different component identified in the conceptual framework (following the 2.8 "operationalisation"). The coding of all answers enabled to organise the answers and to start each case study analysis.

The information gathered is thus analysed with the conceptual framework developed in the previous section. The data gathered helps verify the conceptual framework designed for this thesis research.



### **3.4. Validity and reliability of the research**

The quality of the present research can be evaluated following its reliability and validity. The reliability refers to accuracy and the consistency of the measures of the research, and the validity focuses on having a valid contribution to the existing scientific knowledge (van Thiel, 2014).

The reliability of this research relies in the accuracy and consistency with which the different variables will be measured (van Thiel, 2014). The set of semi-structured interviews carried out can bring accuracy to the research as the qualitative information gathered from different interviewees will be comparable. The research will be difficult to repeat exactly, as we are dealing with qualitative research. To ensure the reliability of this research, the desk study information will originate from verified academic sources. Furthermore, the conducted interviews will be transcribed and made available to expose all the information collected. Considering the two specific citizen initiatives' contexts, very detailed information gathered during the semi-structured interviews, desk-study, and other observations need to be addressed to bring reliability.

The validity of the research will have to fulfil both internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the cogency of the study itself (van Thiel, 2014): the theories and concepts must be used in an appropriate way to answer the research questions. The internal validity is ensured by the comparison between the two case studies, which are analysed following the same variables and components. The external validity refers to the possibility to generalise results found during this research (van Thiel, 2014). The external validity (repeatability of the research) can be reached through the development and end results of the present thesis. Indeed, this thesis research is looking for theoretical generalisation: the two case studies selected are considered to be empirical evidence that will further specify and modify an elaborated conceptual framework. At the end, the final (modified) conceptual framework version may be used in other researches, to analyse other citizen initiatives (Yin, 2013).

## 4. Case studies

### 4.1. Case study 1: Community gardens Agnès Varda, Brussels

#### 4.1.1. *Short introduction*

During my internship, I joined an urban garden project which can be perceived as a concrete example of a citizen initiative led in the city of Brussels.



Figure 8 Agnès Varda's site with the urban gardens identified (within the orange lines)

The community gardens Agnès Varda are historic urban gardens, where people have been cultivating for more than 100 years (figure 8). Originally in the suburb of the city of Brussels, they are nowadays located in the city itself in a relatively comfortable neighbourhood (figure 9). The gardens have been characterised as wild, in the sense that gardeners took possession and started growing their food on an unused site belonging to the municipality. However, because of the fast urbanisation process that is taking place in the city of Brussels, these urban garden are now under the threat of construction projects initiated by the municipality. In fact, a big part of the urban gardens present in this neighbourhood disappeared in the 2010s to be replaced by social housing infrastructure (Otesanek, 2019). It was the plan of the municipality to apply the same logic to the Agnès Varda urban gardens but the gardeners actively contested this decision and prevented the planning of new infrastructure on their site. The help of external actors and the change of political majority at the municipality of Ixelles, ensured the



Figure 9 Urbanisation process evolution in the neighbourhood (urban gardens in yellow on the right image)



preservation of the gardens. As a result, the gardeners won over the municipality's plans and protected their gardens. In the next years (around 2018), following a change of political majority at the municipality, the urban gardens were officially recognized by the municipality and re-named the "Agnès Varda" collective gardens (Otesanek, 2019). This recognition by the municipality means the guarantee that the urban gardens will remain at their location. However, the Agnès Varda site is not limited to these gardens as can be seen on the map (Figure 9).

Respondent 5 emphasizes the importance of the community gardens for its human and environmental benefits. The human aspect is important as the community gardens are above all a network of citizens who aim to create a contact with the earth/ground, to come back to the essentials and move away from technology, etc. On the other hand, the Agnès Varda site is very important to the gardeners, who care about the nature and unique biodiversity and environments they are surrounded by. Respondent 6 explained that the gardeners created a group "Zone Verte" ("Green Space") to fight for the preservation of the urban garden site and its natural characteristics.

The Agnès Varda urban gardens are called "collective gardens", meaning that the site is managed collectively (figure 10). About 50 gardeners can be found active on the whole Agnès Varda urban garden site. The gardens are composed of different plots, which can be managed individually (by one person), or collectively, by more than one person (number of gardeners vary from plot to plot). The individual plots are considered to be more historic, meaning that the people holding them are managing their plot for up to 30 years. On the other hand, the collective plots are considered to be hold by younger people. The collective plots are often subdivided in order to provide a part of the plot to each member, ensuring that everyone has its own space to grow their food. Depending on the plot and its members, the food produced on a collective plot is then shared among its members.

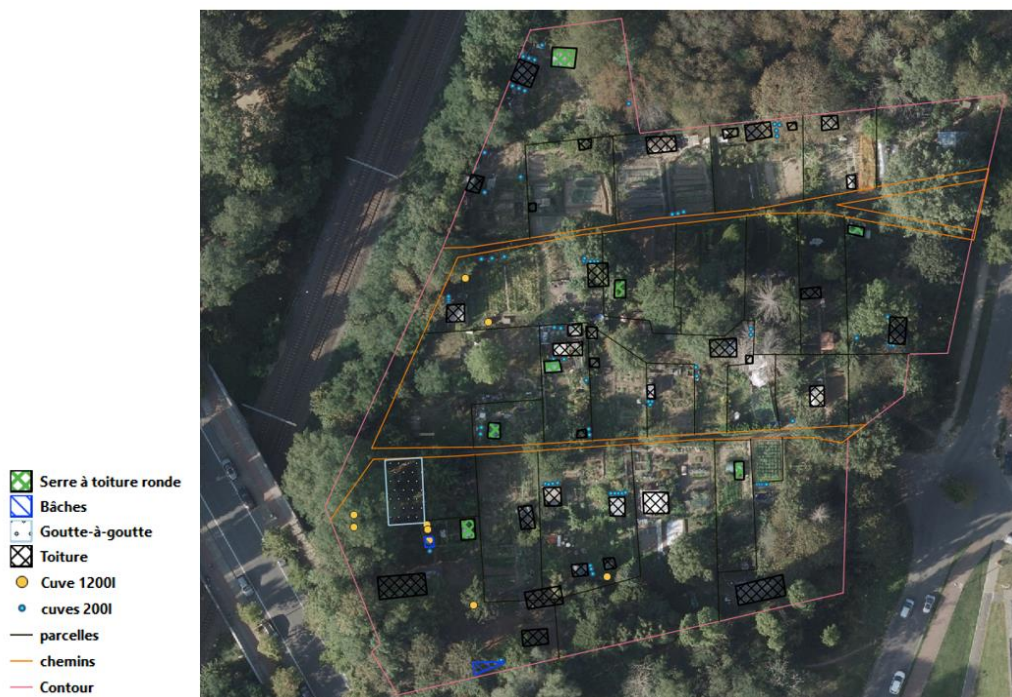


Figure 10 Agnès Varda urban gardens: plot division (made during internship)

On an organisational perspective, it has been observed that individual plots tend to be less active than collective plot members. Many reasons can be identified for this: individual plot members tend to be older and less connected (e-mails, etc.), individual plot members also tend to have acquired a routine which might be difficult to "disrupt", etc. Furthermore, as the gardens were considered as "wild" so could have been qualified its organisation, meaning that they organised themselves to fight the municipality's plan but no formal structure was achieved. Consequently, when key individuals (leaders)

had to leave the community due to personal motivations, the organisation in the urban gardens remained rather horizontal with one or two active individuals/leaders among the community itself.



*Figure 11 Collective plots in the Agnès Varda community gardens*

Recently, the drought issues occurring in the urban gardens seem to have brought the gardeners together around one same matter, ensuring the mobilisation of the community to find innovative solutions together with external actors, and thus re-launching the self-organisation.

In the following sections, we will try to identify the components of our conceptual framework in all the information gathered for the Brussels' case study.



#### 4.1.2. Success factors

First, let's consider each success factor from the conceptual framework.

##### 4.1.2.1. PRESENCE OF A TRIGGER

Different triggers can be identified in the community garden initiative. The first trigger for the Brussels' community gardens happened about 10 years ago and refers to the preservation of an urban green site. Concretely speaking, the Agnès Varda site measures about 35.000 m<sup>2</sup>, while its urban gardens' site represents about 10.000 m<sup>2</sup> of this area (the rest of it being abandoned). As a result, seen from the perspective of the Ixelles' municipality, two thirds of this area are unexploited. This is why the municipality decided, around 2011, to plan social housing construction on this site (Otesanek, 2019). Respondent 5 explained that at that time there were many community councils together with the municipality, where the future of this site was discussed. Whenever the municipality organised these meetings the gardeners would organise themselves to come up to the council to fight for the safeguard of their gardens. During this period of "fight" with the municipality, the gardeners would gather on their plots before important municipal meetings to reflect together on how to approach the issue. This tells us how the trigger (municipality's construction plans) ensured the self-organisation of the gardeners, and enabled them to find some reasons to connect together.

Respondent 7 admitted that the fight brought some of his group of gardeners closer to the "Zone Verte" group. To be clear, respondent 7's plot ("Ils sèment passionnement" (ISP), see figure 12) seemed to



Figure 12 Group "Zone Verte" and group "ISP"

evolve somewhat apart from the rest of the plots of the urban gardens Agnès Varda site. When the conflicts with the municipality emerged in 2010-2011, the ISP plot came closer to the active gardeners to unify their strength and ensure the preservation of the site.

However, it seems that the organisation and the unity that was raised during the struggle with the municipality did not last over the next years. The loss of leading figures associated to the win of the fight, led the community gardens towards the loss of common purpose (trigger), which did slow the self-organizing process of the urban gardens down.

More recently, another trigger has raised the preoccupation of the gardeners: water. The urban gardens Agnès Varda have been facing droughts periods during the last couple of years (since 2017). These drought periods have huge impacts on the productivity of each plot on the site, because the water harvesting does not provide them sufficient water in these periods. The water issue has brought members

of the community together and has motivated the dialogue between gardeners to address the future of their water management. The water issue in urban gardens is a recurrent issue and a difficult issue to address because of collective or individual aspects of urban gardens. Following respondent 4, it is crucial to consider the organisation of a community or group of people, prior to the management of collective projects.

#### 4.1.2.2. TRUST-WORTHY RELATIONS

Respondent 1 explained that the trust-worthy relations was a notion with which she encountered difficulties in Brussels' citizen initiatives. She explains that the conflicting ideas between the members of a same initiative threatened the feasibility of a project.

According to respondent 4, the social capital is of prior importance for the management of citizen projects. She explains that the first step for a citizen initiative to exist is to have a strong group of citizens. Questions related to the communication between members should be discussed shortly after the group creation. In fact, a strong social capital is important to spread information internally. As explained by respondent 4 the trust feeling must also be directed towards external organisations. Respondent 3 specified that in the process of collaboration with the gardeners, the municipality asked for one contact person to be able to represent the whole community (which she obtained). Many gardeners do trust her as a leader, even if inevitably, a share of the gardeners' community is not invested enough in the projects, thereby preventing trust-worthy relations to be created with all the gardeners. Respondent 5 explained that at the end, people coming to gatherings are often the same people, which is good to create a core group, but might be challenging to improve the social capital of the community as a whole. Having assisted myself to an important meeting of the gardeners, I can assert that the fact of not knowing everyone within the gardens slows the project development down because of a lack of trust-worthy relations. Respondent 5 acknowledges her trust-worthy contacts as being the gardeners of her own plot and other contacts were created during the fight for the Agnès Varda site.

Respondent 3 asserted that the gardeners aim to appear strong and united when facing the municipality, but internally they are not as united as they make it look like. This might be explained by the success factor "presence of a trigger": some themes do motivate the community to be unified and improve the social capital, while other internal issues meet less commitment. Respondent 6 joins respondent 3 in this last reflexion: without a purpose and a benefit at the end, the gardeners are not likely to put effort to create a strong community feeling.

When the fight for the preservation of the Agnès Varda site was won by the gardeners, key active individuals chose to withdraw from the collective urban gardens due to personal reasons. Losing these key individuals meant the loss of a network of relations (internal and external). Since then, the citizen initiative had to start again, with a weakened social capital and in need for new leaders.

A gardener asserted that the reason for conflictual relations with the municipality is the lack of trust given to the gardeners. The gardeners are able to self-organise and proved it during the struggle but the municipality does not give them the opportunity to prove it nowadays. Indeed, during the struggle, the gardeners were able to self-organise to collect 10.000€ in order to introduce a recourse to the state court, this money was collected through the organisation of festivities and raising the awareness of external actors. At the same time, other gardeners were completing tasks as the contact with lawyers and the monitoring of the issue at the municipality, the elaboration of a press file, the creation of a website, and then mobilize the people to physically go to the municipality.

#### 4.1.2.3. FOCUS IN INTERACTION

According to respondent 4, internal organisation is where collectives of citizens often need the most assistance. It is important to consider methodological help to create structured group dynamics that would enable the sharing of ideas and the definition of specific community goals.

During the struggle for the preservation of their site the community gardens often gathered and organised meetings to discuss the situation and share new ideas, the common goal of that struggle was defined as: the preservation of the Agnès Varda site. The openness to new ideas and the collaboration with relevant organisations and actors were characteristics that enabled their movement to grow. The kind of productive meetings that were organised during the struggle were continued until about one year after the struggle. However, the gardeners quickly faced difficulties in the development of their projects because of complicated relations with the municipality, who struggled to keep its promises. Thus, over time, the motivation to assist meetings has weakened.

Moreover, conflicting ideas between gardeners occurring after the struggle has prevented the Brussels' collective urban gardens to self-organise. After the struggle respondent 5 tried to change the focus of the gardeners' goal: instead of being in a defensive and struggling approach (referring to the conflictual relations with the municipality), gardeners tried to formulate a real proposition for the Agnès Varda site. It happened in 2015 marking the transition from struggling approach towards a productive approach. Gardeners who were not committed at the time were not involved in this change of focus, causing possible incomprehension and the emergence of conflictual ideas among the community gardens. The lack of support experienced today could be explained by this shift in perspective. The gardeners need to create a common vision, which is important in the construction of a group. Such a vision was elaborated during the struggle for the preservation of their area, but disappeared after that. Nowadays, a common vision could be created about the topic of water management in the community gardens. Up until now, some individuals seem to be motivated to act for the community, but because they are scared to ensure a time-consuming function all alone, motivated gardeners wimp out to embody specific functions in the community.

The gatherings of the community gardens are usually not organised on a regular basis even if their Charter mentions that each gardener is required to assist to 4 meetings/year (Potagers - Vergers Agnès Varda, 2021). This explains why the issue of water management in the community gardens is not perceived the same by all the gardeners (no space to share thoughts).

In case of important conflicts in the gardens, a special meeting can be organised. Respondent 6 gave an example of a plot where collaboration was difficult with the owner of the plot, whose religion complicated the dialogue with women gardeners. At the end a solution was reached by finding two gardeners that ran face-to-face discussions with him. The multicultural aspect of citizen initiatives is thus something to take into account when addressing self-organising projects. Another conflict takes place on respondent 7's plot, where the initial manager of the plot tried to remove the current users of the plot. In this example again, a lack of communication and face-to-face discussions lead to



Figure 13 Group meeting (left) and informal discussion (right)



misunderstandings about the situation in that specific plot. A last factor to consider is the COVID-19 crises. Indeed, respondent 6 explained that before the sanitary crisis, many informal (e.g. figure 13) meetings were organised, as well as an annual festivity that were all cancelled for COVID-19 reasons, damaging the self-organisation processes that was already weakened.

#### 4.1.2.4. LOCUS IN INTERACTION

Respondent 4, in her work, tries to gather the community members physically and treat different themes that are determined depending on the group itself. This enables all citizen to get the exact same information, avoiding the exclusion of some members (as everyone has access to the meetings).

The centralisation of information for the Brussels' community gardens is requested by their municipality. Indeed, during the past years, unclear information has brought confusion for both parties:

- The municipality did not know who to contact among the gardeners
- Different gardeners contacted different employees of the municipality as it was unclear who is in charge

The municipality clarified that a municipal employee is in charge of the management of the Agnès Varda site, while an committed gardener stepped up as the representative and contact person for the community gardens. The municipality is also working to hire LDDH that will help structure the organisation of the urban gardens and ensure clear information flows between the municipality and the citizens.

A physical locus was presented by respondent 5, she mentioned “Stefanos’ plot” where the gardeners would always meet during the struggle for the preservation of their site. However, since the end of the struggle no physical locus could be identified.

Regarding the virtual locus of interaction, the gardeners do take advantage of online means of communication, with a WhatsApp group, e-mail communication, etc. Respondent 5 and 6 specified that all of these means of communication were not as efficient as the face-to-face interactions. Indeed, a large part of the gardeners does not seem to be familiar to the frequent use of virtual means of communication; reasons for this could be age and culture.

#### 4.1.2.5. BOUNDARY SPANNING

During the struggle for the preservation of their site, the gardeners established multiple connections with external actors who helped the gardens in their fight: press, lawyers, interested citizens, neighbours. But as mentioned before, key individuals, which enabled the links between the gardeners community and external actors, withdrew from the community gardens after the struggle. Respondent 5 is currently trying to create new boundary spanning by having regular contacts with the municipality and other external actors (e.g. educative asbl). Respondent 6 had also been affected by the loss of these key individuals, as she ended up carrying the administrative tasks alone after the struggle. Their challenge is to involve more individuals capable of carrying this task: finding external collaborators. The gardeners can count on an external person that helps them by communicating all sort of information related to municipal events and decisions. This work helps the gardeners to be aware of events happening at a higher level.

The water management topic is initiating information exchanges with external actors as LDDH and Brussels Environment. Furthermore, the gardeners do have a trust-worthy contact within the municipality who does not hesitate to come on the ground to have face-to-face contacts when important issues are being discussed.

In the case of respondent 7's plot, the boundary spanning was a kind of trigger for the internal plot-conflicts, as the initial manager had the desire to open up to external organisations. Linked to this issue, respondent 4 addressed the internal boundaries that can exist among a group. For her, the internal organisation does not need to be horizontally (everyone at the same level) or vertically oriented.



Respondent 4 assumes that an organic internal organisation considers the different competences of each person to improve the communication and focus on what one another is best at, developing the boundary spanning too.

#### 4.1.2.6. ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

For respondent 1 a citizen project will always induce positive and negative behaviours, it is the responsibility of the public institution to adapt the project to the citizens' behaviours and preferences. As a rule, people are happy with any kind of design, because they have this capacity to adapt their behaviours.

According respondent 4 the adaptive capacity of citizen initiatives lies in the multiplicity of profiles that exists among a same group. She observes that difficulties are often related to individuals that enjoy taking too much of the responsibilities for the group as a whole. For her, an unbalanced organisation damages the continuity of citizen initiatives. Furthermore, following respondent 4 and 6 discrete community members often carry out small and useful tasks, while they do not want to get involved in the other general management tasks. What is needed is the consideration of everyone's capacities and talents to create the most organic self-organising structure possible.

Respondent 4 also addressed the topic of finances, which, according to her, is likely to damage the capacity of adaptation. Indeed, she noticed that a group counting small financial resources tends to amplify the resourceful and creative side of the group. As a result, the creativity of the citizens do produce innovative and suitable solutions to their specific context, increasing their adaptive capacity.

As it is, the Brussels' case study seems to take advantage of the freedom granted by the municipality in their self-organisation. It seems however that with the formulation of new plans for the Agnès Varda site, the municipality requires the gardeners to create an asbl (ngo). This asbl creation would imply the setting of new formal rules and distribute specific responsibilities to different members of the community. Following respondent 7, the municipality felt the desire of gardeners to remain independent and allows the gardeners to find this self-organising processes on their own, on the condition that all the gardeners together create an asbl. This would solve issues with the municipality as it would:

- Gather all gardeners together and ensure the organisation of the group with one or two contact people, improving the communication between the municipality and the citizen initiative.
- Ensure the recognition of the urban gardens Agnès Varda, and thus ensure the preservation of their plots in case of future plans on the Agnès Varda site.

According to respondent 7 it comes back to two possibilities for the future management of the urban gardens: whether nothing is organised by the community gardens, the municipality would then take total control back over the gardens organisation; or, the community gardens propose a well-formulated proposal, in which case the municipality will keep on managing the community gardens from a distance. Respondent 7 believes that the key stands in the human perception of the citizen initiative and projects that are made possible through these community gardens. For him, a compromise could be reached, and municipal monitoring would be accepted as long as flexibility is granted to the community gardens in their self-organisation.

As highlighted by respondent 6 the issue lies in the fact that the gardeners are not officially recognized to be the occupants of the Agnès Varda urban garden site. The municipal vagueness about the management of their area is now bringing too much adaptive capacity to the gardeners, as they are currently not required to follow any municipal rules.

#### 4.1.2.7. TIME AVAILABILITY

An additional success factor that was not addressed in the conceptual framework and appeared as important in the interviewee's responses: the time factor. More specifically, respondent 4 refers to the amount of time that citizens are able to dedicate to their civic self-organising project. It is the

responsibility of active citizens, who usually have a job and a family aside of the citizen initiative, to carry out self-organising processes. For respondent 4 it is an important factor to take into account when initiating citizen self-organising processes (“how much time am I willing to spend for this project?”), because the time required for the organisation of a group of citizen is often underestimated.

In the Brussels’ case study, the time availability is one important element blocking the commitment of the entirety of the gardeners. The cultivation of plants is considered as a “hobby” and a free time used to refresh the mind. Structuring and formalising such citizen initiative is perceived as the loss of freedom and the introduction of new responsibilities. Respondent 6 explains that cultivating is already a time consuming job, adding monthly meetings to this activity seems to be too much.

A citizen initiative is thus expected to be time consuming for its members, who are required to participate on a voluntary basis.

#### *4.1.3. Meta-governance strategies*

Second, the meta-governance used in the Brussels' case study are addressed in this section.

##### *4.1.3.1. IMPOSING STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS*

Respondent 1 does not see the implementation of strategic frameworks as a prerequisite to ensure the continuity of participation processes, she criticises the sometimes abusive resort to charters and other administrative documents, which she believes is a way for public institutions to disclaim responsibility of any negative future event. Respondent 2 did however defend the position of public institutions who, as such, need to justify public expenses. Imposing strategic frameworks is unavoidable to ensure the development of a project, even if such rules are perceived as an administrative burden by the citizens.

According to respondent 4, the role of her external actors to the citizen initiative is not to impose strategic frameworks, but rather to advice a citizen initiative to do so. A support should be provided by the public institutions to suggest and help citizen initiatives to self-organise.

In the case of the Brussels' community gardens, no concrete strategic frameworks were imposed to the gardeners' community until recently. The municipality aims to initiate the creation of an asbl in the community gardens to take some organisational control back over this area. Following respondent 3, by creating an asbl, the community gardens would have the right to ask for subventions (beneficial for the gardeners), and it would ensure legal obligations for the organisation of the community gardens (reassuring the municipality of the well-functioning of the urban gardens). For respondent 3, this asbl creation is especially important to formally delegate management rights to the gardeners' self-organisation, and enable the municipality to have a say on what projects can be developed on their site. According to respondent 7, the asbl formation is a condition to the further collaboration between gardeners and the municipality. Respondent 6 is not convinced that this asbl creation will solve all gardeners' issues with the municipality. Nevertheless, considering the fact that no other option presents itself to the gardeners, she believes that this asbl formation needs to go through. Under certain aspects, this meta-governance strategy, can be linked to the "playing with fear" meta-governance strategy that will be addressed later.

Respondent 4 seemed rather cautious with this idea of asbl creation. According to her, imposing the creation of an asbl to a group who has difficulties to organise itself is a risky challenge. The formation of an asbl implies a whole set of administrative responsibilities that, without a strong supporting group, is difficult to carry on. According to respondent 4, citizen initiatives need to be creative and adapt already existing frameworks to their specific situations.

The municipality's request seems to have come through, as respondent 5 shared the gardeners' desire to initiate administrative processes to form an asbl. For them, creating an asbl guarantees their self-organised presence on the Agnès Varda site and a possible municipal help regarding their water management. The status of an asbl is thus likely to improve the support received by the gardeners, at the cost of administrative obligations.

##### *4.1.3.2. MONITORING*

Working with citizen initiatives enables public institutions to avoid the usual top-down types of public project management. For respondent 1, making use of the monitoring strategy does create win-win situations for all the actors involved:

- The public institution reaches its goal because it develops the project and ensures the appropriation of the project and the space by the citizens.
- The citizen initiative gets official support (expertise and finances) and is assisted in its development while having a certain freedom to choose which projects they want to launch.

BE is currently managing their citizen initiatives and citizen projects by launching calls for projects, to which citizen communities are encouraged to apply. According to respondent 2, the problem with such calls for projects is that support is ensured during a limited period of time (one to two years). Respondent 4 highlights the importance to award the call for projects to citizen initiatives who can count on a strong core group, without which the project development would happen in a top-down approach. The citizens are then assisted by “coaches” (professionals, experts) hired by BE, that carry out methodological help related to the group dynamics.

For respondent 1 there is an important distinction to make between controlling and monitoring. Controlling actions referring to the inspection of citizen initiatives that do or do not respect the rules which they have committed to. On the other hand, monitoring, referring the continuous contact and collaboration of an institution with a citizen initiative, supporting the citizens in their daily challenges. Monitoring is, following respondent 1, not institutionalised enough within BE.

At the level of the Ixelles’ municipality, it is true that the monitoring activities have been missing. The gardeners having taken control over the area in a spontaneous way about 50 years ago, the whole site has been developed on its own and without municipal rules. Nevertheless, it is the aim of the municipality to take control back over the Agnès Varda site, collaborating with the gardeners and ensuring some monitoring tasks to help them structure their community. Once again, the asbl formation is essential for the community gardens to be able to apply to calls for projects, which will ensure a financial support and monitoring procedure throughout the whole project development and management.

#### 4.1.3.3. FRAMING AND STORYTELLING

An interesting example of what a public institution like BE tries to frame among the citizen is the necessity for participation. Indeed, respondent 1 acknowledges the fact that to get an appropriation of the project by the citizens, public institutions need to involve citizens from the very beginning of a project. By involving citizens in the planning phases, public institutions frame the citizens’ idea of participation, who then grasp the importance of their contribution to the project. For respondent 1, framing and storytelling is more efficient when it takes place in face-to-face explanations. Respondent 5 thoughts is in line with this idea and emphasizes the need for more face-to-face communication.

The conceptualisation of the Agnès Varda site, which is perceived differently by the municipality and by the gardeners, requires the agreement of common notions and frames to develop suitable plans. The whole purpose of discussions between gardeners and the municipality is to create shared believes and find a compromise about the use of this site: an area for the community gardens and an area to be planned and developed. The municipality of Ixelles is aware of the situation and the background of their relations with the gardeners. This is important because it enables the possible establishment of relations between both actors and start processes from a blank sheet.

LDDH (asbl) acts as a sort of intermediary between the public sector and the citizens. Therefore, such asbl is able to have an influence on the way citizens perceive the public institutions, and on the other hand how public institutions perceive citizen initiatives. At the end, the goal is to make compromises in both parties in order to create the best project development dynamics possible.

#### 4.1.3.4. PRESENCE OF SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Respondent 1 explained that a public institution needs to provide support to its citizens: supporting them in their projects, issues, and lives in general. In the daily work of respondent 1, and the different citizen initiative that she presented during her interview (urban gardens, skatepark, youth centre, etc.), she ensures different supporting actions, as: financial support (most often used), legal assistance (to formalise citizen self-organisation), advice/informative (in case of issue), networking (putting similar projects in contact), expertise (by a BE’s employee or a hired professional).

In the community garden case study, similar types of support are starting to emerge. The different types of supports the municipality provides to the gardeners are:

- *Financial support*: by forming an asbl (= condition), the community gardens will be able to apply for subsidies in function of their projects.
- *Informative*: the municipality is trying to involve the gardeners in the definition of new plans for the Agnès Varda site.
- *Expertise*: the municipality plans on hiring LDDH to help the gardeners' community methodologically in their self-organisation.
- *Mediator*: the municipality got involved in the conflicts on respondent 7's plot, by sending the gardeners to a professional mediator.

Note that these supports are not yet totally in place, they are supposed to be granted in the coming months. The gardeners, conscious of their need for external help to organise their community, are motivated to form an asbl and to collaborate with the municipality. According to respondent 6, the occupation agreement is a supporting action that the municipality is refusing to grant the gardeners, while such agreement should not be too difficult to obtain.

#### 4.1.3.5. FORMULATING PLAYING RULES

According to respondent 1, a public institution like BE has to monitor, which do not mean doing things instead of the citizens. Following respondent 2, this administrative work is often what slows citizen initiatives down and what repel citizens to work with public institution, but these are part of the playing rules.

Apart from the administrative load of work that a collaboration with a public institution imply, it seems that there are relatively few fixed playing rules imposed to the citizen initiatives. Indeed, the rules of play introduced by employees of BE are often co-decided upon with the citizens themselves. The playing rules decided upon, perceived by the citizens as “conditions”, shape the collaboration processes between public and private actors.

Respondent 4 referred to the call for projects, which is an appropriate example of playing rules that are introduced. For instance, the citizen initiatives that want to be eligible for the call for project “inspire the neighbourhood” needs to be composed of a minimum of 5 people. Playing rules represent a security for the public institution, as they do not want to spend (public) money on unstable projects.

Respondent 3 acknowledges that for the moment, little, if any playing rules are defined for the community gardens. The only requirement that seems to be established is the clear definition of one “leader” and contact person among the gardeners. Furthermore, the municipality is trying to introduce playing rules for the gardeners in relation to future plans of the Agnès Varda site. The condition, set by the municipality, under which the community gardens Agnès Varda need to form an asbl to remain on the site Agnès Varda, is a typical example of a playing rules formulation, as addressed by respondent 6. The municipality interferes in the self-organisation of the citizen initiative by introducing new rules the citizens need to take into account.

Respondent 5 and 6 welcome the definition of playing rules for their citizen initiative. Indeed, the community gardens welcome the definition of basic playing rules by public authorities to structure and improve the organisation of their citizen initiative. For the gardeners, respecting the playing rules introduced by the municipality, opens the doors towards stronger self-organising processes with more resources and professional help. Nevertheless, according to respondent 7, the gardeners' community does not seem to be very united around this topic either, as some fear the direct implication of the municipality on the community gardens. Also, the formulation of playing rules is beneficial according to respondent 5 and 6, as the committed gardeners will then receive the support from the municipality

to get inactive gardeners involved in the self-organisation processes (there will be municipal sanctions if they do not participate). This already introduces the next meta-governance strategy.

#### 4.1.3.6. PLAYING WITH FEAR

According to respondent 1, citizens making errors is normal, and playing with fear does not have productive effects on the citizen initiatives that aim to develop their community creatively and sustainably. Instead of punishing non-functioning initiatives, public institutions should spend extra time to find a well-suited monitoring. BE tends to use too little monitoring, which results in a controlling attitude that represent the “fear” for citizens involved in a given project (e.g. sanctions). Therefore, she favours strategies that involve citizens from the beginning (defining playing rules together).

Respondent 4 believes that it is the responsibility of the citizens themselves to invest their time and energy in the creation of an initiative. The role of her asbl and other actors should be to simply help them in this process by providing them all the required tools to get there. Apart from that, sanctions will not have a positive impact on their initiative. Empowering citizens in their project will have better results than scare them off.

For the Brussels’ case study, « playing with fear » is an obvious meta-governance strategy that is being used by the municipality. Indeed, in their interviews, the gardeners often addressed the lack of clarity in the municipal decisions on the future plans for the Agnès Varda site. Following respondent 7 the vagueness of information transmitted to the gardeners is held on purpose to scare the community gardens on their future. Indeed, the municipality is “threatening” the community gardeners to be removed if no asbl is created rapidly. The problem with this strategy being used is that it does not boost management and organisational dynamics from both points of view:

- The municipality is waiting for the gardeners to form an asbl in order to involve them in the thinking and planning of the Agnès Varda site.
- The community gardens are worried about the future of their site and do not want to initiate high administrative works for the future (as they do not know if they will be able to stay on this site).

The same fear feeling is getting the gardeners for the topic of water management, where droughts have devastated their cultures over the past summer seasons. The municipality does not seem to be disposed to find a sustainable solution until the gardeners create an asbl. Gardeners, fearing their removal and fearing future climatic events, are constrained to find a compromise and create the required asbl.

#### 4.1.3.7. DIRECT INTERACTION

Across the interviews realised and analysed, it appeared that many interviewees (public and private actors) agreed on the necessity to reduce the distance between public authorities and citizens. According to them, the distance causes a lack of clarity in their relations, which affects the trust feeling and the strength of the relations between public and private actors. This is why an additional meta-governance strategy is being considered.

Respondent 1 insists on the multicultural aspect of populations in big cities as Brussels nowadays. She asserts that: “Brussels is multicultural, Brussels is multicolour!” Being able to reach these culturally different populations is a challenge for public institutions as it requires the consideration of other languages and practices. The same goes for online public information, which do not anticipate that a share of the population is not capable of finding relevant information on the internet. Reducing the distances of communication between the citizens and the public institutions will ensure the sharing of such concerns, and enable the research for efficient channels of communication, capable to spread information fairly.

The distance in interaction is damaging the quality of the relations between the municipality of Ixelles and the community gardens Agnès Varda. Respondent 3 asserts that the gardeners are involved in the

plan constructions that are currently being elaborated for the Agnès Varda site. However, the gardeners are complaining about the unclear and undetailed municipal communications, which do not inform them well enough about their fate on the Agnès Varda site. Gardeners did express their desire of having face-to-face discussions (excluding online meetings as zoom) with the municipality. They want the municipality to meet the human, multicultural and multigenerational aspects that constitute their community gardens. According to respondent 6 the municipality is holding a double discourse which is causing trouble and incomprehension among the gardeners, making them unable to develop their citizen initiative.

In brief, a meta-governance strategy of “direct interaction” strategy emphasizes the need for clear streams of communication that should happen at the lowest scale possible, as close to the citizens as possible. It would enable public institutions to grasp the specificities of a group, which would improve the relevance of local project management practices. In the Brussels’ case study, clear and direct interaction with the municipality is a desire expressed and highlighted by the gardeners, who believe that the municipality is keeping their communication unclear on purpose.



#### 4.1.4. Co-creation

In this sub-section, we aim to learn more about the types of co-creation in the Rotterdam's case study, using the work of Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015). We will also be able to consider if the co-creation processes happen following the thoughts of Bisschops and Beunen (2019): where the public institution is still the one deciding at a distance (= meta-governance).

- Citizens as co-implementer: the assistance of citizens is required to complete the project

In this case study, such co-implementation procedures are not established yet. However, as developed by respondent 3, the goal of the municipality is to reach some level of co-implementation, making all required resources available for the citizens to be able to develop their projects on site. Some frustrations from the gardeners are currently being expressed, as they would like to embrace this co-implementer role but are not likely to receive the municipal support until they create an asbl. It is thus supposed that after the asbl-formation, gardeners will be considered as co-implementers through their work warried out on the Agnès Varda site.

- Citizens as co-designer: while local governments initiate the project, citizens decide how service delivery is designed and maintained

Respondent 5 and 6 highlight that little co-designing competences are delegated to the gardeners of the Agnès Varda site, given that the municipality does not have a lot of direct contacts with the gardeners. According to respondent 3 the gardeners are being involved in the process to plan the new Agnès Varda area, but this involvement seems rather superficial. Indeed, the municipality is not considering specific needs of the community gardens. Consequently, the gardeners are not contributing to the production and creation of a new space, they are only involved to express their opinion and introduce some requests. In order to reach co-creation processes, the municipality of Ixelles should consider the improvement of citizen involvement for local projects. Nevertheless, it is the aim of the municipality to avoid imposing ideas to its citizens, which is why they are trying to work on this aspect.

- Citizens as initiators: the government is then considered as an actor that follows and citizens take the initiatives of the projects following their local needs

Gardeners of the Agnès Varda community gardens embody initiators behaviours. Indeed, following their needs and ideas, the gardeners organise meetings and contact external organisations to get help. For instance, following the drought events occurring in the past few years, gardeners contacted Brussels Environment to get concrete help and advice regarding their water management. Unfortunately for the community gardens, they are still dependent on public organisations to develop larger scale projects, which prevents them to manage these kind of projects all by themselves.

In short, the Brussels' case study seems to be at a rather early stage to assume concrete co-creation procedures. The plan of the municipality of Ixelles is to get to co-creation practices, although the gardeners' citizen initiative is not receiving yet co-implementing and co-designing capacities from the municipality. Nevertheless, the gardeners do adopt an initiating behaviour, which is necessary to create co-creation.

Furthermore, the co-creation idea developed by Bisschops and Beunen (2019) is also recognisable. In the city of Brussels, respondent 1 emphasized that projects are usually developed by the public institutions and implemented by the citizens on the ground. This is why participation processes with the citizens are increasingly set up: to consider the local needs and local specificities. Following respondent 1, the citizen initiatives in Brussels are closer to a co-production than a co-creation, emphasizing the need for co-implementing behaviour from the citizens.



#### 4.1.5. *Outputs*

Finally, the interaction and co-creation processes happening between citizens and their public authority are expected to produce two possible outputs: the formalisation and institutionalisation of citizen initiatives, and the production of new spatial planning service arrangements. The Brussels' case study still being in the working procedures, concrete outputs of the co-creation processes are difficult to identify for this case study (but expectations for the future can be elaborated).

##### 4.1.5.1. FORMALISATION AND INSTITUTIONALISATION

The formalisation and institutionalisation of a citizen initiative is the result of an interaction with a public authority, as explained by Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015, p.1064): “self-organization can be defined as a process of shared understanding that results in the emergence of ordered structures”.

In the Brussels' case study, it seems that the community gardens Agnès Varda (still relatively informal self-organisation) are currently having trouble with this component. Indeed, as mentioned by almost all the interviewees from the Brussels' case study, a condition for the citizen initiative to receive external support and help (experts, subsidy, etc.) is to be organised as an asbl (=formalisation). Obtaining such a legal status is thus an unavoidable condition to receive support from a public institution in Brussels. This formalising process can appear as a threat to the freedom of the citizen self-organisation, which is what happens in the case of the Brussels' community gardens. Little frictions between the gardeners and the municipality have emerged because of this asbl formation request formulated by the municipality. As emphasized by respondent 4, the danger for such a self-organising citizen initiative is to formalise the initiative without having a strong core group capable to support all the tasks that a formal organisation require.

Nevertheless, both parties would benefit from an asbl creation, as the structure of the citizen initiative will appear as clearer for the municipality, and the citizen initiative will be eligible to receive official help and support from public institutions (applying to calls for projects).

##### 4.1.5.2. NEW SPATIAL PLANNING SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS

It is assumed in the conceptual framework that successful citizen initiatives tend to help public institutions to develop improved spatial planning service arrangements (tools, or methodologies, or, etc.). Such new spatial planning service arrangements were not explicitly mentioned by the interviewees, but indirectly they addressed some interesting elements.

The Brussels' case study addressed a citizen initiative at a rather initial stage of its self-organisation. The community gardeners had already developed a strong self-organising movement during the struggle for the preservation of their area, however, this self-organisation gradually disappeared with the loss of key individuals and the lack of public help. Nonetheless, the municipality, encouraging the self-organisation of citizens, seem to have realised that external support is necessary for the citizen initiative to develop a more formal organisation, which will ensure the continuity of the citizen initiative and the strong relations between citizens and public authorities. This is why the municipality of Ixelles is providing professional help to the gardeners through the guidance and support of the asbl “le début des haricots” (LDDH) (Pauline Lemaire's asbl). The role of the asbl is to assist the gardeners in their development of self-organisation and their internal structure. The new spatial planning service arrangement generated by this case is thus the contribution of professional support (mainly methodologies to organise a community) for early stage citizen initiatives.

#### 4.1.6. Conclusion

To summarize, the analysis of the Brussels' community gardens has shown that success factors and meta-governance strategies were present to ensure the success of the citizen self-organisation. Some components of the conceptual framework were clearly identified, while others remain absent.

The presence of two triggers and the strong adaptive capacity have enabled the community gardens to develop nice self-organising processes over time, arranged without external influence and emphasizing their initiating attitude. Furthermore, the lack of involvement by a share of the gardeners has complicated the trust-worthy relations, focus in interaction, and boundary spanning. These three success factors are currently being addressed by few individuals that need more help. Lastly, the locus in interaction could not be identified in the community gardens nowadays. Indeed, no clear physical locus in interaction is identified and a doubt persists on the effectiveness of online communications as a share of the gardeners is less likely to access the virtual information.

Imposing strategic frameworks, formulating playing rules (asbl creation), and playing with fear (vagueness) are the three meta-governance strategies that are being used by the municipality of Ixelles for the management of the community gardens' initiative. These reflect the authority that the municipality is exercising on the gardeners. The framing and storytelling, and the presence of supporting actions are two strategies that are expected to take place in the near future, related to the municipal help that will be made available. Last of all, the monitoring meta-governance strategy has been lacking since the beginning of the community garden self-organisation. The municipality ensures that it plans to organise close monitoring procedures to assist the whole Agnès Varda area, but it keeps being relatively vague.

Table 1 Evaluation of the community gardens' case study (green: identified; orange: partly identified; red: absent)

Success Factors	Meta-governance strategies
Presence of a trigger	Imposing strategic frameworks
Trust-worthy relations	Monitoring
Focus in interaction	Framing and storytelling
Locus in interaction	Presence of supporting actions
Boundary spanning	Formulating playing rules
Adaptive capacity	Playing with fear
Time availability	Direct interaction

Two extra components (one success factor and one meta-governance strategy) were found relevant to address in the analysis of this case study. It is considered that the "time availability" is an important success factor to include in the civic-self-organisation. On the other hand, "direct interaction" meta-governance strategy is necessary to consider, especially in the case of the community gardens. Note that both of these components are poorly developed in the Brussels' case study.

Finally, the community gardens are at a too early stage to estimate whether or not co-creation processes are being successfully used. Nevertheless, the initiating role of the gardeners has been clearly identified. The formalisation and institutionalisation of the citizen initiative has also been identified through the asbl requirement. The quick provision of professional help to ensure the continuity of a citizen initiative has been developed in the Brussels' case study and can be considered as an output to be used in future planning projects related to citizen initiatives.

## 4.2. Case 2: Het Oude Westen, Rotterdam

### 4.2.1. *Short introduction*

Het Oude Westen is a neighbourhood in the centre of Rotterdam. The neighbourhood is composed of a very diverse population, all engaged for the improvement of their surrounding environment. There are strong social bonds and social cohesion that link the citizens of this neighbourhood together (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). Central to all the actions imagined and undertaken in this neighbourhood, is the Action Group Het Oude Westen (“Aktiegroep”). This Aktiegroep develops its project in a rented building of the neighbourhood that is easily accessible for the residents of the neighbourhood (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). A very diverse set of services (computers, coffee, etc.) can be found inside of this building that is being taken care of by a team of 40 volunteers. The process of project constructions aims to be open to different sources of influence (experts and other relevant stakeholders). According to the Aktiegroep, citizens and all the relevant stakeholders are involved to co-create the best output possible for the neighbourhood as a whole (Desmet & Linssen, 2019).

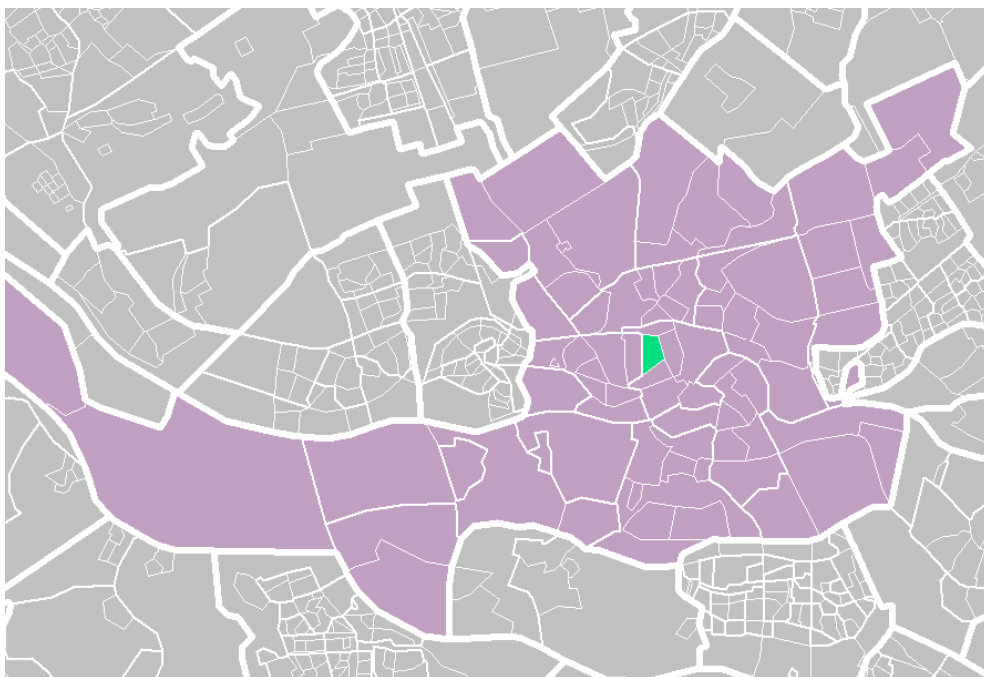


Figure 14 Het Oude Westen - location (in green)

The Aktiegroep is made up of, for and by residents. It was founded in the 1970s and undertook social housing actions together with the municipality and the housing corporation (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). Every year, more than 250 residents are active in working groups in this neighbourhood. The Action Group always tackles current themes that resonate with residents. In doing so, it also attracts new residents and finds partners with whom to achieve results together. This 'co-creation' between citizens and other stakeholders gives shape to a creative future for neighbourhood. It is characteristic of the Aktiegroep that special attention is always paid to vulnerable residents (Desmet & Linssen, 2019).

The sustainability topic is one of the latest topic that has been addressed in the neighbourhood. Indeed, the neighbourhood aims to become sustainable by addressing different key topics as: greening ('groen'), energy, reuse ('hergebruik'), community square ('wijkplein'), and property ('pand') (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). The active citizens are divided into working groups to facilitate the project construction regarding the different topics and in order to facilitate the co-creation processes taking place with the relevant external actors. This neighbourhood emphasizes bottom-up approaches to develop a specific area.

“Green” has long been an important theme for the Aktiegroep. The Wijkpark, which was realised in the 1980s partly thanks to the Aktiegroep, is a powerful example of this. Several working groups of residents

are active around the park: Wijktuin, Theeterras, Dierenhof, Kabouterpad, BuitenBewegen and Vrienden van het Wijkpark (Desmet & Linssen, 2019).

To give an example on the kind of initiatives taken in the neighbourhood, the Aktiegroep is managing a “block of green” project. For years, local residents have been complaining about a large black roof on an industrial building. Together with the residents and the designers, the Aktiegroep has developed a greening plan for the block to which this building belongs (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). If the plan is realised, 800,000 litres of rainwater will no longer need to be drained off via the sewers. This plan and ambition from the Aktiegroep has even motivated external support: the project is taken a step further with financial support from WaterSensitiveRotterdam.

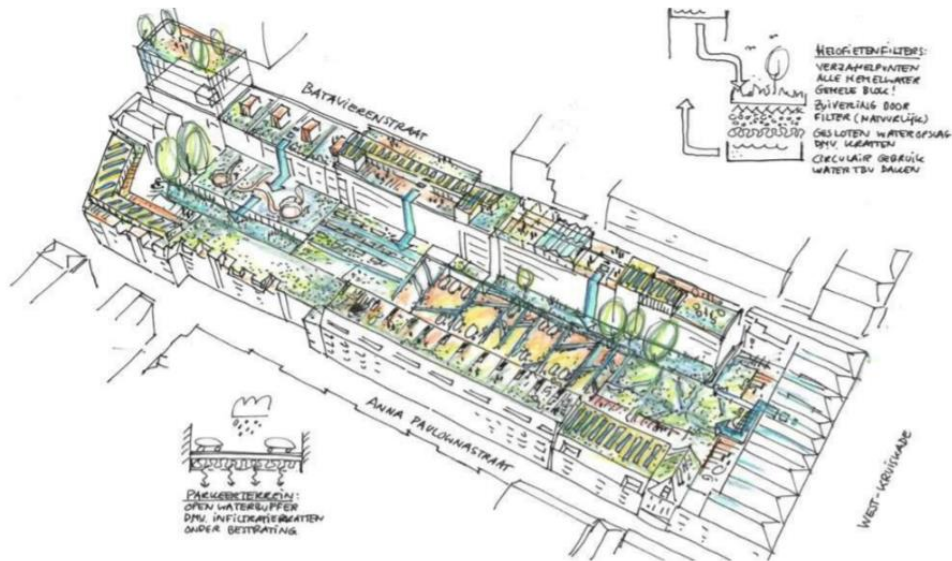


Figure 15 Block of green (Desmet & Linssen, 2019)

Finally, the Aktiegroep Het Oude Westen is a foundation with a volunteer board. The foundation rents the building on the Gaffelstraat from the municipality and employs two part-time professionals. For years, the Foundation was fully subsidised by the Social Development Department (MO) of the City of Rotterdam. As of 2018, this has stopped. It must also be highlighted that all activities of the Aktiegroep would not be possible without the voluntary efforts of many residents and committed professionals (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). What the Aktiegroep has achieved in two years with regard to new partners and new sources of income is a special achievement.

In the following sections, we will try to identify the components of our conceptual framework in all the information gathered for the Rotterdam’s case study.

#### *4.2.2. Success factors*

##### 4.2.2.1. PRESENCE OF A TRIGGER

Interestingly, the self-organising processes taking place in the Oude Westen case study went through a similar trigger as identified in the Brussels' case study. Indeed, as mentioned by respondent 8 and 9, the Aktiegroep het Oude Westen was founded in the 1970s because of municipal plans that imagined the demolition of some parts of the neighbourhood, to build a university district. The houses in the neighbourhood the Oude Westen were in bad shape but residents of the area stood up for their neighbourhood, proposing alternative plans for the neighbourhood. The plans and ideas developed at the time created the Aktiegroep: a neighbourhood residents' organisation.

The residents of the Oude Westen were helped by a general mobilisation in the city of Rotterdam. In the Oude Westen, students and architects interested in the case did elaborate an alternative plan for the whole neighbourhood. According to respondent 9 this "reconstruction plan" as it was called, was the starting point for discussions with the municipality. These discussions enabled them to slow down the project conceptualisation, and with approaching political elections, the inhabitants of the Oude Westen did exchange with the socialist party to make a compromise to save the neighbourhood. Later on, a very special organisation (the Aktiegroep) was set up to deal with this urban vision in the neighbourhood, and one of the components of the organisation was to support its residents. The essence of this organisation was to be a group in which officials and residents would make plans together.

##### 4.2.2.2. TRUST-WORTHY RELATIONS

The links and relations between the inhabitants of the neighbourhood are facilitated by the Aktiegroep. The residents' organisation often organises neighbourhood garden tours, to give the opportunity to residents to get in touch and establish trust-worthy relations with each other. It is an important aspect of respondent 8's work, as the projects in the neighbourhood require the help of volunteers to implement them. Overall, it seems that residents of the Oude Westen have strong trust-worthy relations with the Aktiegroep (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). The openness of the Aktiegroep to residents' suggestions and the citizen projects that they carried out over the years establishes a trust feeling among the inhabitants of the Oude Westen.

However, respondent 8 points out the diversity in population that has grown over the years and sometimes threatened the strong bonds that exist between inhabitants. Indeed, she explained that the Oude Westen welcomed people from different nationalities (Spanish, Surinamese, etc.), which has made the communication harder. An effort is always made to try to involve them as much as possible but people do not always want to get involved. This change of population has been increased by the phenomenon of "gentrification" taking place in some parts of their neighbourhood. The gentrification phenomenon refers to a process where a poor urban area is modified by the moving in process of wealthier people. For respondent 8 it is very important to reach these profiles, as they might have more difficulties to get in touch with their own neighbours. For respondent 9, the community workers present in the neighbourhood embody the trust-worthy relations: she has been working there for over 30 years and this is why residents trust her and come find her for any issues or new idea.

##### 4.2.2.3. FOCUS IN INTERACTION

The Aktiegroep is working on different themes: sustainability, energy, transition, greening, security, and poverty (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). These different themes are presented to the residents of the neighbourhood and rely on their volunteering to implement the different projects (in working groups) (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). The sharing of new ideas between residents and the Aktiegroep are organised during "Spreekuren" (speech hours) every Tuesday, where active citizens present the different topics and try to involve as many residents as they can (Aktiegroep Oude Westen, 2021).

The interaction with the citizens has increased following the loss of financial support from the municipality for the Aktiegroep. This lack of municipal support amplifies the need for a strong self-



organised community and relies on the work carried out by the volunteers. According to respondent 9 the Aktiegroep makes it possible for the inhabitants to talk to each other, to know about each other's work and to share experiences. As mentioned by respondent 8, ensuring that the residents of the Oude Westen share the same goals is an important task for the durability of the citizen initiative. The Aktiegroep acts as a network organisation for its residents (Desmet & Linssen, 2019).

For respondent 10, the municipality and its citizens do not always share the same ideas and goals, which is why they need to educate each other, by sharing their thoughts. The importance of the municipality is to make its citizens understand what projects are possible and realistic to consider. This is why the municipality of Rotterdam developed a vision ("Binden en Verlijden") to link residents, local entrepreneurs, and the municipality to each other (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2021).

A last factor important element to consider is the COVID-19 crises. Indeed, respondent 6 explained that before the sanitary crisis, many informal meetings were organised, as well as an annual festivity that were cancelled for COVID-19 reasons, damaging the self-organisation processes that had already been weakened. The same reflection was made by respondent 8 in the Rotterdam's case study, where the organisation of large physical meetings has been complicated.

#### 4.2.2.4. LOCUS IN INTERACTION

In the case of the Oude Westen, a clear physical locus of interaction can be identified: the Wijkplein, where the building of the Aktiegroep is located and where important gatherings and meetings are held (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). The building in itself is rented by the Aktiegroep to the municipality of Rotterdam. This place is open to all publics, the residents are welcomed inside, where they will be able to present their issues and projects to a professional as a community worker for instance. Moreover, the building is the working space of two municipal employees, whose work is focused on the Oude Westen citizen initiative. Indeed, respondent 9 explained that for each neighbourhood in the city of Rotterdam, a neighbourhood manager and an area networker represent the municipality and help the citizen initiatives in their process. The active residents of the neighbourhood take care of this central building and help the citizens that come to ask for help (Aktiegroep Oude Westen, 2021).

Finally, the Aktiegroep is also providing an online locus in interaction: the newsletters and a Facebook group ensure the coordination of the different residents in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, a website "Aktiegroep Oude Westen" exists, where background information is centralised and can be used by internal and external actors.

#### 4.2.2.5. BOUNDARY SPANNING

The boundary spanning component is ubiquitous in the Oude Westen, highlighting the importance of the solid construction of an internal network and ensuring the multiple external connections. The Aktiegroep, as defined by respondent 8, embodies this role by working as an umbrella for all kinds of initiatives that want to get involved in the neighbourhood. The Aktiegroep appears as a central citizen organisation for the residents themselves, but also for external organisations that would like to get involved in some citizen-lead projects. The boundary spanning element was also present in the struggle for the preservation of their neighbourhood through the support of architects and students who got involved. Nowadays, Desmet and Linssen (2019) cited about fifteen external partners and funds who help the Oude Westen in its development (e.g. Water Sensitive Rotterdam, Oranje Fonds, KNHM Foundation, Housing city Rotterdam, etc.).

As presented by respondent 8 and 9, the connection between the internal civic self-organisation and external actors is often carried out by key individuals living in the neighbourhood. For instance, an architect that helped the community to develop greening plans for some streets in the neighbourhood, was himself an inhabitant of the Oude Westen. Having this kind of individuals capable to create a connection with the external sphere, enables the citizen initiative to grow and establish sustainable relations with external parties. Additionally, the Aktiegroep collaborates with important partners as

housing associations, shopkeepers' association, and the neighbourhood pastorate, which are influential parties who need to be on board to realise projects in the neighbourhood.

Seen from the perspective of external organisations, the Aktiegroep stands as an interesting partner, as they are a very active citizen group and a great network of inhabitants ready to participate. Following respondent 8, the Oude Westen is a very interesting partner for the municipality because they take a lot of initiatives about different topics, linking these initiatives to municipal programs is beneficial for both parties. The boundary spanning, in this context, is thus also a way for the municipality to make use of the citizen initiative. On the other hand, respondent 9 emphasize the importance of individuals capable to exploit his/her knowledge about the municipality to strengthen the civic self-organisation.

#### 4.2.2.6. ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

In the Rotterdam's case study, respondent 8 explained that "who pays, decides", so to say that the citizen initiative experiences less adaptive capacity when they are being subsidised for specific projects. In general, the Oude Westen remains independent on the projects they carry out, however, in the case of municipal subsidies, it is the municipality that directs the citizens towards certain topics and project ideas that could be developed in their neighbourhood. According to respondent 8, having constructed a citizen organisation as the Aktiegroep, enables the Oude Westen to experience a great adaptation capacity. Indeed, as trust-worthy relations are established with the municipality, the municipality of Rotterdam allows the Aktiegroep to find their own project and develop initiatives that they require and that their community needs.

The subsidy-loss for the Aktiegroep is an interesting example that emphasizes the adaptation capacity of this citizen initiative. The neighbourhood reacted by:

- Respondent 9 with other individuals decided to lead direct discussions with an alderman to reach an agreement over a two year extend for subsidies, to ensure the transition.
- The Aktiegroep and involved residents searched fund opportunities among other actors (mainly public services) to ensure the continuity of their initiative.

#### 4.2.2.7. TIME AVAILABILITY

Interestingly, as we discovered in the Brussels' case study, the time factors seems also very important in the context of the Rotterdam's case study, where citizen projects are carried out by volunteers.

Indeed, professionals were hired to carry out the organisation of the Aktiegroep and the coordination with diverse actors and residents, which highlights the necessity for few fully devoted citizens that can ensure the continuity of a project. On the other hand, it can be observed that not every citizen is willing to spend the same amount of time in the organisation of new citizen-lead projects. Respondent 9 also addressed the time needed for the construction of such citizen initiative: it cannot be created overnight, the citizens need to find their own self-organising mechanisms and are dependent on the external help they receive.

In short, a citizen initiative can be time consuming in two ways: on a day-to-day basis for the management of concrete actions (e.g. Brussels community gardens), and in a more general way with the development and construction of the citizen initiative in itself (e.g. formalise the citizen self-organisation).

### *4.2.3. Meta-governance strategies*

#### 4.2.3.1. IMPOSING STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

Few information are available for the Rotterdam's case study. The interviewees did not mentioned relevant elements to this meta-governance strategy for the Oude Westen. What is considered as strategic framework for the Oude Westen is the Aktiegroep itself. The Aktiegroep has been created after the initial struggles for the preservation of the area, encouraging the creation of the Aktiegroep did formalise the citizen initiative and enable the municipality to have strong and clear contacts with the citizens of the neighbourhood about the projects development. It is possible to associate this Aktiegroep formation to the asbl creation in the Brussels' case study, the two are considered as formalisation processes, and are imposed by the municipality to proceed the citizen lead initiatives.

#### 4.2.3.2. MONITORING

In the Oude Westen, the monitoring procedure works through the presence of the neighbourhood manager and the area networker, working in the same building as the Aktiegroep. This presence enables the citizens to have direct contact with the municipality on the ground, reducing the distance with municipal authorities. Following respondent 9, these two civil servants are mainly involved in the day-to-day practical tasks (e.g. direction of projects). Also, a project coordinator provides the link between the residents and the municipality.

Now that the municipality of Rotterdam decided to shut down the continuous financial help, it seems that the monitoring activities have been reduced too. The community workers working for the Aktiegroep are the ones who ensure the monitoring of projects on the ground. For respondent 9, community workers were initially introduced to the processes with the residents to see what problems were experienced, and learn how social policy should be handled on the ground, what role the projects could play in the neighbourhood, and what extra facilities were needed for the residents. The municipality is in fact delegating some competences to the Aktiegroep to assist the residents in their projects management, monitoring guide through the self-organising process. Nevertheless, for respondent 8, the Aktiegroep remains an independent citizen organisation and is thus not directly implementing the municipality's plans, they are just to be considered as a mean for the municipality to reach its citizens.

According to respondent 10, the monitoring of such citizen initiatives is complicated due to the large amount of different stakeholders involved. According to her, there are no strict measurements but an overall goal that is shared between the municipality and its citizens. To ensure a good monitoring, the municipality needs to manage the different ideas that emerge from the different groups of citizens.

#### 4.2.3.3. FRAMING AND STORYTELLING

The framing and storytelling strategy was not omnipresent in the Rotterdam's case study. The interviewees did not explicitly refer to frames that were adopted by the community, under the influence of a public institution. What is identified as relevant for this meta-governance strategy, is the presence of civil servants on site, who are directly involved in the planning of new neighbourhood activities. Following respondent 10, such an involvement of the municipality in the citizen initiative enables the public authority to guide the citizens and the Aktiegroep, but also to use this group of citizens to make new municipal plans. As a result, it is assumed that this involvement of the municipality frames the ideas that are developed in the Oude Westen.

The municipality is in control of the topics and general ideas of projects developed by the residents. For respondent 10, the role of the municipality is to make its citizens understand what projects are possible and realistic to consider. As mentioned by respondent 8: "who pays, decides", highlighting that the municipality decides/frames which topics have to be addressed (e.g. sustainability, energy, etc.) and based on this decision, the Oude Westen develops its own projects directly related to these topics. In



fact, such a management of the citizen projects is what is expected: the municipality giving clear guidelines to the Aktiegroep and the residents of the Oude Westen.

#### 4.2.3.4. PRESENCE OF SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Respondent 8 explained that the municipality was not willing to support their community at first. It is only later that they decided to grant some support to the citizens with real construction experts and social workers financially supported by the municipality. This support was granted to get the citizen initiative started and once it was well-functioning the support was gradually removed, until four years ago when the municipality decided to completely stop the support of the Aktiegroep (Desmet & Linssen, 2019). Respondent 8 believes that this decision is linked to the desire of the municipality to take control back over the neighbourhood. As explained by respondent 10, the subsidies and financial support is something that goes up and down: there is sometimes a lot of money and sometimes no money to grant a subsidy. The risk for citizens is that the loss of financial help leads to the loss of the Aktiegroep's support and community workers. As explained by respondent 9: "there is an enormous value placed on citizen participation, but there is no money for organising and supporting it with community workers, because they think it's all volunteers that we have, and that does not work".

For respondent 8, getting financially supported by the municipality is only a normal thing, because the municipality should try to facilitate the self-organisation of citizens. If such supporting actions are not accomplished for citizen initiatives, all those types of bottom-up projects will disappear. The municipality is still offering financial support for projects on a case-by-case basis (e.g. Duurzaam 010 (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2021)), but citizen dynamics are then different. The negative aspect about calls for projects is that less freedom is granted to the citizen initiative to imagine their own project in function of their own necessities. As explained by respondent 9, priorities from the municipality are different from the Oude Westen's priorities, which complicates the project orientation for citizens.

Apart from the financial support, the presence of the neighbourhood manager and the area networker ensures proximity with the Aktiegroep and the inhabitants of the Oude Westen themselves. As highlighted by respondent 9, these civil servants make use of the knowledge that the Aktiegroep has about the neighbourhood. The municipality also helps the residents by providing them with coaches, for instance: a financial aid has been granted to energy coaches in order to find ways to develop a gas-free neighbourhood (Desmet & Linssen, 2019).

#### 4.2.3.5. FORMULATING PLAYING RULES

The formulation of playing rules is not a meta-governance strategy significantly used by the municipality of Rotterdam. The Aktiegroep is considered to be relatively independent from the municipality for what concerns the development of its own ideas and projects. Nevertheless, it is true that the municipality delineates some limits and rules concerning the spending of the financial support made available to the residents of the Oude Westen. As mentioned before, the municipality, through its financial contribution, is able to direct the citizens to develop some aspects of their neighbourhood before others (respondent 8: "who pays, decides").

Respondent 9 explained that, the municipality supported the Aktiegroep for over 15 years and then gradually reduced the support provided because the citizen initiative seemed to be well-functioning on its own. Applying for municipal subsidies is still possible but only by applying to calls for projects, which imply that the citizens implement a project thought of by the municipality. Furthermore, leading such projects set stricter rules for the citizens (established by the municipality) when elaborating the neighbourhood project.

#### 4.2.3.6. PLAYING WITH FEAR

The playing with fear meta-governance strategy can be, to some extent, identified in the Rotterdam's case study, where the municipality uses the "subsidy" element as a mean to put pressure on the citizen self-organisation. Indeed, as developed by respondent 8, the financial support is something that « comes

and goes », depending on the municipal resources available. Respondent 8 is not worry about the subsidies coming back, she is worried about when it will come back. Cutting financial support is a way for the municipality to take some control back over citizen initiative and ensure that these do not become too powerful compared to their public institution. Thus, the support that the municipality is providing to the residents of the Oude Westen is currently being used as a “fear” factor, to put pressure on their citizen self-organisation and reassert the dominance of the municipality over the projects development in the city of Rotterdam.

#### 4.2.3.7. DIRECT INTERACTION

As in the case of the Brussels’ case study, Rotterdam’s interviewees did emphasize the need for reduced distances between public authorities and citizens. They acknowledged the added value of physical proximity with public authorities when it comes to the planning of new neighbourhood projects. The direct interaction occurring in the Oude Westen is identified in various ways.

The Aktiegroep, as a network organisation, is focused on finding the best way to communicate directly with its inhabitants and transfer their requests and ideas to external actors. Respondent 8 believes that the change of population inside the neighbourhood, and the phenomenon of “gentrification” taking place in the Oude Westen is continuously challenging the Aktiegroep and the municipality to reach everyone for future projects. Following respondent 4 and 8, online citizen-lead initiatives have been increasingly organised with the Covid-19 events, which have excluded some share of the citizens (older generation).

The municipality fixed direct communication channels with the neighbourhood by sending two civil servants to work in the Oude Westen. Their function is to assist the Aktiegroep and the residents at a local level and learn from their obstacles, ideas, and achievements. The interesting elements are then transferred to the municipal authorities. According to respondent 9, thanks to a face-to-face discussion with an alderman of Rotterdam’s municipality, the Aktiegroep achieved a two year extension of the municipal subsidies.

Lastly, an essential feature of the citizen initiative in the Oude Westen is the physical proximity it has with its inhabitants. Indeed, occupying a building in the neighbourhood itself enables the citizens to have a clear meeting-point for project development in the Oude Westen. Residents are welcome find a social worker at the Wijkplein to present an issue or an idea. It is the physical interaction and proximity between the residents and the Aktiegroep that establishes strong trust-worthy relations and boosts the motivation of citizens to get involved for project management. Respondent 9 goes further and suggests that the Aktiegroep’s building should become central to the collaboration processes with the municipality, with an increased number of municipal employees come to sit together with citizens and social workers in the same building.

In a few words, the meta-governance strategy of “direct interaction” that was identified in the Brussels’ case study has also been identified in the Rotterdam’s case study. The close proximity and interaction between public actors and citizens in the Oude Westen proves its utility to reach the success of a citizen initiative. The desire of the inhabitants of the Oude Westen and the Aktiegroep is to establish closer relationships with the municipality and other relevant actors.

#### 4.2.4. Co-creation

In this sub-section, we aim to learn more about the types of co-creation in the Rotterdam's case study, using the work of Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015). Through the answers of the interviewees, we will also be able to consider if the co-creation processes happen following the thoughts of Bisschops and Beunen (2019): where the public institution is still the one deciding at a distance (= meta-governance).

- Citizens as co-implementer: the assistance of citizens is required to complete the project

Citizens as co-implementer is identified in the neighbourhood of the Oude Westen, where volunteers are getting involved in the project developments and implementations (working groups). The topics that are developed in the neighbourhood (e.g. energy, green, etc.) are discussed with the municipality who finance the different projects through calls for projects. The public authority is thus clearly influencing the citizens on the topics and the kind of projects to lead in their neighbourhood. In short, the municipality provides the financial support in exchange of specific topics being developed and implemented by the citizens in the neighbourhood.

- Citizens as co-designer: while local governments initiate the project, citizens decide how service delivery is designed and maintained

This case study considers the citizens as co-designers. Indeed, the projects developed in the neighbourhood answer the needs of the local citizens, taking into account the municipal objectives into account. The physical presence of civil servants in the neighbourhood itself enables the municipality to co-design the projects directly with the residents of the Oude Westen and the Aktiegroep, meeting their needs and the municipal objectives. Respondent 10 explained that activities such as the organisation of ateliers are a concrete example of how the co-designing phase can take place. Desmet and Linssen (2019) developed that the Aktiegroep was also open to collaboration with external partners who wish to develop projects in co-creation with residents, to develop the best output possible.

- Citizens as initiators: the government is then considered as an actor that follows and citizens take the initiatives of the projects following their local needs

Indeed, as explained by respondent 8 the residents of the Oude Westen are welcome to enter the Aktiegroep's building in order to develop their ideas and ambitions for the neighbourhood. The Aktiegroep is then able to organise its citizens together and get the municipal support to answer the demands and develop new projects. Respondent 8 gave an example of an architect who enabled the greening of several streets in the neighbourhood. The ideas and development of projects in the neighbourhood are directly being initiated by its residents.

Following the co-creation idea developed by Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015), it seems that the Oude Westen's case study does consider the citizens as being co-implementers, co-designers and initiators. It is thus realistic to consider that co-creation processes are being used by the Aktiegroep to develop the neighbourhood.

Lastly, the co-creation idea developed by Bisschops and Beunen (2019) is also recognisable. Indeed, for Bisschops and Beunen (2019), the public institutions have the responsibility to foster active citizenship, and guide/influence the citizens' projects from a distance. This idea has been addressed by respondent 10 in the Rotterdam's case study, highlighting the need to consider the needs of the citizens which are related to municipal goals (both need to be related).

#### 4.2.5. Outputs

Finally, the interaction and co-creation processes happening between citizens and their public authority are expected to produce two possible outputs: the formalisation and institutionalisation of citizen initiatives, and the production of new spatial planning service arrangements.

##### 4.2.5.1. FORMALISATION AND INSTITUTIONALISATION

In the case of the Oude Westen, the Aktiegroep is the concrete realisation of the citizen initiative that was initiated 50 years ago. The residents of the Oude Westen initiated their civic self-organising community when they struggled against the municipality for the preservation of their neighbourhood. When the municipality recognised their self-organisation, the residents initiated the Aktiegroep, working as a network organisation for the residents of the Oude Westen and ensuring the link with the municipality. The Aktiegroep is in fact a formalised organisation representing the self-organisation in the Oude Westen, which is being supported by the municipality. The Aktiegroep is composed of (Desmet & Linssen, 2019):

- A chairman: network and face to the outside
- A secretary: legal knowledge to support the chairman
- A treasurer: financial and fiscal knowledge
- Members with knowledge of- and affinity with the network of residents and partners of the Aktiegroep
- Member with knowledge of- and affinity with the activities around the Programme Building

The Aktiegroep is the perfect example of how successful citizen initiative processes lead to the formalisation and institutionalisation of a citizen initiative. Interestingly, now that the municipal subsidies stopped, respondent 9 helped the Aktiegroep to become a more formalised organisation, to take responsibility and to continue to bring money in (partners and funds). Thus, it appears that to grow further, apart from a public institution, citizen initiatives require further formalisation and institutionalisation stages.

##### 4.2.5.2. NEW SPATIAL PLANNING SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS

This case study also proved the necessity for a specific service arrangement: physical proximity between the citizens and the public institution. Indeed, one of the key for the success of citizen initiatives in the city of Rotterdam is related to the proximity that exists between the municipality and its citizens. In the case of the Oude Westen, the two civil servants (a neighbourhood manager and an area networker) present in the neighbourhood to represent the municipality and assist the Aktiegroep and the residents, have ensured the project developments in the neighbourhood: meeting the needs of the residents and framed by the municipality's program and objectives for the city. Such support provided by the municipality is now being applied to other self-organised neighbourhoods, for instance the pilot project addressed by respondent 10.

The Rotterdam's case study emphasized the need for direct, physical interaction between public authorities and their citizens. Such proximity ensures the well-functioning and development of appropriate projects in a neighbourhood.

Note that this proximity between the citizens and the public institution is also an element that had been mentioned several times for the Brussels' case study, it should thus be considered useful in the community gardens' context too.

#### 4.2.6. Conclusion

To summarize, the analysis of Oude Westen case study has shown that success factors and meta-governance strategies were present to ensure the success of the citizen self-organisation. Some components of the conceptual framework were clearly identified, while others remain absent.

The success factors present in the conceptual framework were almost all identified in the Rotterdam's case study. Interestingly, we noticed that this citizen initiative did organise itself as a reaction to the same trigger as the Brussels' case study: the preservation of an area. The strength of this citizen self-organisation lies in its strong trust-worthy relations between residents and the Aktiegroep, the very good coordination and communication (facilitated by the Aktiegroep) between the residents (but affected by the COVID-19 situation in the past year), the clear locus in interaction: the central Aktiegroep's building, and the many links with helpful external actors. The "adaptive capacity" is the only factor that seemed to have been damaged by the loss of municipal financial support. Indeed, with the loss of continuous financial support, the citizen initiative now need to apply to various calls for projects, which affects the freedom of the neighbourhood to develop the project they want and spend their money the way they want.

Multiple meta-governance strategies mentioned in the conceptual framework were used by the municipality of Rotterdam. The monitoring, framing and storytelling, and formulation of playing rules strategies are all three facilitated by the presence of civil servants in the neighbourhood the Oude Westen. These civil servants enable direct communication with the Aktiegroep and the residents of the neighbourhood, to ensure the well-functioning of co-creation processes with the municipality. On the other hand, "imposing strategic frameworks" has recently been limited by the decrease of municipal support towards the citizens. Thus, the "presence of supporting actions" (mainly financial) has been stopped by the municipality for some time, and has been perceived as a "playing with fear" strategy by the Aktiegroep and the residents of the Oude Westen.

Table 2 Evaluation of the Oude Westen case study (green: identified; orange: partly identified; red: absent)

Success Factors	Meta-governance strategies
Presence of a trigger	Imposing strategic frameworks
Trust-worthy relations	Monitoring
Focus in interaction	Framing and storytelling
Locus in interaction	Presence of supporting actions
Boundary spanning	Formulating playing rules
Adaptive capacity	Playing with fear
Time availability	Direct interaction

The two extra components that were identified in the Brussels' case study proved to be important in this second case study too. Indeed, the time perspective was addressed by respondent 9, who confirmed the idea that to last over time, members of a citizen initiative need to dedicate a lot of time to their self-organisation. On the other hand, the Rotterdam's case study proved that "direct interaction" taking place between citizens and public authorities was an essential component to ensure the success of a citizen initiative. Thus, both extra components were identified in the Rotterdam's case study.

Finally, the Aktiegroep and the Oude Westen have adopted co-creation procedures with the municipality. All the types of co-creation processes developed by Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015) are recognisable in the Rotterdam's case study (citizens as implementers, designers, initiators). The co-creation idea by Bisschops and Beunen (2019) is also relevant for this case, as public institutions influence from a distance the citizen initiative in their neighbourhood projects development. The case study refer to the formalisation of the citizen initiative through the creation of the Aktiegroep. Also, it emphasizes the need for direct, physical interaction between public authorities and their citizens. Such proximity ensures the well-functioning and development of appropriate projects in a neighbourhood.

### 4.3. Comparison of cases

After having analysed both case studies individually, this research has developed sufficient understanding to compare the two citizen initiatives on the basis of its conceptual framework. The results of this analysis also suggest a possible modification of the conceptual framework as they emphasize the importance and the irrelevance of some success factors and meta-governance strategies.

#### SUCCESS FACTORS

	<b>Community gardens AV</b>	<b>Oude Westen</b>
<b>Presence of a trigger</b>	Preservation of the area + water management	Preservation of the neighbourhood
<b>Trust-worthy relations</b>	Yes, strong core group	Yes, Aktiegroep represent these
<b>Focus in interaction</b>	Difficulties due to conflicts	Yes, important task for the Aktiegroep
<b>Locus in interaction</b>	Not since the struggle	Yes, the Aktiegroep building on the Wijkplein
<b>Boundary spanning</b>	Only ensured by respondent 5	Yes, the Aktiegroep is central to this task
<b>Adaptive capacity</b>	Too much adaptive capacity	Good adaptive capacity until the stop of subsidies

An extra success factor has emerged from the information given by the different interviewees. These emphasized the “time availability” factor in two ways. First, getting involved and active in a citizen initiative is a time consuming activity to add to an already existing professional and social life. For instance, respondent 5’s management of the self-organisation process in the community gardens leaves her little time to cultivate in her plot. Second, as mentioned by respondent 9, the development of a citizen initiative happens over a long period of time. It seems thus important to include this component in the conceptual framework because it highlights that a citizen initiative would not be able to be developed if its members do not have time to spend to the self-organising processes.

<b>Time availability</b>	Respondent 5 carries the different tasks alone (not enough)	Volunteers and Aktiegroep workers who are entirely devoted to the neighbourhoods projects
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#### META-GOVERNANCE STRATEGIES

	<b>Community gardens AV</b>	<b>Oude Westen</b>
<b>Imposing strategic frameworks</b>	Yes: the asbl requirement	Yes: the Aktiegroep is the representation of it
<b>Monitoring</b>	No monitoring, which is problematic	Yes, close monitoring by the municipality
<b>Framing and storytelling</b>	Framing carried out by the municipality is on the rise (getting closer to the gardeners’ activities)	Civil servants present in the neighbourhood have an influence on the project development
<b>Presence of supporting actions</b>	Yes: financial, informative, expertise, mediator	Big support in the beginning that gradually disappeared
<b>Formulating playing rules</b>	Yes, e.g. asbl-formation	With the drop of subsidies, the municipality is also dropping some playing rules



<b>Playing with fear</b>	Used but not creating productive dynamics	Used to take control back on the neighbourhood
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The first meta-governance strategy (“imposing strategic frameworks”) seems to divide the interviewees. They acknowledge the need for strategic frameworks but contest the “imposing” aspect of this strategy. As a result, a reformulation of the strategy is proposed: “suggesting strategic frameworks”. As mentioned by respondent 4 their role is not to impose anything to citizen initiatives, but rather to monitor and help them in their project construction.

Moreover, interviewees of both case studies, seriously questioned the added value of the “playing with fear” meta-governance strategy. They all seemed to agree on the fact that the “fear” factor does not influence positively the civic self-organisation and its relation with a public authority. It could thus be considered to eliminate this meta-governance strategy from the conceptual framework.

Finally, an additional meta-governance strategy has been identified in the interviewees’ answers. They expressed the need for direct interaction between the public authorities and the citizens. Direct interaction and close proximity between the two parties enables the clarity discussions. This has already been implemented in the Rotterdam’s case study, where two civil servants are physically present and involved in the projects development of the neighbourhood. This strategy is differentiated from the “monitoring” strategy, which one is expected to happen at a distance (no face-to-face interaction required).

<b>Direct interaction</b>	High demands of the gardeners to have face-to-face and honest discussions with the municipality	Two civil servants representing the municipality and working in the same building as the Aktiegroep.
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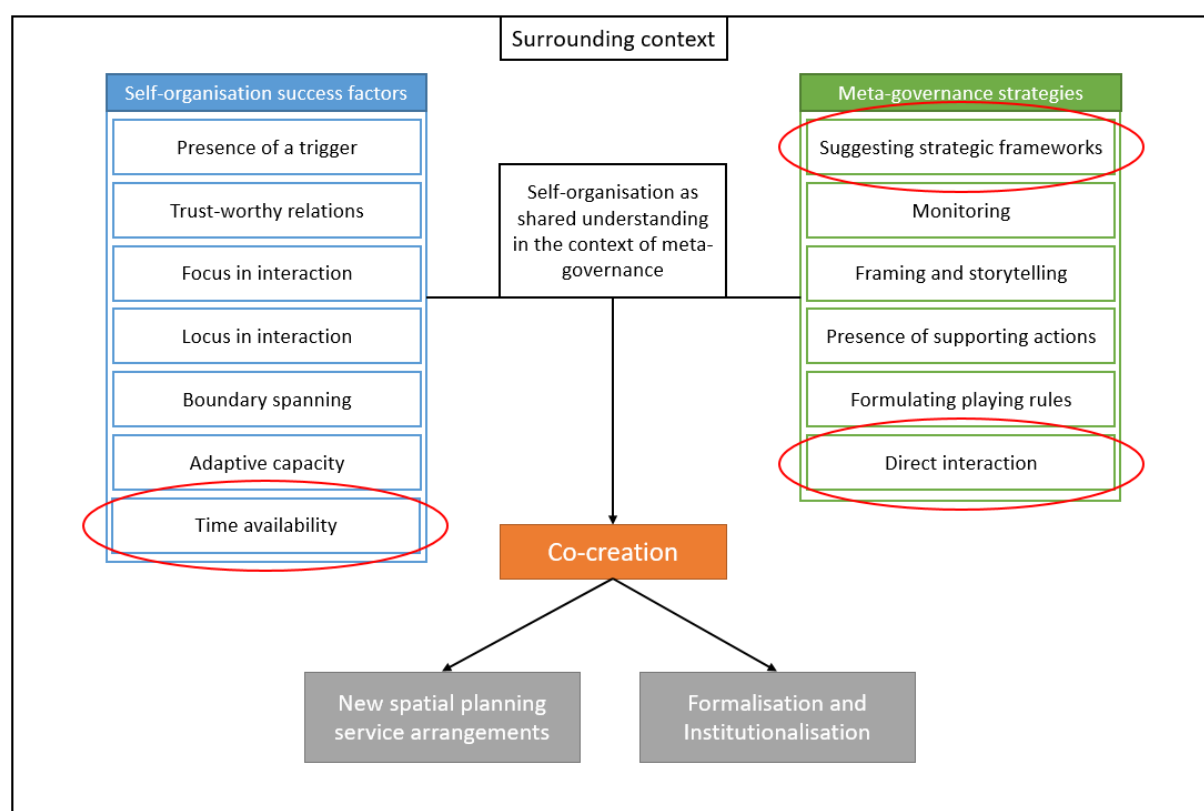


Figure 16 Final Conceptual Framework

## 5. Discussion

This thesis research addressed the different success factors and meta-governance strategies likely to ensure the success of a citizen self-organisation. The conceptual framework developed by Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) completed by a “co-creation” component and the “new spatial planning service arrangements” output, was taken as a basis for the analysis of two case studies: the Agnès Varda urban community gardens (Brussels), and the Oude Westen (Rotterdam).

Overall, the Brussels’ case study is considered as a citizen initiative that is not yet successful. Conflictual relations with the municipality have complicated the co-creation process between actors over time and need to be improved to ensure the success of the gardeners’ self-organisation. The lack of municipal support and the loss of key individuals has lead the citizen initiative to come back to a rather early stage development. In the future, the municipality aims to improve the quality of their support to the community gardens, especially through the improvement of the “monitoring” meta-governance strategy.

All in all, the Rotterdam’s case study was used by this thesis research thanks to its very complete development. The case study showed that through the use of every success factor, in combination with the right meta-governance strategy, a citizen initiative reaches success. In the Oude Westen, the relevant meta-governance used are: monitoring, framing and storytelling, and formulating playing rules. Nowadays, the citizen initiative is facing some supporting difficulties, which forces the Aktiegroep to find new external funds and partnerships to ensure the durability of their project development and management.

The results from this case studies’ analysis indicate that the support of public authorities is crucial to the development of citizen initiatives. Furthermore, the analysis shows that, as organised as a citizen initiative can be, if it enters in conflictual relations with public authorities, it is likely to struggle a lot in its development and management of new projects. Nevertheless, the goal of public authorities is to assist the citizens and co-create projects with them in order to ensure the formalisation and institutionalisation of their initiatives, then also ensuring the autonomy and continuity of the citizen self-organisation over time. As both case studies emphasized, big support needs to be provided to the citizens in their initial phases (e.g. community gardens), but once the citizens are well organised, public authorities are able to progressively decrease their support (e.g. Oude Westen).

In the end, an additional “time availability” success factor was considered and included in the final conceptual framework. It was first highlighted by respondent 4 expressing the idea that members of a citizen initiatives need to dedicate their time on a daily basis to the construction of self-organisation processes. Respondent 9 confirmed this thought and added the long-term perspective that is required to develop the citizen self-organisation. Moreover, an additional “direct interaction” meta-governance strategy was added to the final conceptual framework expressing the need for proximity between citizens and public authorities. While the “playing with fear” meta-governance strategy was eliminated due to its non-constructive impact on the success of a citizen initiative.

### 5.1. Implications of research

As developed in the introduction, few research have focused on green space development as the result of citizen initiatives. The present research, and the associated two case studies, aim to fill this gap in the academic literature by considering specific citizen self-organisations’ contexts. The two case studies reflect similarities and differences that are inevitable as they are taking place in different environments. Choosing an already elaborated case study (the Oude Westen) enabled this thesis research to put into perspective the Brussels’ case study, which is still at a relatively early stage. The lessons from the Oude Westen could be used by the Brussels’ gardeners and the municipality of Ixelles to question their own operating mode, and consider new self-organising components and meta-governance strategies.



Through the modification of the original framework developed by Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015), it is now possible to have a concrete idea of the success factors and meta-governance strategies that are required for a citizen initiative to succeed. The original framework is already well developed, but the updated one is assumed to be more complete and proved to be relevant for the analysis of both case studies selected. At the end, the components developed in the final conceptual framework may help the gardeners and the municipality of Ixelles to ensure the durability of the Agnès Varda community gardens self-organisation.

## **5.2. Limits**

This research had some theoretical and methodological limitations. Theoretically, the modified conceptual framework from Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015) proved to be relevant for this thesis research. The addition of the “co-creation” component to the conceptual framework was based on my interpretation and knowledge developed during the theoretical researches I elaborated for this thesis. Furthermore, the final version of the conceptual framework embody spatial planning ideas that influence my own perspective, with the role of the spatial planner that is indirectly included through the whole framework. It might thus not be relevant for other citizen initiatives taking place in another context and adopting another focus than in relation to the spatial planning field.

Methodologically, ten interviews were conducted with relevant actors of both case studies. More interviewees were selected for the Brussels’ case study (7 interviewees) because it seemed necessary concerning the early stage of the citizen initiative. Three interviews were thus conducted for the Rotterdam’s case study. Let’s notice that due to a difficult COVID-19 situation the opportunity to visit the Oude Westen with relevant actors did not present itself. At the end, the focus of this case study was put on the Aktiegroep itself, which is why two interviews were conducted with two of its members. The third interview was conducted with a member of the municipality of Rotterdam, who had some knowledge about the management of citizen initiatives, but little specific information about the Oude Westen itself. Considering the advanced stage of the Aktiegroep in the Oude Westen, no interview was conducted with the residents and volunteers of the neighbourhood because the Aktiegroep’s interviewees are assumed to have a more general knowledge over the citizen initiative than volunteers.

Nonetheless, the results of this thesis research remain valid for the purpose of answering the main research question. Indeed, the cases selected and the information collected was useful for the analysis based on the developed theoretical framework. The relevance of the factors included in the conceptual framework could be assessed for two cases, and some additional relevant factors were found.

## **5.3. Recommendations**

Lastly, recommendations can be formulated for those involved in the cases and for future researchers.

First, for the Brussels’ case study, this research recommends the give extra attention to two different success factors poorly developed until now: focus in interaction and boundary spanning, which both rely on the implication of the gardeners in the self-organising tasks, providing help to their leader. On the other hand, it is crucial for the municipality to develop “monitoring” and “direct interaction” meta-governance strategies. Indeed, the vagueness that frames the current interactions between the citizens and the municipality needs to be addressed to expect an eventual success of the citizen initiative over time.

Second, the Oude Westen could also benefit from some improvements. The citizen initiative seems to meet every success factor. However, with the loss of municipal subsidies it is important for them to find new support (improve boundary spanning). The municipality is required to make efforts to keep on supporting its citizens and drop the “playing with fear” strategy.

Third, this research and conceptual framework could be recommended for future research on citizen self-organisation in the spatial planning field. It is however important to critically review this framework

if it is used in another context. The analysis of similar case studies based on the final conceptual framework could be interesting to consider its relevance and to confirm the presence (or not) of the modified components.

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, by analysing the Agnès Varda urban community gardens' self-organisation, and the citizen initiative taking place in the Oude Westen, this thesis has identified success factors for self-organisation projects, and has addressed different meta-governance strategies applicable by public authorities to assist citizen initiatives. The two case studies were analysed following a conceptual framework inspired from the work of Nederhand, Bekkers and Voorberg (2015). By analysing both case studies in function of each component present in the framework, conclusions could be drawn regarding the importance of each component.

At the end, the success factors identified in this research are: presence of a trigger, trust-worthy relations, focus in interaction, locus in interaction, boundary spanning, adaptive capacity, and time availability. It is thus assumed that a citizen initiative composed of all these different factors will be likely to succeed, whereas a citizen initiative missing one or more of these success factors will not succeed over time. On the other hand, the meta-governance strategies that this research acknowledges are: suggesting strategic frameworks, monitoring, framing and storytelling, presence of supporting actions, formulating playing rules, and direct interaction. In contrast to the success factors, all meta-governance strategies do not need to be used for one same citizen initiative. Indeed, this list takes into account the relevant meta-governance strategies to consider when assisting a citizen initiative, but depending on the specific context, some strategies should be prioritized over others. Hence, the results indicate that if a citizen self-organisation is composed of the above mentioned factors and is appropriately assisted by public authorities, it is likely to generate a constructive co-creation process leading to productive outputs (formalisation and future citizen initiative management methods).

The qualitative research methods used for the purpose of this thesis research were selected to consider new specific contexts in which citizen initiatives are being developed. The two case studies selected were related to urban greening citizen initiatives, the Brussels' case study being at a rather early stage while the Rotterdam's case study being already fully elaborated. Having analysed an early stage case study and a fully elaborated case study enabled this study to address specific details and issues coming up during each phase, for instance: the formalisation process at an early stage and the decreasing public authority's support over time. As expected, the comparison between the two case studies enabled the identification of relevant success factors and meta-governance strategies that shape the outcome of citizen initiatives. The results gathered also exceeded the expectations as they enhanced the conceptual framework by identifying one new success factor (time availability) and one new meta-governance strategy (direct interaction).

In the context of the Brussels' case study, the action research used enabled the thesis research to gather specific information from observations and direct interaction with the citizens. The analysis then concluded that this case study is not yet successful, because the community gardens' self-organisation, without public authorities' assistance, cannot sustainably develop over time. This is emphasized in the conceptual framework: the co-creation process between public authorities and citizens is shaped by the presence (or not) of the success factors and relevant meta-governance strategies. The co-creation phase taking place between both actors then enable the consideration of outputs as the formalisation of citizen initiatives, and the production of new planning methodologies for similar citizen initiatives.

The Rotterdam's case study proved to be very complete as its analysis revealed the presence of every success factor and meta-governance strategies mentioned in the conceptual framework. Among the meta-governance strategies, some were partially being used, highlighting the idea that meta-governance strategies are being selected and used in function of the specific context. As a result, the Oude Westen's

case study reflects the idea that with all success factors met within the citizen self-organisation and the appropriate use of meta-governance strategies, a citizen initiative can very well co-create (citizens as co-implementer, co-designer, and initiators) its projects with public actors, and ensure the formalisation of their initiative and the production of spatial planning services to assist future citizen initiatives (e.g. the proximity needed between citizens and public authorities).

By considering two case studies evolving in similar contexts (urban environments), this research has brought in-depth understanding on citizen initiatives for the spatial planning field, which has recently developed some interest for citizen self-organisation developments. Hence, the present research contributes to the knowledge available regarding citizen self-organisation for spatial planners and researchers. It provides concrete examples and details on urban citizen initiatives developing greening and sustainability projects. The challenge for spatial planners is now to position themselves in citizen initiative developments in order to ensure the best project management possible between citizens and public authorities, reflecting the needs of each actor. The challenge for spatial planners lies also in the consideration of citizen initiatives in very specific contexts, which are likely to influence the citizen self-organisation in itself. The present thesis research brings understanding on urban green citizen initiatives, but citizen initiatives taking place in different contexts require further research to guide spatial planners in projects development and management processes.

To better understand the implications of this research's results, future studies are encouraged to address civic self-organizing projects developed in similar contexts, using the final conceptual framework. Using this framework for the analysis of citizen initiatives developed in urban greening contexts will confirm the relevance of its components or bring further modifications. The generalisation of this framework to different specific contexts will ensure the acknowledgement of the essential components already identified. Consequently, by continuing to explore the topic of citizen initiatives in different contexts, the quality of spatial planners' work will improve thanks to the knowledge they will develop on the specific needs required by citizen self-organisations (evolving in specific contexts) to succeed.

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## 8. Appendices

### 8.1. Interview guides

#### **Interview public institutions**

##### Introduction

Hello and thank you for being here.

The interview we are going to do and the questions I am going to ask you are all related to the theme of the "Citizens' Initiative". What I expect from you is that you answer my questions by explaining your experience related to this topic. The data I collect in this interview will be processed only by me. Only I and the people who read my research will have access to this information. Furthermore, your identity will be kept anonymous when I refer to your answers if you wish.

I am used to recording interviews, which makes it easier for me to collect any information you may give me, is this okay?

You should also be aware that your participation in this interview is not compulsory, which means that you can interrupt it at any time and you can choose not to answer a question if you wish.

So far, do you have any questions?

Let's get started.

##### Initial questions

Can you introduce yourself? Your position and your work?

What kind of projects do you follow?

What is your role in managing these initiatives?

Does your institutions find the initiatives to follow and support or do the citizens come to your institution?

How do citizens come to you? How can they contact you? Why do they contact you in the first place?

##### The process

What are the different steps in the process of working with citizens?

How are citizens' initiatives initiated? Who initiates them (type of profile)?

When do citizens contact you? For what reasons in general?

- Imposing strategic frameworks

Does your institution provide for community organisation models to manage citizens' initiatives?  
Example: charter, methodological guide, etc.

- Monitoring

How does your public institution monitor/oversee citizens' initiatives? By what means?

- Framing and storytelling

Which elements are naturally integrated (by citizens) in citizens' initiatives and are appreciated by the public institution?



Do you perceive any influence of your public institution on the citizens' initiatives organised by itself?

- Presence of supporting actions

How does the public institution support citizens' initiatives? Financial support, expert eye, etc.?

What tools are available to citizens?

How does communication work between citizens and a public institution?

- Formulating playing rules

Which rules/elements should be integrated by citizens' initiatives? Example: the BE charter states that vegetable gardens may not contain shelters on the plots.

What happens if these rules are not respected?

- Playing with fear

What can the public institution do to force citizens to comply with its rules?

How does the public institution ensure compliance?

### Collaboration

How is collaboration between citizens and public institutions implemented? By what means?

How long does collaboration usually last?

When does the support offered by the public institution end?

What is the main obstacle to collaboration between citizens and public authorities?

What is the most favourable element for collaboration between citizens and public authorities?

What are the concessions made by citizens and public authorities? What elements are required by both actors?

Is the citizens' initiative directly managed by the authority or are some management capacities delegated to local experts/municipalities/NGOs?

Is there any follow-up on citizens' initiatives that have already been in contact with your public institution?

### Conclusion

I think the interview is over. Thank you for your time, you have given me a lot of useful information for my research.

Is there anything else you would like to add to conclude this interview? Do you have any questions or comments?

I have one last practical question for you, can I contact you if I need any other important information?

All right, then, let me thank you again for the time you spent answering my questions.

## **Interview citizen initiative**

### **Introduction**

Good morning and thank you for being here.

The interview we are going to do and the questions I am going to ask you are all related to the theme of the "Citizens' Initiative". What I expect from you is that you answer my questions by explaining your experience related to this topic. The data collected in this interview will be processed only by me. Only I and the people who read my research will have access to this information. In addition, your identity will be kept anonymous when I refer to your answers, if you wish.

It is my practice to record interviews, which makes it easier for me to gather any information you may give me, is this OK?

You should also be aware that your participation in this interview is not compulsory, which means that you can interrupt it at any time and you can choose not to answer a question if you wish.

So far, do you have any questions?

Let's get started.

### **Initial questions**

Can you introduce yourself? What is your role in the community?

How is the community organised in general? Is there an internal organisation on the kitchen garden site?

Is there a leader(s)? If so, for which theme management?

What projects have the vegetable gardeners already carried out?

### **The process**

Can you define/introduce your initiative?

What is the problem, what do you want to achieve? (Related to the kitchen garden site itself).

- Presence of a trigger

What motivated the community to get organised? (When the vegetable gardens were set up + when a real organisation was set up).

When did the gardens start?

When did an organisation come into being? E.g. why now: the water situation?

- Trust-worthy relationships

Do community members interact a lot with each other, do they know each other? How do they know each other?

How is communication managed within the community?

When a problem arises, is it dealt with internally first? Who is competent to resolve conflicts?

- Focus in interaction

Are meetings organised to exchange ideas? How are these meetings conducted?

Is the problem (droughts, construction) perceived in the same way by all members of the community?  
Is it shared?

- Locus in interaction

Is the information centralised? If so, where? Example: communications with the commune.

Is there a fixed place where people in the community can meet? Is there always someone there?

Are there online (virtual) exchanges between community members?

- Boundary spanning

Do you have contacts with external actors? Who are they?

Have external actors helped or hindered you in your projects? If so, which ones and how?

- Adaptive capacity

Are you allowed to manage your affairs as you see fit? Example: by becoming a non-profit organisation you will have to comply with certain more administrative rules?

Can you adapt to the rules as you wish?

#### Meta-governance strategies

How do you perceive the follow-up and/or support provided by public institutions? How do they assist you? Are there any rules they impose on you?

What strategies/attitude should public institutions adopt in order to assist you in the best possible way in your opinion? Example:

- Administrative checks based on guidance documents.
- Rather assist you at a distance or be involved in the project directly (financial support, experts, etc.)
- Or not be involved at all? But how could they then ensure compliance in the gardens?
- How can rules be enforced in kitchen gardens? How can quality monitoring be carried out?
- Was the recognition of the gardens appreciated by the gardeners?
- Has the municipality or BE ever "threatened" the gardens with closure?

#### Co-creation

How is the influence of public actors perceived? How do public actors influence community projects?

What is the main obstacle to collaboration between citizens and public authorities? What is the most favourable element for collaboration between citizens and public authorities?

#### Conclusion

I think the interview is over. Thank you for your time, you have given me a lot of useful information for my research.

Is there anything else you would like to add to conclude this interview? Do you have any questions or comments?

I have one last practical question for you: can I contact you if I need any other important information?

All right, then, let me thank you again for the time you spent answering my questions.