

# THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIETAL CHANGES AND THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERS

Can co-production maintain local liveability?



## Colofon

### Title

The Challenges of Societal Changes and the Power of Volunteers  
Can co-production maintain local liveability?

### Background

The research for this thesis was carried out within the framework of the INTERREG VA Project Volunteers 2.0 as part of a research internship at the HAN University of Applied Sciences. Therefore, the layout of this thesis is oriented towards the one of the projects final handbook, which can be found in the reference list under Melis et al. (2022).

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## Preface

This thesis marks the end of my Master's degree in Human Geography at the Radboud University. It not only reflects my development as researcher within this program, but also my development as a human being.

As for my personal development, I was active as a volunteer myself until I came to the Netherlands. My career thereby started as a delegate of the hockey department of my local sports club already in 2015, which was later on accompanied by other positions within the department and club. In executing my voluntary duty, I got involved in democratic processes within the sports club, as well as the interaction between the club and the local government. When I started my bachelor studies in Geography in 2016, the volunteer perspective was extended by a scientific one, that paid attention on who was participating and who not, thus linking my experiences to demographical analyses. However, although writing about the demographical influences on sport clubs was one idea for my bachelor's thesis, I ended up writing about graveyards in Hamburg and their future developments.

Therefore, it is all the more fitting that my master thesis will finally deal with the volunteer topic, changing my focus from future developments of the death to future developments of the living.

That being said, a second aspect shall be mentioned at this point. I was born and raised in Hamburg in Germany. But during my studies and my involvement in international projects as a student employee in a city development company, I realized that I needed to extend my perspective from a local to a more international one. I needed to escape my bubble, which I then did by coming to the Netherlands for my master's degree. Participating in the Dutch-German Volunteer 2.0 project thereby gave me the chance to combine my old perspective with the new one, to compare them both and to become even more aware what their similarities and differences are, how both countries face similar problems and how each one developed their own best practises to solve them. Analysing which solutions for the same demographical challenges can be applied even if the structural foundations in both countries might differ might be helpful to formulate general solution approaches for other European or even non-European countries with similar problems.

Before the thesis will start, I would like to most genuinely thank my thesis supervisor Prof. Ernste for his wise advice and for calming me down whenever I was worried, as well as Prof.

van Houtum for the second examination of my thesis. A heartfelt thank you goes also to my internship supervisor Dr Korrie Melis for the opportunity to do an internship in the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 for our many conversations and for asking the right questions at the right time, to help me figuring out what I wanted to do and how. I further would like to thank the rest of the Volunteers 2.0 team, from both, the HAN and the HRW. Additionally, a huge thank you goes out to all my interview partners for taking the time to participate in this thesis and for sharing their experiences and thoughts with me. I hope that my work will do them justice. A warm-hearted thank you also belongs to the team of the district office Neu\_Meerbeck in Moers, that for two days answered all my questions and allowed me to gain insight into the work of a district manager, to give me some experience of the work I would like to do in the future.

Finally, I would like to thank Saumya Shendurnikar, who proofread my thesis, as well as my family, who supported me in studying abroad.

I hope that you as a reader enjoy reading this work and gain new perspectives on how demographic changes, voluntary engagement and local liveability are connected with each other and how we can use this knowledge to being prepared for the future.

Kim-Jasmin Menssing

## Abstract

Germany as well as the Netherlands experienced huge changes in their citizen distributions in the last years. Processes like urbanisation and demographical transition, where the ever less young population moves from rural areas to the big cities, led to sparsely populated spaces with an increasingly older population. This development then starts new challenges for local infrastructure, since different age groups have different demands and needs that need to be faced. At the same time, fewer people mean less financial resources to pay for the maintenance of such infrastructure or welfare services. Following Giddens's structuration theory, this already led to changes in the provision and the provider of welfare services. Nevertheless, such developments are often the reason for increased fees and cut back in services as well as their quality, thus creating a downward spiral where even more people leave an area.

To stop this spiral, local liveability has to be maintained. When considering the Community Capitals Framework, increasing the political capital seems to be the most promising in this case. For the municipalities this means giving citizens a voice to be heard and initiatives the chance to engage. Thereby a motivation for the volunteers is not only to ensure the provision of such services, but to have a saying in what is happening and how. But not all forms of participation are the same, as can be inter alia seen with Arnstein's famous participation ladder. If the cooperation between local governments and volunteers is not executed in the right way, the process itself is not sustainable and the alleged solution turns out to be none. In that aspect Löffler and Timm-Arnold argue that co-production is the most sustainable form of cooperation.

But for this co-production to work in a sustainable way, it is important to analyse, which aspects exist on the side of the volunteers, as well as on the municipalities side that benefit or hinder such cooperation, so that the city representatives can (re-) act at an early stage. On the volunteer's side such influences are inter alia of geographical, demographical, or technological nature, or even depending on their live situations. Cooperating with volunteers then not only bears benefits, such as increased social capital that leads to increased liveability, but also risks. Examples thereof are volunteer burnout or the non-representativity of initiatives for the whole community.

Employees of the municipal administration not only need to consider all these aspects for their part of the cooperation, but they are also themselves dependent on underlying structures,

such as the compilation of the budgets they can spend to support the initiatives, or the way they have to have to answer to higher hierarchical levels respectively being more or less independent from them in their work.

Besides this rather theoretical approach the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 brought more praxis into the thesis. Therefore 11 experts from 10 municipalities were interviewed about their personal experiences with interacting with volunteers. On the basis of that it was analysed that the municipality experts do act in many cases very similar, but that they also differ, from municipality to municipality, but also across the border. The biggest country wise difference thereby is that Dutch municipalities mainly support in a financial way, whereas German municipalities focus on non-financial support. On the basis of these country-specific approaches it was analysed how much more or less municipalities in the Netherlands and Germany tend to use co-production or not. The main conclusion out of that thereby was that it is easier for citizens in the Netherlands to start initiatives than it is in Germany but that both systems have different advantages and opportunities for improvement.

**Key concepts: liveability; Community Capitals Framework; social capital; co-production; demographic transition**

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01

**INTRO  
DUCTION**

## 1. Introduction

*“The processes of demographic change not only cause a wide range of challenges for local public policy, but at the same time also limit the endogenous capacity to deal successfully, both economically and demographically with the inherent consequences” (Swiaczny, 2010, p. 209).*

Swiaczny wrote this in a paper about the demographic change in Germany already twelve years ago. But how is the situation now? Birth rates in Germany have been shrinking since the 1970s, leading to a decrease in population. In 2035, the total fertility rate is projected to still be below the replacement rate, with 1.56 children per woman. With a moderate net migration rate, this TFR will decrease the population by about 2.2% (Kocks, 2003; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021-a, p. 4 f.; Swiaczny, 2010). Figure 1 provides a more vivid picture of this development. The World Bank and Statistisches Bundesamt datasets take the demographic influences of the refugee crisis in 2015 (notable through the population increase since 2015 in both graphs) into account. Nevertheless, both were calculated before the current migration movement due to the Russian-Ukrainian war, whose demographical influences are not yet known (BBC News, 2016; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung /bpb 2022, Herbert & Schönhagen, 2022).

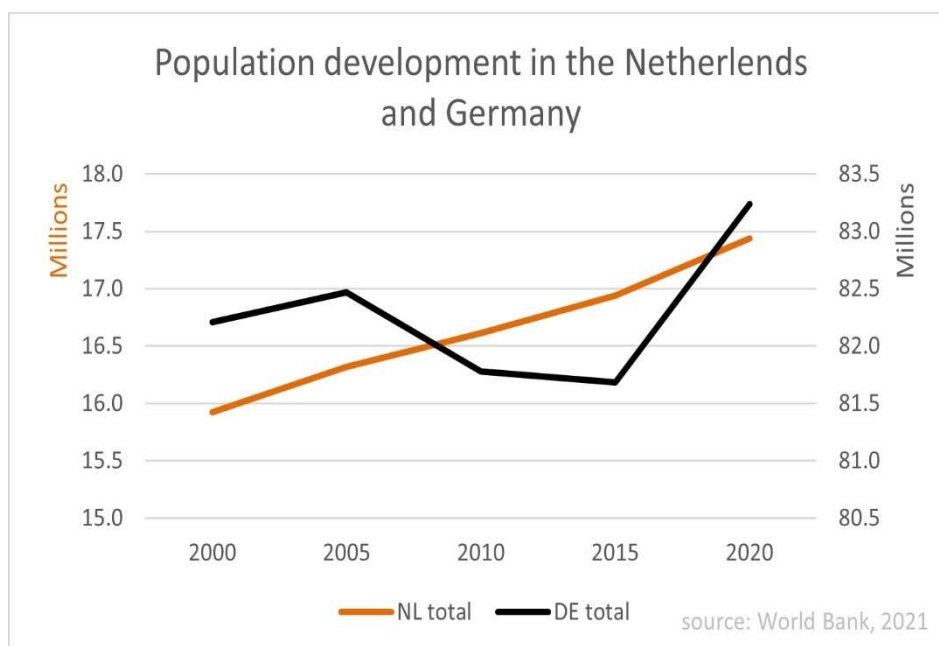


Figure 1: Population development in the Netherlands (left) and Germany (right), source: own graphic, based on World Bank 2021

Along with the German numbers, Figure 1 provides data for the Netherlands. It shows a steadily growing population, which raises the question of why one should be concerned with demographic problems when both countries have seen an increase in population in recent years. An answer to this can be given with the population distribution in rural and urban areas. Both countries differ in their population size and thus also in their understanding of what is rural and what is not. Clearer definitions of that will be given in Chapter 2. For now, it can be said that in both cases, the trend in the past twenty years was a continuous decrease in rural population, meaning that although the demographic situation that builds the foundation of Swiacznys problem description might not be the case when looking at both countries as a whole, it is definitely true for rural areas, where fewer and fewer people live (World Bank, 2021). In addition, the United Nations (2019) provide data on projected population trends, forecasting a decline in the Netherlands from 2040 onwards. As for Germany, their data shows a decline already since 2020. However, this process will be further discussed in Chapter 2. Having proven that the first part of the quote still applies locally within the Netherlands and Germany and will occur nationwide in the future, the question remains what does Swiaczny mean by the "challenges for local public policy" and the "inherent consequences"?

### 1.1 Defining the problem

As was already mentioned, rural areas in Germany and the Netherlands are facing a situation of depopulation. Depopulation due to natural demographic influences such as deaths and low birth rates, but also unnatural demographic influences such as migration, especially of younger, well-educated people, to more urban areas. This depopulation creates several problems, one being the need to reduce or close services such as schools and public transport because they are no longer used to capacity and therefore no longer economically viable. Lack of services or infrastructure and, therefore, lack of liveability is a motivator for even more people to leave those areas, creating a downward spiral (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2010; Kocks, 2003; Meijer & Sysner, 2017; Müller, 2006; Nadler, 2017).

Another problem occurs when focusing on public finances. Bailey (2016) describes a development for most developed countries, which since the late 20th century, would spend more money on social welfare services than they could pay by tax income, leading to depths as well as cuts in public spending and increased taxes in the 21st century. How exactly these welfare

systems work in the Netherlands and Germany will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3. However, demographic transition means that a population gets less and older. Additionally, fewer people mean less financial resources to pay for social services, but at the same time, an older generation has more demands for precisely these services. Whereas this situation is already the case in Germany, when considering the United Nations (2019) prognosis, this will occur as a challenge to the Netherlands in the upcoming years (Blank, 2019; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung /bpb, 2021-a; Figuee et al., 2008; Nadler, 2017; Swiaczny, 2010; van Gerwen, 2019).

To end and reverse this downward spiral, communities can activate their social capital by empowering and working with volunteers to improve or at least maintain the liveability in rural areas (Besser, 2009; de Haan, 2019; de Wilde et al., 2014; Putnam, 2000). Nadler (2017, p. 504) is commenting this as follows:

*"In times when an all-encompassing welfare state is no longer considered financially viable, the activation of civil society engagement is apparently considered a promising strategy."*

She is complemented by Bailey (2016, p. 55), who writes:

*"Austerity is therefore an opportunity to rethink services, their objectives and service models, moving from top-down municipal models to bottom-up deinstitutionalised structures giving up control to communities by changing municipal functions, financing and modus operandi."*

But, to quote one of the experts interviewed for this thesis, "money is not the answer for everything" (Int-6, l. 204). Although the sentence was said in a different context, here it means that less money in municipal budgets and thus lack of services are not the only reason for citizens to get involved. Other reasons are inter alia an emotional connection to their living environment, leading to a feeling of being responsible for it; not enough trust in the government, but also the fact that citizens now better what they need, making policy outcomes and services through their involvement more suitable (Brandsen, 2016; de Haan, 2019; Visser & van Popering-Verkerk & van Buuren, 2021)

However, as Gieling and Haartsen (2016) mention, this approach has some limits and risks, leading to the question of how this interaction must happen, especially when concerning

Swiaczny again. He argues that in a long-term perspective, societies that face the demographic transition do not only have the problem that people need more "medical and social services" (ibid, 2010, p. 198) but also have fewer paid and voluntary workers to fulfil their needs. This structure of effects leads to the following research question:

**Q. How can local governments sustainably cooperate with citizen initiatives in order to maintain and safeguard local liveability?**

In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to ask which variables exist on the side of both volunteers and governments that influence the success of this cooperation:

*Q.1 What aspects exist on the volunteers' side that the local governments must observe to*

*(re-) act early and thus ensure sustainable cooperation?*

*Q.2 What aspects exist on the local governments' side that help respective hinder such cooperation?*

To answer these questions, Chapter 2 defines the terms volunteerism and citizens' initiative in more detail. It then analyses which aspects on their side can influence the success of sustainable cooperation before taking a closer look at the political structures that promote or hinder cooperation between actors in Chapter 3. Next, Chapter 4 brings theory into practice by linking the literature to the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0, which over the past two years has supported local governments in 10 participating municipalities in the Netherlands and Germany in the interaction between volunteers and municipalities to enhance local quality of life (Euregio Rhein-Waal, 2020). Finally, Chapter 5 rounds off the thesis with a concluding discussion and answers to the questions just raised. But first, the introduction will be completed by presenting the theoretical framework and the methodology used for this thesis.

## 1.2 Theoretical framework

What is liveability, and what does sustainable cooperation look like? As for the first one, de Haan (2019, p. 3) defines it as the "extend to which the living environment is aligned with the needs and desires of the inhabitants". This is seen very similarly by Gieling and Haartsen (2016), who thereby distinguish liveability from the quality of life by seeing the latter as the "subjective social wellbeing of individuals" (ibid., p. 578). However, since the literature used

for this thesis is not only in English but also in Dutch and German and due to that, a specific distinction cannot always be guaranteed, the two terms liveability and quality of life will be used simultaneously in this thesis.

Earlier on, the activation of social capital for the maintenance of liveability was mentioned. Thereby, the social capital is just one of 7 components of Emery and Floras' (2006) Community Capitals Framework (CCF) for community development. It is defined as "connections among people" (ibid., p. 21) and further developed and described by the sociologist Robert David Putnam. He divides **social capital** into bridging and bonding ties. Whereas the first represents the relationships between heterogeneous people, the second is about relationships between homogenous people (Besser, 2009; de Wilde et al., 2014; Putnam, 2000). Additionally, Igalla et al. (2020, p. 606) mention a third division, linking ties, which they define as "ties of exchange between actors who know themselves to be unequal in their power and access to resources".

As seen in Figure 2, other aspects of the CCF are financial, human, cultural, natural, built and political capital. **Financial capital** is thereby described by Emery and Flora (2006) as the financial resources available for investing in the community. **Human capital** is then the skills and abilities of the people within the community, whereas **cultural capital** refers to how people perceive and interact with the world around them. **Natural capital** describes the natural elements of a certain geographical space, which is interconnected with cultural capital. Finally,

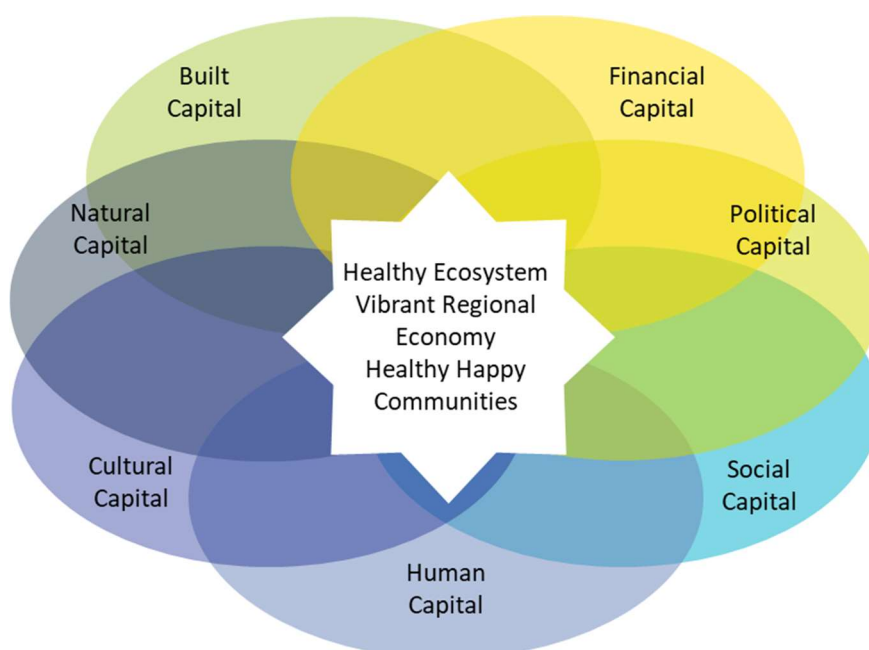


Figure 2: Community Capitals Framework, source: own graphic, after Emery & Flora, 2006, p. 32

**build capital** refers to the built infrastructure available. In contrast, **political capital** is defined as "ability of people to find their own voice and to engage in actions that contribute to the well being [sic!] of their community" (Emery & Flora, 2006, p. 21). Following Emery and Flora, increasing one of the seven capitals will also increase the others, leading to, as Figure 2 shows, "Healthy Happy Communities".

So, what can such an engagement or participation of citizens look like? Especially when taking the sustainable cooperation part of the research question into account? Over the years, many scholars have addressed the question of conceptualizing participation. One famous concept is thereby Arnstein's participation ladder (Figure 3). It consists of the following eight steps:

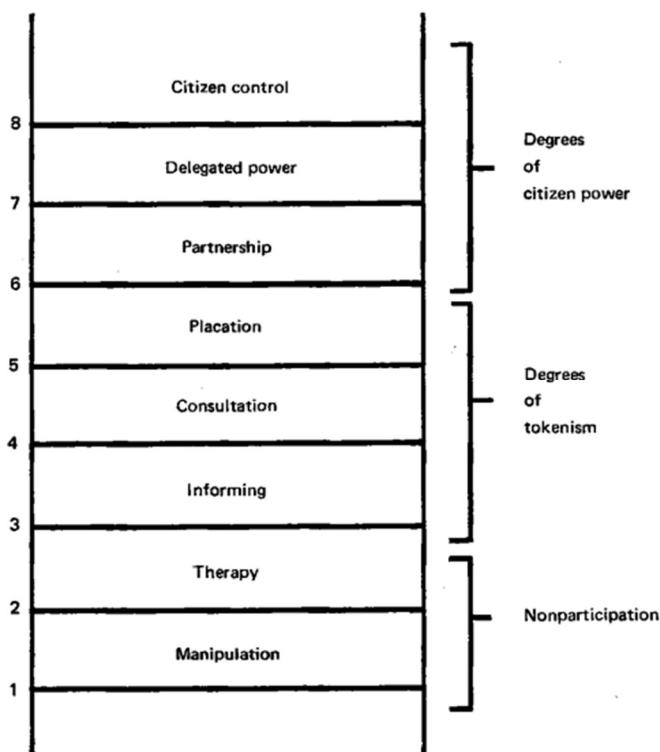


Figure 3: Participation ladder, source: Arnstein, 1969, p. 217

- **Manipulation:** Citizens appointed to committees and the like under the pretext of citizen participation in order to legitimise pre-existing political opinions
- **Therapy:** participation that appears to be more of a group therapy, where the organisers address the symptoms but not the cause of dissatisfaction
- **Informing:** is a first step for good participation, but often just the "one-way flow of information -from officials to citizens-with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219)
- **Consultation:** the consultation of citizens in for example public hearings, but without other forms of participation it cannot be ensured that their concerns will be considered
- **Placation:** a strategy where a few specially selected people are chosen to join boards of associations or public bodies

- **Partnership:** negotiation between hierarchies possible, stakeholder making decisions together
- **Delegated power:** citizens have an even bigger, now dominant saying in the decision-making process than at the partnership step
- **Citizen control:** the ability for citizens to have the full saying on programs and to “be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 223)

These steps are grouped into categories from "non-participation" over "degrees of tokenism" to "degrees of citizen power", related to the degree of power held by the citizens (see Fig. 3) (Arnstein, 1969). Fung (2006, p. 67) criticized this concept as being outdated and developed a democracy cube (Fig. 4) based on the following three questions for the three axes:

- Who participates? (axis: Participants)
- How do they communicate and make decisions? (axis: Communication & Decision Mode)
- What is the connection between their conclusions and opinions on one hand and public policy and action on the other? (axis: Authority & Power)

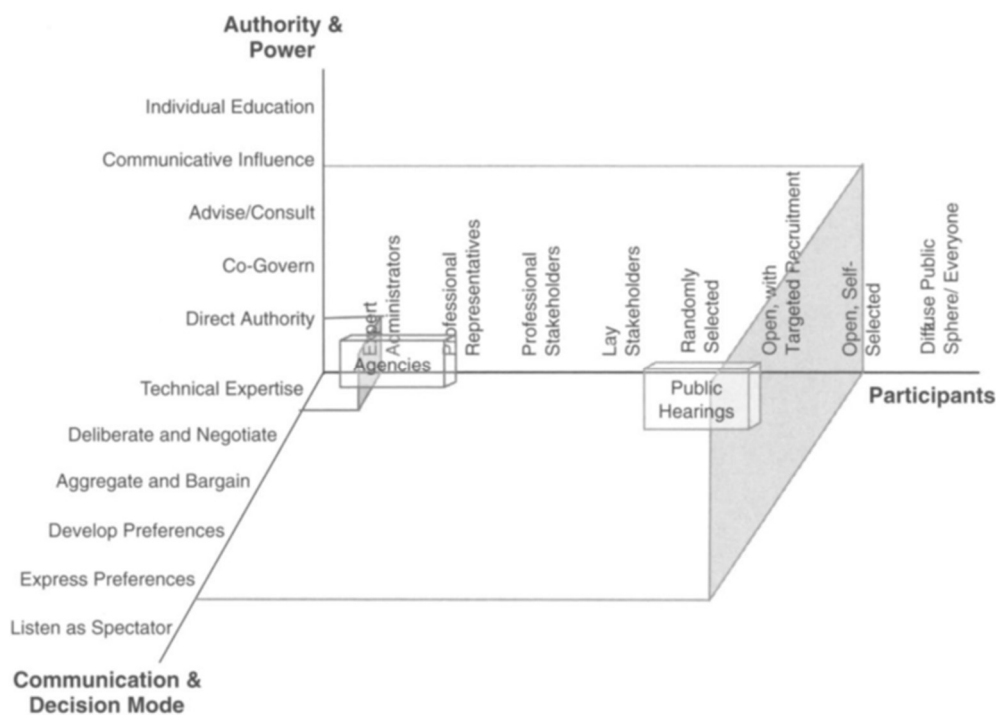


Figure 4: Democracy cube, source: Fung, 2006, p. 71

Although Fung provides a more complex concept than Arnstein, both concepts were criticized by Edelenbos et al. (2018, p. 54), who argue that "neither Arnstein nor Fung explicitly discuss how citizen control interacts and evolves with public administration". However, this interaction between citizens and public administration can be shown conceptually in more detail, with one exemplary attempt to do so being done in the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0's handbook. There the concept is used is a further development from Rieger and Straßburger's (2014) participation pyramid in combination with top down and bottom-up development of projects (Melis et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, this thesis will use a concept by Löffler and Tim-Arnold (2016). They made an overview of the diverse ways in which public administrations and volunteers can interact, with more respectively less intensity on each side (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of different forms of government-citizen-interactions, source: Löffler & Timm-Arnold, 2016, p. 307. This table was translated from German

Participation of professionals (public administration or independent institutions)	Participation of citizens (as a user of a municipal service, a resident or a citizens group)		
		Active	Passive
	active	A co-production	B service commune
	passive	C self-help, voluntary work and self-organization (e.g. association activities)	D symbol policy

The authors concluded that the most sustainable way of working with volunteers to deal with the financial gaps in the public budget is to work with them side by side, in the form of co-production (A). The basis for this concept was laid by David Miller, who argued that there are three actors for the provision of goods or services: the market, the state and the community. Later on, Elinor Ostrom, a political scientist, was the first to use the concept of co-production (Griffiths & Foley, 2009). She defined it as:

*“process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not ‘in’ the same organisation”* (Ostrom 1996, 1073, as cited by Alford, 2016, p. 158).

Other definitions are given by Griffiths and Foley, who argue that co-production is an

*“active partnership between citizen and state [...]. At the most general level, the term should incorporate a degree of participation, negotiation and collaboration on the part of both service users and providers”* (Griffiths & Foley, 2009, p. 40)

as well as Grohs (2021, p.312)

*“‘Co-production’ describes different practices of cooperation between individual or organised citizens and the public sector in developing and implementing public goods”.*

Löffler and Tim-Arnold (2016, p. 307), however, define co-production as:

*“impact-oriented forms of joint action between public administrations and citizens that are designed to better develop the capabilities, potentials and contributions of all stakeholders in order to improve the quality of life or achieve efficiency gains”* (2016, p. 306, translated into English).

Their concept contains the following four “co’s”:

- **co-control:** on which are the priorities to use resources for
- **co-development:** of solutions through their knowledge as “user experts”
- **co-implement:** increase the quality of life through the citizens abilities’, energy and resources when implementing projects
- **co-evaluate:** of the project’s success

Lastly, Co-production is further specified as not being self-help or voluntary engagement without the involvement of public administration, nor pure self-organization of citizens in associations or the like (Griffiths & Foley, 2009; Löffler & Timm-Arnold, 2016).

### 1.3 Conceptual framework

All the concepts and theories that have been introduced might seem slightly confusing at first sight. For a better understanding, Figure 5 shows a more graphical approach.

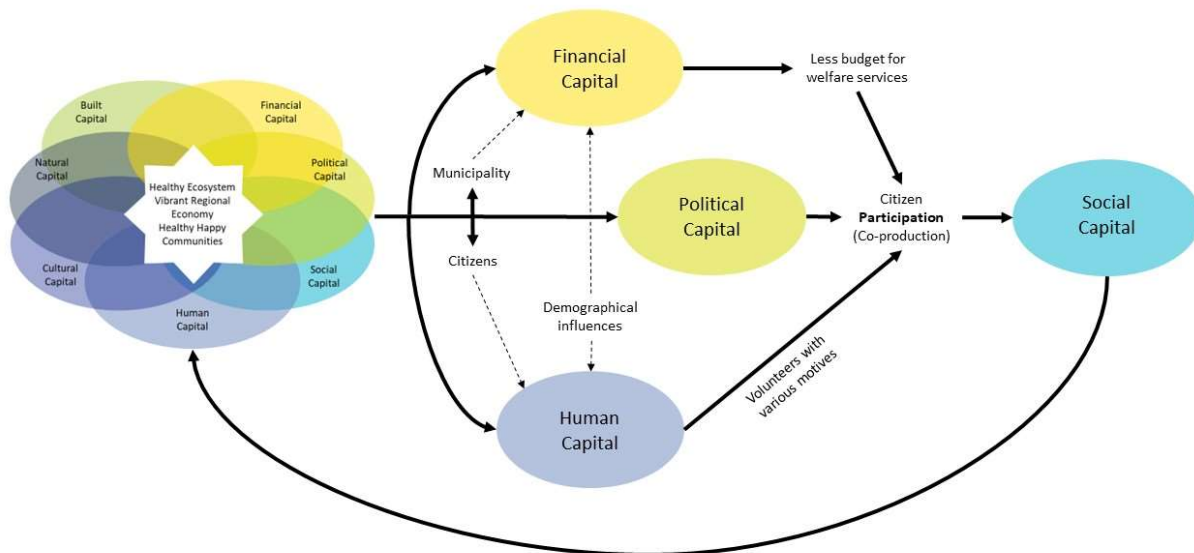


Figure 5: Conceptual framework, source: own graphic

As the graph depicts, the narrative for this thesis goes as follows:

As we have already seen in Chapter 1.2, to improve a community's liveability, at least one of its capitals has to be improved. Nevertheless, as Emery and Flora (2006) show, this spiral goes in both ways, meaning that as proven with the declining population leading to a declining financial capital, leading to a declining liveability, it can also go downwards. This is shown in the graph with the demographical influences. Changes in the society (natural/migration) can lead to problems, such as the reduction of a municipalities budget. Having less financial resources for welfare services motivates the municipality to start cooperation with citizens in the form of participation. However, the municipality's side is just one out of two. Citizens are also influenced by demographical changes, which impact the community's human capital. As will be shown in Chapter 2, different age groups have different interests and therefore volunteer in different fields of work (see inter alia GHK, 2010).

Additionally, citizens have their own motivations for volunteering, as already argued in Chapter 1.2. The interaction between municipality and citizens then builds the political capital, in the form of citizen participation, and for this thesis, even more specialised as co-production. Interaction thereby additionally contains the ways with which the parties communicate and, since the focus of this thesis lies on the municipality's perspective, what the municipality's role

is within this interaction. Moreover, as Chapter 2 will show, the participation process itself has good and negative aspects that need to be considered by the municipality when starting such cooperation. Different forms of citizen involvement have been happening in the past, such as the Big Society movement in Britain that started in 2010. Experiences from such interactions have led to certain regulations and laws ensuring more or less power for the citizens (for example the Weimar Constitution in Germany) (Flidner, 2019; Kisby, 2010, Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012).

A side effect of municipalities being able to provide welfare services with the help of volunteers, as well as volunteers engaging for their own aims, is that in participating, the citizens create bonds with each other, thus improving the community's social capital. All in all, this process then can increase the community's liveability.

#### 1.4 Methods

The research question raised in Chapter 1.1 has been subdivided into two sub-questions. The

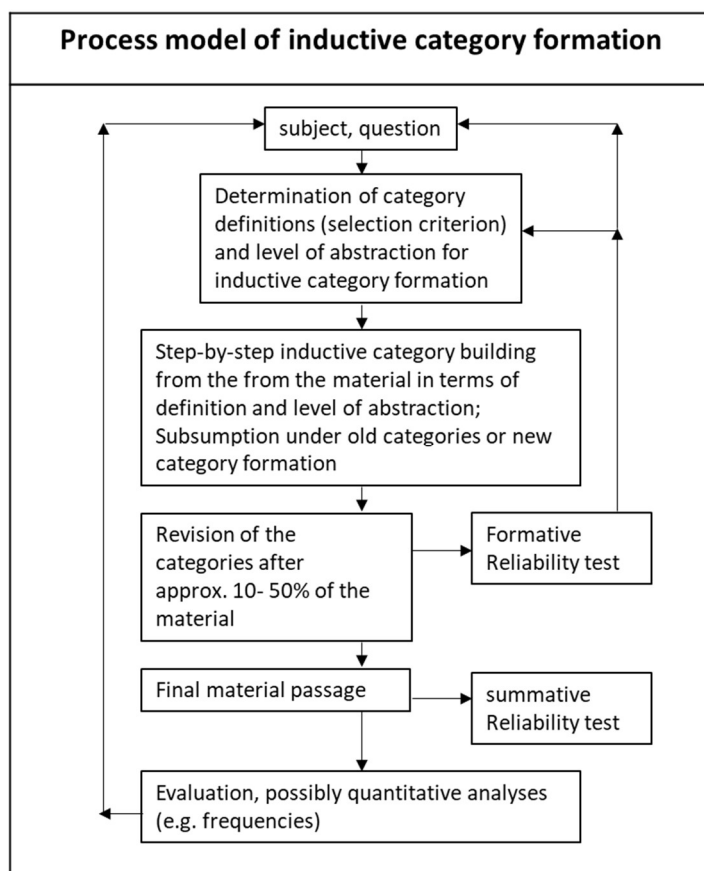


Figure 6: Process of inductive category formation, source: Mayring 2000, from Ramsenthaler, 2013 p. 29, own translation

first one asks about the aspects on the volunteer's side that can influence the cooperation. To answer this question, a qualitative content analysis was done according to Ramsenthaler (2013). Thereby 62 papers were analysed in an Excel table (Appendix I). For the analysis, inductive category formation was carried out, i.e. the formation of categories out of the analysed material (Fig. 6). Criteria for used papers were the character as being a website, but mostly paper. The subject was either political structures, public budget, welfare system, co-production, volunteering, participation, demographic influ-

ences on regional development, government or governance. As for a geographical limitation, the papers were mostly focused on Germany, the Netherlands and Europe or were kept on general observations. This was, however, not the case for the paper of Robert Putnam, who analysed volunteerism in the USA.

Nevertheless, since he wrote one of the most important works about social capital and was cited by many of the papers used for this thesis, he was still taken into account. The earliest material was published in 1969 and is Arnstein's participation ladder; the newest works were published in 2021. The material was mainly in English and German, but also Dutch.

The categories built were:

- **Country:** if the paper was about a specific country. This division was crucial for the Dutch-German comparison
- **Society:** for societal changes and the problems or challenges that (subdivided into changes and problems) evolve from that
- **history/ background:** for historic events that were important for structures today
- **participation/ volunteers:** for the definition of terms regarding engagement, volunteering or participation; certain numbers of volunteers; influences on volunteers and changes in their behaviour; their motivation or the governments motivation to work with them; the positive aspects of voluntary work; as well as the negative aspects of voluntary work (subdivided into definition, numbers, influences/ changes, motivation, chances/ benefits and risks/ burdens)
- **quality of live/ liveability:**

- for the definitions and influences on quality of live resp. live-ability
- **structures:** for the description of the relationship between actors, such (subdivided into as government and volunteers; certain laws or policies relationships around the topic of volunteering; as well as information re- between regarding the governmental side, that was neither fitting into actors, law/policies the relationship nor the law category and other)

The theoretical findings in the content analysis part of the thesis are accompanied by quantitative data analyses of demographical and social datasets where necessary, to give more insight on current and future societal developments.

For the second question, the same qualitative content analysis was carried out to build a theoretical, literature-based foundation of knowledge. On the basis of that, a case study was conducted. For the case study, municipal experts from the ten participating municipalities were interviewed to gain more insight in how and why administrative workers interact with volunteers the way they do. Additionally, one expert on political structures in the Netherlands was interviewed. As an interview type, a structured interview was chosen since it provides enough similarity in its structure to be comparable to the other interviews but also enables a flexible questioning that can be adapted to the interviewee's narrative (Smettan, 2017). The guides for the interviews can be found in the Appendix. Due to Covid-19 regulations and geographical distances, 10 of the 11 interviews were held digitally via Microsoft Teams and Jitsi Meet. Those interviews were recorded and transcribed. In one case, the interview was held via a telephone call because of technical difficulties. For that interview, a conversation protocol was made instead of a transcription. For one municipality, additional information about the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 was gained via an E-Mail interview (Maddox, 2021). All interviewees were anonymized, the interviews can be found in the Appendix (II-XIII). The length of the interviews varied between 21 and 85 minutes. The language chosen for the interviews with the German municipalities was German, whereas the one for the Dutch municipalities was English. The language for the e-mail interview was Dutch and conducted with the help of my internship supervisor Dr Korrie Melis.

The interviews were coded and analysed with inductive category formation (Ramsenthaler, 2013). The analysis was carried out with ATLAS.ti, using the three coding groups:

- **volunteers side:** for the good aspects of the work with volunteers; influences (subdivided into on volunteers, as well as the negative aspects, the municipal-chances/benefits, ity has to keep in mind when working with them influences/changes and Risks/burdens)
- **municipalities side:** For the ways the municipalities adapted during the last years (subdivided into of cooperation with volunteers to make the process better; changes on municipi- the way the municipality communicates and interacts with- pality side, volunteers; as well as the motivation for municipalities to communication, start such a cooperation. interaction, motivation and role of municipal- ity)
- **Volunteers 2.0:** for the differences the municipalities experienced during the (subdivided into project with other (cross boarder) municipalities; as well as NL/DE and Volun- the project the municipality did within the INTERREG VA pro- teers 2.0) ject Volunteers 2.0

A better insight into the way of working can be gained in Figure 7.

Additionally to the interviews, I took part in several meetings with German and Dutch project partners and went to the "Krachtike dorpen" SBE symposium at the end of May 2022. The symposium was organised for Dutch and German experts and dealt with topics around the question of how to reactivate villages. For those events, notes were taken and will be referred to as memos in the following.

The screenshot displays the ATLAS.ti software interface for a document analysis project titled "Case study Netherlands/Germany - ATLAS.ti". The main window shows a document titled "D 10: Int-11\_eng" with the following text:

working on better conditions of life for families in Apeldoorn, but I looked at public space but also on relations, networks, neighbourhoods. So we started lots of projects and one of the projects was related to making the community stronger by connecting generations and cultures. I think that was what they had as an aim. So I was doing lots of things in my program and some of them were easy, so I started a new -I never talk in English about my work- (laughs) (I: laughs) arrangement about a school yard and we did lots of things with public space and we started with a youth board. But this topic, making communities stronger, was a harder one for me. And then a colleague of mine talked about Volunteers. They were looking for a possibility for Apeldoorn to check in. And I said, 'well, this topic, making communities stronger, working with generations and cultures, that is a harder one for me, because I do not know what is my role as being a member of the municipality. (I: mhm) So I can use some help'.

71 I: Okay, great. And have you noticed that in this cooperation with the volunteers, is there a certain type of people that engage more often?

72 E11: No, the way we worked was, that I made a selection of projects that I knew and I ask around which were already nice examples of community building. And we went for interviews, I think there were 14. So the research is (...?), and most of the interviews, I did a couple. From that we had a lot of information and we made a program group with some volunteers and some professionals and that group we worked on. So I was not really working with residents themselves in that way.

73 [- Ah okay

74 E11: More with volunteers.]

75 I: Oh, sorry. And outside this Volunteer 2.0 project, do you have a different aspect? Is there a certain type of volunteers?

76 E11: Yes, but that is a very broad question. Because I have been working with volunteers for a long time but also with citizen initiatives. (I: mhm) Are you asking about the more organised volunteers, or about the initiatives with the active citizens?

77 I: Within the initiatives.

78 E11: The initiatives. Yes, I think there are lots of different types of volunteers. In the past I made a big map which showed all the initiative in public space and then said it was all about little green yards or cleaning the streets, well, all the neighbourhood prevention. Yet what you see is they are initiatives, so there is some energy (I: mhm) and they are trying to make a change in their own neighbourhood. That is a common thing. And maybe when I think a bit more there will be more to

The right-hand side of the interface shows a list of highlighted segments with their corresponding code labels:

- motivation
- Volunteers 2.0
- Volunteers 2.0
- Influences/changes
- Influences/changes
- chances/benefits

Figure 7: Screenshot analysis in Atlas.ti, source: own graphic

02

**VOLUN  
TARY  
WORK**

## 2. Voluntary work

Volunteers and voluntary work occur in many different forms, with different motivations and influences on what they are doing, how much time they spend and how they are affected by societal changes. In this chapter, first the term volunteer will be defined, followed by influences on volunteers and the work they are doing. These influences will be connected to demographical statistics of the countries, in order to make some forecasts on future tendencies of volunteers and voluntary work. In the end the good and bad aspects of work done by volunteers will be illuminated.

### 2.1 Definitions

In order to be able to talk about co-production and citizen initiatives, they should be defined first. Whereas co-production was already defined in the introduction de Haan (2019, p. 21) provides a definition for the latter, describing them as:

*“formally or informally organised groups of citizens who are active and contribute to the public domain”.*

She further divides the initiatives in three types, the initiatives that provides services that stopped because of the local government’s austerity measurements, the takeover of services that weren’t in the governments possession before, as well as the ones that set up completely new services (de Haan, 2019).

Having co-production and citizen initiatives defined by know, leaves the question open who these active citizens then are. The GHK study uses the following definition of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports of volunteering in the Netherlands:

*“work done in any organised context that is carried out without obligation and without pay for other people or the community whereby the person doing the work is not dependent on it for his or her livelihood” (2010, p. 2).*

But in the same context the study adds critics of the volunteer organisation MOVISIE (see Chapter 3) on this definition, being that not all voluntary work is without financial compensation, and many volunteers acting outside an organised context (GHK, 2010). As for the German side, one definition was created in 2002 by the Enquiry Commission stating:

*“Civic engagement is a voluntary, cooperative activity that is not aimed at achieving personal material gain and is oriented towards the common good. [...] Civic engagement creates social capital, thus contributing to the improvement of social welfare and, since it is constantly fed by citizens from the experience of their everyday lives, develops as an open social learning process” (Deutscher Bundestag 2002, p. 40).*

Thus the definition of the Enquiry Commission is nearly the same as the one from the volunteer survey about voluntary engagement (Simonson et al., 2021). Although this definition argues that voluntary work is unpaid, volunteers sometimes get a monetary compensation for the time they spend, a volunteer allowance that regulates that this compensation is tax free on an annual sum up to 840 € (Bundesministerium der Finanzen, 2020; Section 3 (26a) EStG). So both definitions focus on the non-binding nature of voluntary engagement, as well as an officially unpaid character, whereas in both countries volunteers can be financially rewarded in some cases.

## 2.2 Dependencies

After the definitions are set, the attention will now be brought to the dependencies of volunteers. The question to answer here is what influences the amount, composition and type of voluntary work? The variables thereby can be largely differentiated into geographical, demographical, technological and political influences, as well as the life situation of the volunteers. Analysing them can help to understand current changes among the different types of volunteers and to predict future changes, so that municipalities can prepare in advance.

### 2.2.1 Geographical influences

The main geographical influence is the place of residence. People living in rural regions are often more likely to volunteer, compared to urban settlers. This is mainly because the claim for voluntary work is louder in rural areas, but also because the competition with other free time activities is less than in cities, thus making engagement more valuable for social integration. Additionally, it is more likely for communities in rural areas to take over tasks of the local governments (de Haan, 2019; GHK, 2010; Grohs, 2021; Klie et al., 2016; Simonson et al., 2021). Klie et al. (2016, p. 40) are describing the rural impact structure as follows:

*“The smaller the place and the more sparsely populated the region, the less supply and commercial entertainment, cultural, leisure and sports facilities there are and the more important sociability, community and self-organised offers become.”*

Another influence of rural peripheral areas is the population decrease, that can be found in both countries, the Netherlands as well as Germany. The reasons for this decline are the migration of younger, higher educated citizens to the urban regions on one hand, as well as the relatively higher death rate of the older generation that is left back in the rural regions on the other. These processes not only lead to a decrease in the number of volunteers, but also to demographic and economic problems that make the existence of volunteers even more important, thus leading to a dilemma (de Haan, 2019; Klie et al., 2016; Nadler, 2017; Ubels et al., 2019).

To clarify this process, Figure 8 presents some data of Germany and the Netherlands of the last twenty years. It can be seen that whereas the rural population in the Netherlands<sup>1</sup> decreased about 15% from 2000 to 2020, the German rural population<sup>2</sup> was in the same period more stable, with a decrease by 2.5%. Furthermore Gieling and Haartsen (2016) mention that long-time residents in rural areas are more engaged in local matters, whereas new residents are more engaged in regional matters. Lastly, as another characteristic de Haan (2019) points out that rural residents have more contact with their neighbours than urban ones.

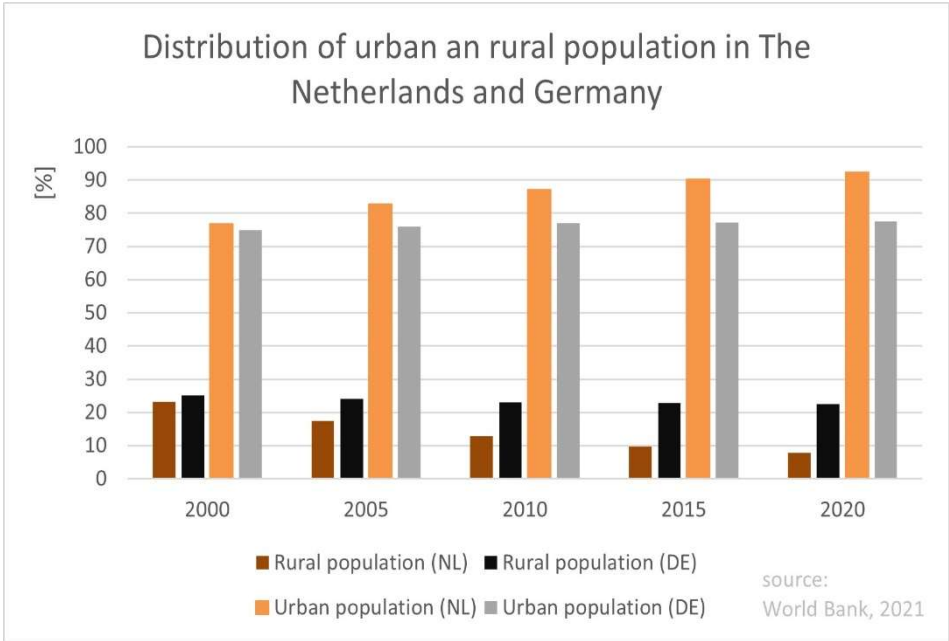


Figure 8: Distribution of urban and rural population in the Netherlands and Germany, source: own figure based on World Bank, 2021

In case of Germany, there is another geographical factor that needs to be mentioned. During the separation of Germany into the DDR and BRD, the “West” and the “East” of the country developed differently due to their different occupying powers. This development still influences the current structures of the regions. This is why more volunteers can be found in the West, than in the East (Grohs, 2021; Klie et al., 2016; Kocks, 2003; Simonson et al., 2021). Klie et al. (2016) are adding another two influences from this division, the first being that the population of Germany will decrease until 2030 especially in the East. The second being that the East is financially weaker than the West. The influence of finances on volunteering will be considered in more detail later in this chapter. For 2019, Simonson et al. (2021, p. 19) provide the data of the engagement quota, with 40.4% in West and 37.0% in East Germany. As a last influence, Klie et al. (2016) mention that besides the west-east differentiation, a north-south differentiation can also be made, with a higher engagement level in the north.

### 2.2.2 Demographical influences

In terms of demography, there are four influences on the amount and distinction of volunteers, namely population, age, gender and migration.

To start with the first one, the influence of depopulation was already described in the paragraph above. As can be seen in the Figures 9 till 12, the population in the Netherlands and Germany will develop very differently. The Netherlands had an increasing population for the last twenty years, whereas the German population was decreasing in the past years due to the demographic transition. The reason for the sudden population increase in 2015 is the refugee crisis that happened that year. Thereby the refugees not only went to Germany in search of an asylum but to other European states as well, such as the Netherlands (Fig. 9, 10) (BBC News, 2016; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/bpb, 2021-a; Grohs, 2021; Swiaczny, 2010). The population prognoses for the Netherlands show a continuing increase until 2040, followed by a strong decrease of citizens. Contrary to that, the population for Germany is prognosed to decrease without previous rise (Fig. 11, 12). However, when using the data, a few things must be observed. First of all, the data until 2020 is from the World Bank from 2021, whereas the predicted data is from the United Nations from 2019. This causes some minor differences in the numbers given for 2020 (around 300,000 citizens difference in the Netherlands and around 500,000 in Germany). Secondly, the prognosis was calculated in 2019.

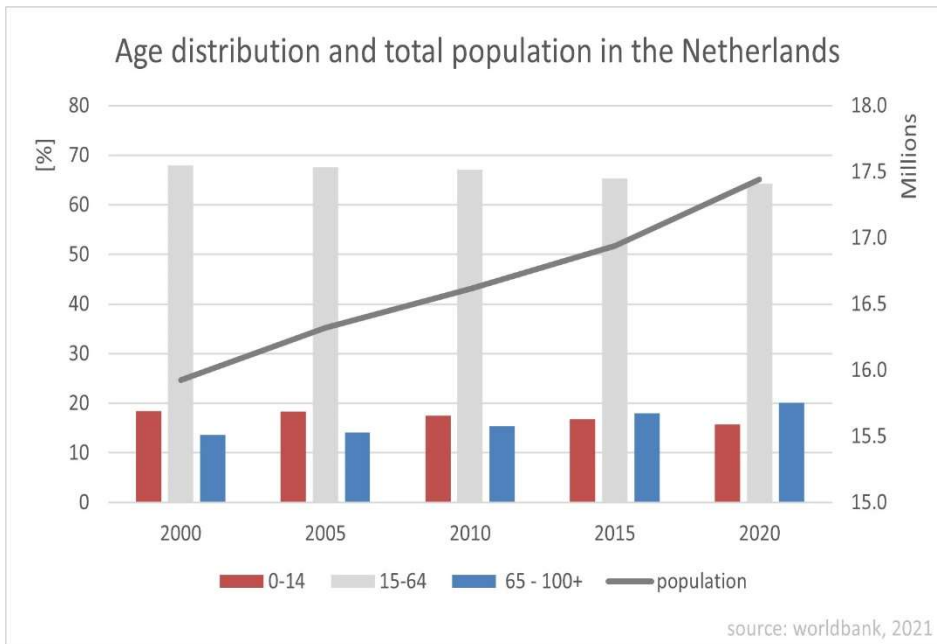


Figure 9: Age distribution and the population in the Netherlands, source: own figure based on World Bank, 2021

Since then, some events transpired that influenced and are still influencing population numbers in Europe and around the world. The first event thereby is the outbreak of the Covid-19 disease that led to a higher death risk especially of the older generations. The other event is that in February 2022 Russia declared war on Ukraine, which led and still leads to a new movement of refugees to European states (Balbo et al. 2020; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung /bpb, 2022).

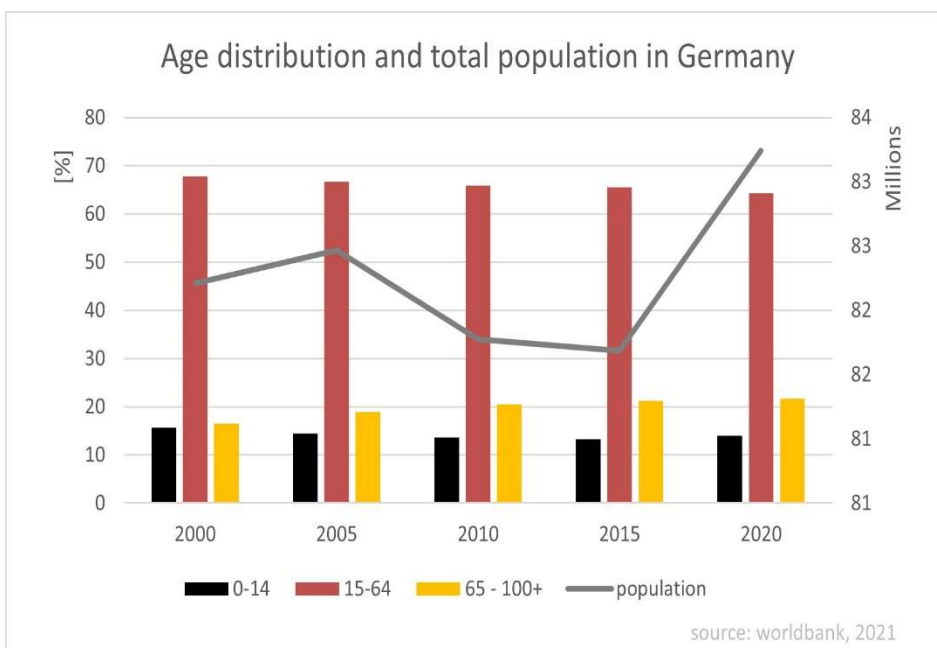


Figure 10: Age distribution and total population in the Netherlands, own figure based on World Bank, 2021

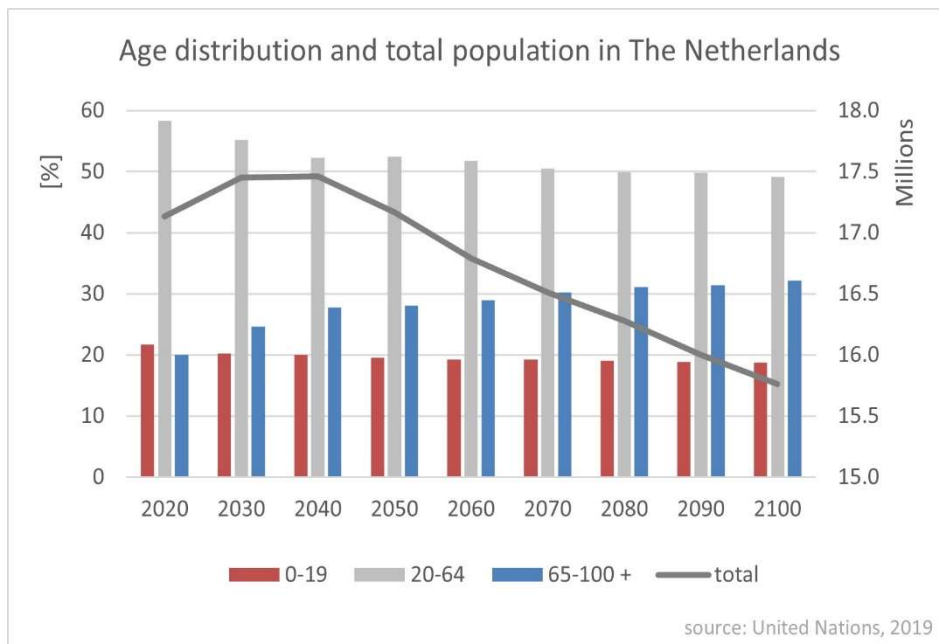


Figure 11: Predicted age distribution and the population in the Netherlands, own figure based on world bank 2021

To connect the population data with the one on urban population, one could assume that Germany will have a declining number of volunteers in rural areas in the future. Although the Netherlands will have a growing number of citizens by 2040, its urbanisation rate is higher than Germany's, which again leads to the assumption that the number of volunteers in rural areas will decrease.

As second variable, age influences the number of volunteers as well, and is adding the aspect of what type of work is done. The older a person gets, the less likely it is to participate in volunteering, and if it does, it is more likely to be in the social sector than in a sports club, for example (Swiaczny, 2010). Furthermore, in a study on volunteers in the Netherlands, the GHK study (2010) figured out that Dutch people aged 65 and above spent less time in the period of 2000 and 2005 on voluntary work than younger people, because they sometimes still had to work, or needed to care for their grandchildren or family. In contrast to that, Simonson wrote about elder volunteers in Germany, those spend more hours per week than younger people and that they participate longer in their life due to improved health care. Nevertheless, both agree that the age group of 75+ (GHK) respective 65+ (Simonson et al.) is the smallest group along the volunteers (GHK, 2010; Simonson et al., 2021). On the other hand, the GHK study is arguing for younger people to volunteer less as a result of the “dusty image” (ibid., 2010, p. 31) of volunteering and because they work in paid jobs or are involved in informal care. The study then adds that attempts to increase the number have been made by companies

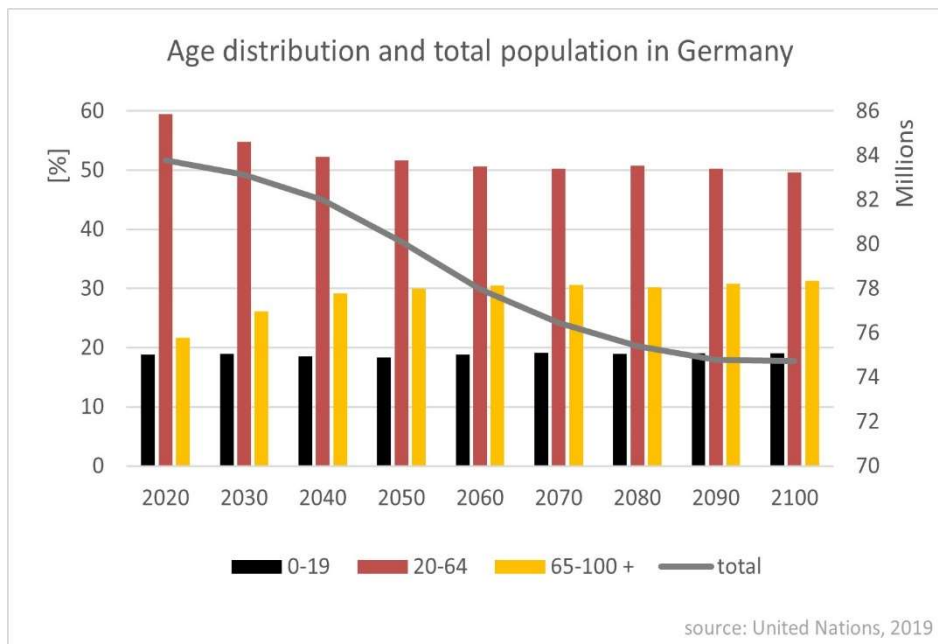


Figure 12: Predicted age distribution and total population in Germany, own figure based on UN 2019

encouraging their employees to volunteer and by the implementation of a mandatory social traineeship in the secondary education. Grohs describes younger volunteers in more detail, by saying that they prefer a less hierarchical way of working and that they are less likely to be found in leadership positions within volunteer organisations. Simonson adds here, that these positions are mostly filled by people above 50. For the Dutch volunteers between 35 and 44 it was analysed that they work mostly in education related fields and are the biggest group among volunteers. The same can be said for German volunteers, but there it is the age group of 30 until 49 (GHK, 2010; Grohs, 2021; Simonson et al., 2021).

So having this theoretical background of who prefers what, what is the actual age group situation in the Netherlands and Germany? In terms of the first one, the groups of the 0-14 year-old, as well as the 15-64 year-old decreased in the last twenty years, letting the group of 65 year old and older increase by 6.4% (Fig. 9). For the future, this age group is supposed to increase even more, up to 32.12% of the total population in 2100, with a steady decrease in the other two age groups. The important part to consider here is, that in terms of the predicting data, the division between both of the younger age groups is not at 15 years, but at twenty, letting the youngest age group appear taller in Figure 11 than in Figure 9. As a last aspect, the projection of 80 years in the future is very vague, therefore nearer predictions will be more likely to come true than those in the more distant future.

On the German side of the border, a similar process for the last 20 years can be found. The youngest age group decreased by 1.7% until 2020 and the age group of 15-64 year old decreased even more by 3.4%, letting the age group of elder citizens increase by nearly 5%. Even though the same methodological problems exist with the projected data, it can be said that the group of 65-year-olds and older will continue to increase.

It is interesting that in contrast to the Netherlands, the youngest age group (0-19) is also supposed to grow, albeit minimal by less than 0.2%. This means that the age group in between will decrease around 10%. In combination with the volunteering behaviour of different age groups, there might be a decrease in the total number of volunteers, if mostly the age group with the smallest participation will increase. This situation will be stronger in the Netherlands, regarding the study of the GHK on volunteering hours (GHK, 2010). When the age group of the middle agers with kids decrease in the future, this also means that there might be less volunteers in the education sector.

Besides population size and age, gender also has an influence on the type of work volunteers do. Regarding the gender discussions of the recent years, there must be a short disclaimer at this point. Even though the binary gender concept is now outdated, the research to date is still based on it, which is why the following only refers to female and male volunteers. Further research is needed on the preferences of non-binary citizens in voluntary work, as well as more differentiated data on the distribution of gender in the Netherlands and Germany.

In the GHK study for the Netherlands, between 2000 and 2008, female volunteers were more likely to work in fields related to education and welfare services. Male Volunteers on the other hand were found to prefer work related to sport clubs and religion. For Germany, female volunteers matched with their Dutch neighbours in terms of education and social aspects, but in contrast were found to prefer religion and health more than their male colleagues (GHK, 2010; Simonson et al., 2021). Klie et al. (2016) add, that female volunteers are less found in leading position and are more interested in informal neighbourhood help, which refers to the category of voluntary work in the community sector of the GHK study. Male German volunteers tend to prefer work related to sport clubs alike their Dutch neighbours, but in contrast were also found in fields such as rescue service, politics or job related tasks. In addition, in 2019, more males tend to engage in leading positions, with 30.5% of male and 22.1% of female volunteers (Klie et al., 2016; Simonson et al., 2021; Swiaczny, 2010).

The data for the Netherlands shows that the distribution of male and female citizens have been nearly equal for the past twenty years (Fig. 13). It started with 1% more females than males and decreased to a difference of 0.4% in 2020. Similar to that, the binary gender distribution in Germany became more equal as well during the last years. It started with 4.4% more female citizens and decreased to a difference of 1.2% more females in 2020 (Fig. 14).

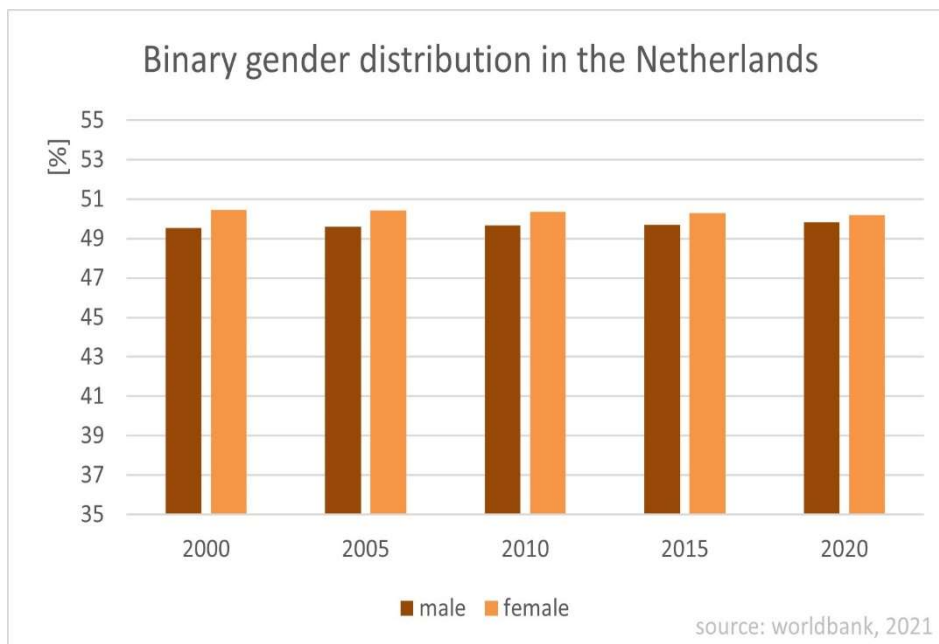


Figure 13: Binary gender distribution in the Netherlands, source: own figure based on World Bank, 2021

As general information about the influence of migration on volunteering, Tonkens and Verhoeven (2018) say that people with migration background tend to engage more in initiatives within their own ethnic groups, adding that the typical volunteer is mostly white. Klie et al. (2016) and Simonson et al. (2021) provide a more detailed view of volunteers with migration background in Germany, arguing that the more the people are connected to Germany, the more likely they are to engage in volunteering. Following this argumentation, people in the second or third generation of migrated ancestors are more engaged than the first generation. In addition, the personal and socio-economic background of migrated people also plays a role in how engaged they are (Klie et al., 2016; Simonson et al., 2021).

In their study, Simonson et al. (2021, p. 18) show, that in 2019, 44.4% of the German citizens volunteered, followed by 38.7% of people with migration background, but German citizenship and without migration experience, 33.9% with migration background, but without citizenship and migration experience, 28.3% with migration background, citizenship and migration

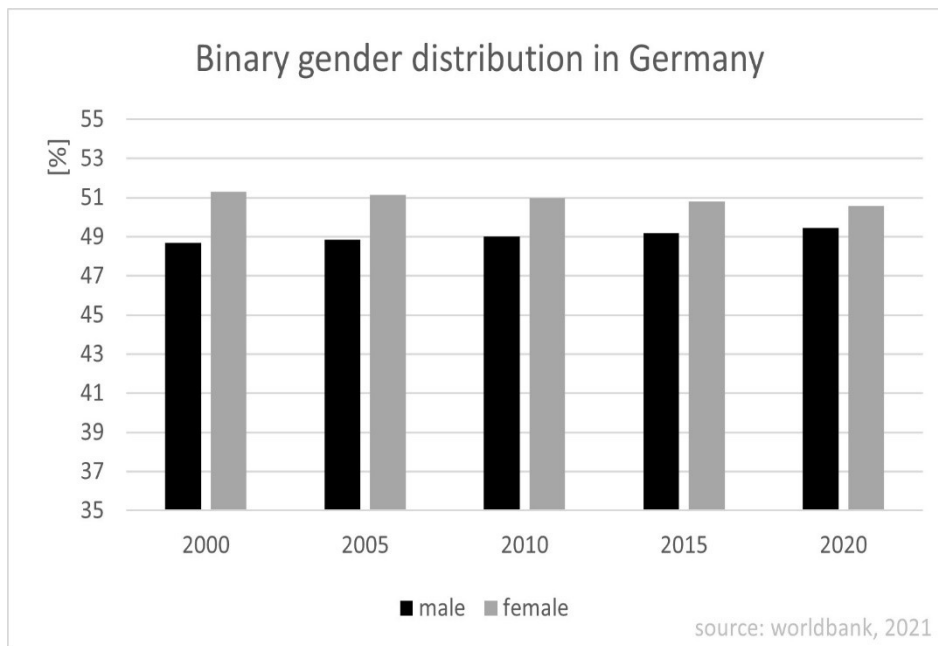


Figure 14: Binary gender distribution in Germany, source: own figure based on World Bank, 2021

experience, as well as 15.2% of the people with migration background and experience, but without citizenship. In the Netherlands, the amount of people with migration background has grown in the past twenty years, from 17.5% in 2000 to about 24.3% in 2020. Although there is no data available for third generation residents, one can say that the amount of first-generation residents with migration background has been and still is slightly taller than the one of second-generation residents (see Fig. 15).

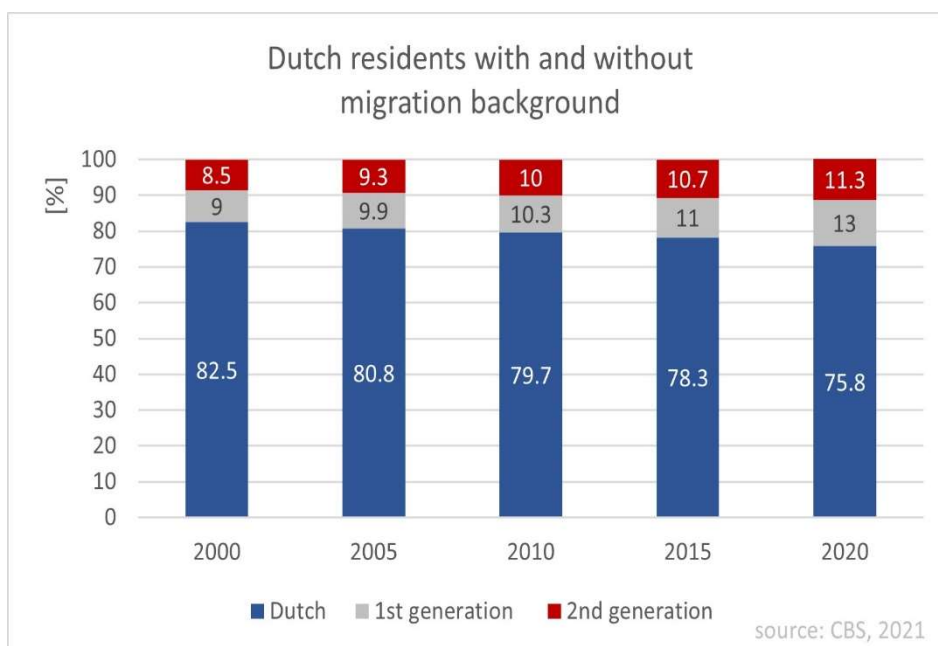


Figure 155: Dutch residents with and without migration background, source: own creation based on cbs, 2021

For Germany the group of residents with migration background in total is smaller than the Dutch one, starting with around 9% in 2000 and increasing to 13.7% in 2020 (see Fig. 16). The data for Germany in Figure 16 is not free from conflicts. To create the diagram two datasets from Destatis were combined, one about the distribution of German and non-German residents in Germany, and a more specified one about the first and second-generation migrated people. Thereby the numbers of non-German citizens differed from the numbers of the different generations of migrants, although the definition of both categories is the same.

This is the reason the amounts of German residents and the more specified generations of migrated people do not always sum up to 100% but differ around +/-1%. What can still be said is that the group of second-generation migrants is smaller than the group of first-generation migrated residents. For the volunteer politics of both countries, this means that more focus should be put on how to activate residents with migration background sufficiently.

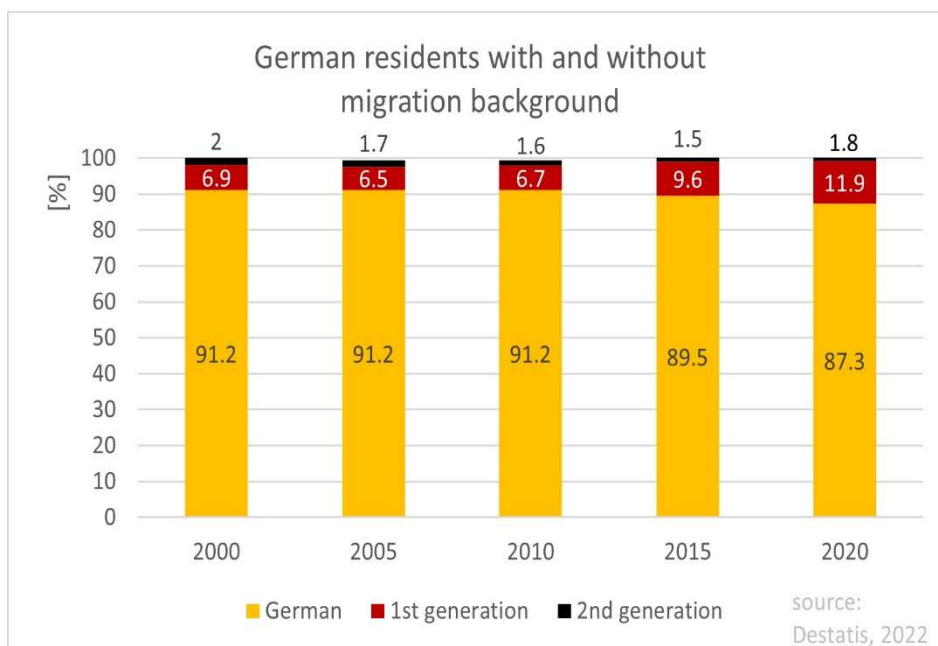


Figure 16: German residents with and without migration background, source: own figure based on Destatis, 2022

### 2.2.3 Influences due to the life situation of the volunteers

Besides geographical and demographical influences, there are some influences regarding the individual life situation of each volunteer. The first of them is education. In general Tonkens and Verhoeven (2018) argue that the level of education determines how likely people are to volunteer. For the case specific literature, both sides agree that in the Netherlands as well as in Germany the higher educated people volunteer more than the less educated. Thereby the

GHK study adds for the Dutch side, that the proportion of higher educated volunteers is two times the one of lower educated ones. For the German side Simonson et al. mention that higher educated people are also more likely to be found in leading positions (de Wilde et al., 2014; GHK, 2010; Grohs, 2021; Klie et al., 2016; Simonson et al., 2021).

Higher education also leads to a better employment position, which again influences how likely people are to volunteer and how much time they spend. The GHK (2010) study mentions for the Netherlands that the type of employment plays a part in how much time there is available for employees to spend on volunteering (or not). For Germany Klie et al. (2016) argue that engagement depends on the own financial security, meaning there is a negative correlation between unemployment and volunteer rate. Finally, Grohs (2021) notes that the typical volunteer in Germany is, besides many other things, wealthy.

Another catalyser for de- or increasing numbers of volunteers is religion. The literature on both sides of the Dutch-German border agree that secularisation is the reason for decreasing volunteer ratio (GHK, 2010; Grohs, 2021; Klie et al., 2016). Yet interesting to analyse is which influences the ongoing process multi-religiosity has on engagement.

The last aspect from the influences of the life situation of volunteers on the volunteer rate is the personal background of the volunteers. Gieling and Haartsen are mentioning that in general a typical volunteer is from a higher social class. For the Netherlands and Germany it can be said that earlier experiences with volunteering positively influence the likeability of volunteering in different fields or later in life, as it was the case of engagement within and outside the religious environment. Robert Putnam describes the same behaviour in his study on volunteering in America and adds that an earlier experience of help can motivate a person to engage in helping others later on as well (GHK, 2010; Gieling & Haartsen, 2016; Klie et al., 2016; Putnam, 2000). Finally, Simonson et al. (2021, p. 15) conclude:

*"A person must have access to voluntary work, i.e. he or she must be socially integrated and networked. He or she must have enough free time; he or she must be able to bear the (additional) demands and burdens that a voluntary activity may entail, and he or she must have knowledge or skills, depending on the field of activity".*

#### 2.2.4 Technological and political influences

Another development that plays a huge role not only but also in terms of volunteering, is the usage of digital media. The GHK study argues that internet influences voluntary work, which is in the same way seen by Simonson for the German case, prognosing that its importance will increase further in the future. Klie et al. add more detail to the importance, by arguing that it allows a faster and broader communication and networking, allowing initiatives to spontaneously act. In doing so, they cite moments of civil protection as an example. In a next step they list the danger of digital media by arguing that if people only connect on a digital level, they lose connection with each other. They also add that organisations can lose members when people shift to digital projects outside the organisational environment (GHK, 2010; Klie et al., 2016; Simonson et al., 2021).

#### 2.2.5 Type of work/ character of volunteering

The last aspect that will be highlighted in this chapter is the change of the character of voluntary work itself. The GHK study (2010, p. 4) shows for the Netherlands, that volunteers tend to shift to “short-term projects with well-defined tasks and objectives”, leaving the long-term work to professionals. The same process can be seen in Germany where the voluntary work is changing from long lasting, community focused work to a project related one in a broader scale. Other shifts were seen from associations to a more private engagement, a more digital way of working, as well as a more spontaneous acting outside the established volunteering structures with less hierarchy and less leading positions, meaning less responsibility and time spend (Grohs, 2021; Nadler, 2017; Simonson et al., 2021).

In terms of the fields of voluntary work, for the Dutch side a preference in the sport sector was noticed, which could also be seen on the German side. In addition German volunteers also prefer work related to education, local affairs and with social context (GHK, 2010; Grohs, 2021).

### 2.3 The bright side of volunteering

From a governmental perspective, the main positive aspects of the cooperation with volunteers are the ones already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, namely the maintenance of public services that were meant to be provided by the welfare state; and the

preservation of the quality of life (Brandsen, 2016; de Haan, 2019; de Wilde et al., 2014; GHK, 2010; Gieling & Haartsen, 2016; Igalla et al., 2019, 2020; Löffler & Timm-Arnold, 2016; Nadler, 2017; Nederhand et al., 2015; Swiaczny, 2010; van Gerven, 2019). But these are not the only benefits that emerge from this cooperation. There are many others that, for a short overview, can be summarised under the topics of societal, financial and political benefits.

To start with the first one, societal benefits of the cooperation between volunteers and government are effects such as the accumulation of social cohesion, solidarity, social inclusion, the encouragement of intercultural and intergenerational exchange, tolerance, social capital and all in all a more stable society (GHK, 2010; Gieling & Haartsen, 2017; Klie et al., 2016; Putnam, 2000; Simonson et al., 2021; SPD et al., 2021; Swiaczny, 2010). However, these effects are questioned by Ubels (2020), who experienced in her study that those effects were limited due to the fact that the active citizens were already active before and that it would also not increase the participation of socioeconomically weak groups.

As a second aspect, the assumption of public services by volunteers is not only positive for their maintenance, but also for the budget of the municipalities, for example by increasing its sustainability (Besser, 2009; de Wilde et al., 2014; GHK, 2010; Klie et al., 2016; Löffler & Timm-Arnold, 2016). As for the political benefits, cooperating with citizens can lead to a more effective local government and therefore to an improved democracy. Not only can the cooperation ensure more balance between government and citizens, but it can thereby additionally increase the legitimacy of policies. However, power can also lead to misuse, especially when the citizens are not equally represented, which leads to the next topic, the dark side of volunteering (Besser, 2009; Brandsen, 2016; Fliedner, 2019; Grohs, 2021; Igalla et al., 2020; Nadler, 2017; Simonson et al., 2021; SPD et al., 2021).

#### 2.4 The dark side of volunteering

As it was mentioned in the paragraph above, volunteering provides not only benefits, but also risks, and has to face certain obstacles. For the government, it is important to know them in order to avoid or overcome them respectively. Many of the risks develop from the interaction between volunteers and institutional actors. Volunteer burnout for example is one of these risks, that can develop out of the feeling on the volunteers side, that they are not heard or their work is not acknowledged. Another reason for this can be if they indeed take over

services that were once done by paid professionals, that they are expected to have the same quality in their work, or to take over the same responsibilities (Angermann & Sittermann, 2010; de Wilde et al., 2014; GHK, 2010; Gieling & Haartsen, 2016; Grohs, 2021; Nadler, 2017; Ubels et al., 2019). The capability issue becomes even worse when considering the influence of decreasing population that was already mentioned in Chapter 1.2, and that is putting more pressure on the people left in the areas (GHK, 2010; Gieling & Haartsen, 2016; Nadler, 2017; Swiaczny, 2010). Ubels et al. (2019, p. 10) are summing these two arguments up by saying:

*"[...] it is problematic to assume that volunteers in depopulating and peripheral communities have the time and competencies needed to achieve this, to shoulder the various responsibilities and handle the frequently complex and differentiated local social realities successfully."*

If the services are not fully run by volunteers, another obstacle might occur, namely the cooperation between voluntary and paid workers. A second aspect of cooperation is then the one between volunteers and the local governments. Problems here can be that not all administrations in rural areas are prepared for cooperation with volunteers or willing to give up power. Furthermore, civil servants might experience such cooperation as additional workload instead of a relief and might fear ineffectiveness when processes are managed by citizens (Angermann & Sittermann, 2010; Edelenbos et al., 2018; GHK, 2010; Gieling & Haartsen, 2016; Nadler, 2017; Ubels et al., 2019). In terms of institutions, two additional aspects can be added, the first one being a necessary adaptation of the institutional infrastructure to the shift within the volunteers towards less working hours and less responsibility, but more flexibility (see Chapter 1.2). The second aspect then is the bureaucratic obstacle for volunteers to reach out to the correct person in charge (GHK, 2010; Grohs, 2021; Nadler, 2017; Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2018).

In the previous subchapter, the diversity of volunteers was portrayed. However, this diversity bears a high risk of unequal representation (as was mentioned with Ubels' critique in the previous subchapter). Citizen initiatives are groups that contain and therefore represent just certain parts of citizens. They bear the risks of accumulating only likeminded people and therefore might exclude people with certain ethnics, gender, educational level or income, leading to power inequalities and unequal relations not only in but also between communities (Besser, 2009; Brandsen, 2016; de Wilde et al., 2014; Edelenbos et al., 2018; Gieling & Haartsen, 2016;

Igalla et al., 2019; Nadler, 2017; Simonson et al., 2021; Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2018; Ubels et al., 2019). E1 explains the problems that occur from this for the municipalities as follows:

*“For the municipalities that is a difficult position, because they never know [for] certain that these people are indeed representing of all the citizens in that village”*  
(Int-1, ln. 215 ff.).

and

*“[T]here is always some discrepancy between the representatives, or who say that they are the representatives and the common sense in the area they intend to represent”*  
(ibid., ln. 248 f.).

Therefore, local governments need to carefully decide how, when and how much to interact with the volunteers. If they involve them too late for example, the volunteers might feel as if they are being used for only legitimizing decisions that were already made without them. Besides that, they have to figure out when to give responsibility to the volunteers and when to take it back, in order to ensure fair, representable processes without overburden the volunteers. Risks at this point can be that the aims of the initiatives are not in line with the ones of the government or that the initiatives intention might be good, thus create bad outcomes on broader scales. Furthermore, the intervention of the government can cause a -what Brandsen calls- “hedgehogs dilemma”, where the intensity of involvement equals the harm for the initiatives (Brandsen, 2016; Grohs, 2021; Ubels et al., 2019). All in all, this discussion shows how difficult it can be for governments to react to and interact with volunteers, to find the right way between (over-) activeness and passiveness, and that no situation is like the other. The Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties (Ministry of Kingdom and Interior Relations) (2014, par. 4) sums this up as follows:

*“Active citizens don't want the government to provide standard solutions for everything. They prefer a tailor-made approach and authorities that think along with them.”*

03

**POLITICAL  
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TURES**

### 3. Political Structures

The second sub-question for this thesis asked about the structures on municipalities side that help or hinder cooperation with citizens. In order to illuminate these structures more detail, the following chapter will first present general administrative structures in the Netherlands and Germany, before the welfare systems and the budget will be explained. The latter is done so that the problems which were briefly introduced in Chapter 1, can be understood more deeply. In the end, policies and structures for volunteering will be shown.

#### 3.1 General administrative structures

##### 3.1.1 The Netherlands

In 1815 the Netherlands became a constitutional monarchy under the rule of King William I, Prince of Orange-Nassau, whose family played an essential role in the country's past and whose ancestors are still the monarchs until the present day. Fifteen Years after the kingdom was built, Belgium got separated and formed its own country (Ch. 2, Subch. 2.1, Art. 24 GW; Fiege et al., 2008; The National Academy for Finance and Economics. Ministry of Finance, 2013).

Besides this hierarchical approach, the Netherland is ever since highly democratic. Fiege et al. (2008, pp. 7 f.) explain the reason for this rather poetically:

*“This long-term relationship with the ever-threatening water clearly determined the way democracy took root and gained shape in the Netherlands. The eternal sword of Damocles of the water threat meant that early residents had to combine and work together to defend themselves, which brought the concepts of rights and obligations to the fore.”*

To explain this combination of monarchy and democracy further, on the one hand, the monarch is the head of the country. However, regarding Article 42 of the constitution, the position has no direct political power. On the other hand, the kingdom of the Netherlands has been a parliamentary democracy since 1848. The parliament is called the States General (Staten-Generaal) and forms the government together with the monarch, who holds a formal role. It consists of two chambers, the Upper House (Eerste Kamer) and the Lower House (Tweede Kamer). In addition, three other administrative levels follow the parliament, the first being the

provinces and the lowest being municipalities. As will be shown later in the German context, the term municipality can be used, among other things, for cities, villages, and towns. Moreover, the water bodies lie between provinces and municipalities (see Fig. 17). There are 12 provinces in the Netherlands and about 352 municipalities (in 2021). Regarding Article 124 of the constitution, the provinces and the municipalities have the right to self-government. However, municipalities, provinces and the central government cooperate and negotiate working agreements on a daily basis. The municipalities are of great importance to Dutch politics, even more so since the decentralisation. Whereas it aimed to bring policies closer to the citizens they are made for, it simultaneously increased the complexity of the municipalities' tasks. In order to cope with this new situation, municipalities started to merge or cooperate, for example in the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten). Although the municipalities grow in size due to that policy, the districts and neighbourhoods within the municipalities are shrinking. It is essential to note this fact when considering the negative correlation between the size of the community and the number of volunteers (see Chapter 2.2) (Ch. 2, Subch. 2.2, Art. 42 GW; Ch. 3, Subch. 3.1, Art. 51 GW; Ch. 7, Art. 124 GW; CBS, 2020; Int-1; Figue et al., 2008; Flidner, 2019; GHK, 2010; The National Academy for Finance and Economics. Ministry of Finance, 2013; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2016).

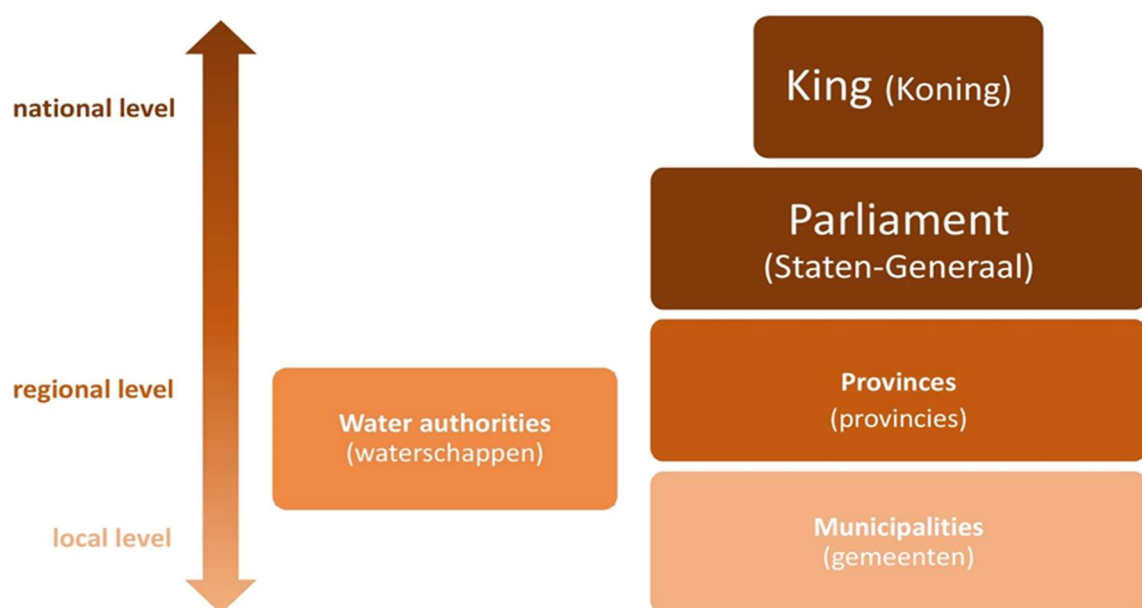


Figure 17: Administrative structures in the Netherlands, source: own figure inspired by Ciceroni, 2021

The provinces are managed by a provincial council whose meetings are open to the public. In addition to the council exists a provincial executive. Both are chaired by the King's Commissioner (Commissaris van de Koning), a member of the executive but not of the council and a representant of the national government. The provinces then assemble in the Association of Provincial Authorities (Interprovinciaal Overleg). Tasks of the provinces are, inter alia, the supervision of the municipalities' governance, the maintenance of nature parks and mobility (Ch. 7, Art. 125 GW; Int-1; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2016).

The municipality is in the same way headed by a council, alongside the municipal executive that consists of a mayor and council members<sup>3</sup>. The council itself is built from the mayor and representatives of parties that together form a coalition (College van Burgemeester en Wethouders) (Ch.7, Art. 125 GW; Int-1; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2016). Until 2002 alderpersons were also part of the council, but they got separated to make it easier for the council's secretariat to get closer to the citizens. Whereas the alderpersons advocate for specific areas of expertise and work as executives, the mayor's job is to ensure a proper decision-making process while not being part of any political party. In doing so, the mayor is supported by the municipal secretary. In addition, the mayor is the chairman of both the executives and the council (Figuee et al., 2008; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2016). The municipality is in the same way headed by a council, alongside the municipal executive that consists of a mayor and aldermen. The council itself is built from the mayor and representatives of parties that together form a coalition (College van Burgemeester en Wethouders) (Ch. 7, Art. 125 GW; Int-1; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2016). Until 2002 Aldermen were also part of the council, but they got separated in order to make it easier for the council's secretariat to get closer to the citizens. Whereas the aldermen advocate for specific areas of expertise and work as executives, the mayor's job is -while not being part of any political party- to ensure a proper decision-making process. In doing so he is supported by the municipal secretary. In addition the mayor is the chairman of both the executives and the council (Figuee et al., 2008; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2016).

At the beginning of the chapter, the vast influence of the geographical proximity to the water on the Netherlands was mentioned. Another argument for the importance of that relationship is the existence of the water authorities, also called water board, waterschap, heemraad, or hoogheemraad. The 26 water authorities manage natural water systems and ensure that the

country is not flooded. They consist of an executive board and a general council chaired by the so-called dijkgraaf. There have been discussions in recent years to merge the waterbodies with the provinces, but until now they are still autonomous (Int-1; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2016; Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2012).

Similar to Germany, the Netherlands has a separation of power into legislative (parliament), executive (government) and an independent judicative, whereby the municipalities act as executives of national and regional orders. However, besides this division and despite the existing vertical hierarchical structure of parliament, provinces and municipalities, Dutch politics work more horizontally through networking and compromise, rather than authorities making use of their power. This is additionally shown through the social support act, which was implemented in 2007 and decentralised power by giving more responsibilities to local governments (Figuee et al., 2008; GHK, 2010; Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2012; The National Academy for Finance and Economics. Ministry of Finance, 2013). Figuee et al. (2008, pp. 16 f.) describe the essence of this way of working further by writing:

*“This [the central position of municipalities in creating and implementing policies] is a distinct consequence and prominent feature of the operation of a decentralised unitary state: listen to and then act on what is happening in the heart of society [...].”*

A person critical of the "listen to and then act"- part of the quote is the village supporter (dorpsondersteuner), also called dorpsverbinder, dorpsregisseur or dorpscoördinator. The main task of the dorpsondersteuner is to connect and coordinate citizens, volunteers and professionals with each other. This can be done, for example, by organizing social activities or informal care or by introducing the residents to care organisations. In doing so, the dorpsondersteuner is of enormous importance for the liveability in villages. When it comes to cities, this actor is also called wijkconciërge or buurtassistent and is usually in charge for a certain neighbourhood (Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health, 2020; Nederland Zorgt voor Elkaar & Vereniging Kleine Kernen Limburg, 2021).

### 3.1.2 Germany

For the German structure, the country can be divided into three horizontal levels of administration. The highest one is called the federation (Bund), which makes the country a federal republic (Bundesstaat). The difference between a federal republic and a confederation of

states (Staatenbund) is that states in the latter are allowed to leave the confederation, whereas in the first one, they are not. In Germany, this can be found in Article 79 (3) of the basic law (Ch. 7, Art. 79 GG; Fliedner, 2019; Gunlicks, 2003). The 16 states are the second administration level and can be divided into 13 territorial states and three city states. For the city states, there is no further subdivision to the third, the local level of government, which is also called the communal level. The territorial states differ in their sizes. To make administration in the taller ones easier, they are divided into government districts. Regardless of these government districts, the territorial states can be further divided into counties (Landkreise) and county-free cities (kreisfreie Städte). As for the city states, there is no further subdivision for the county-free cities, whereas the counties can be subdivided into municipalities (see Fig. 18). In this context, municipality (Gemeinde) is used synonymously for cities, villages, communities, communes and towns (Fliedner, 2019; Gunlicks, 2003; Klie et al., 2016).

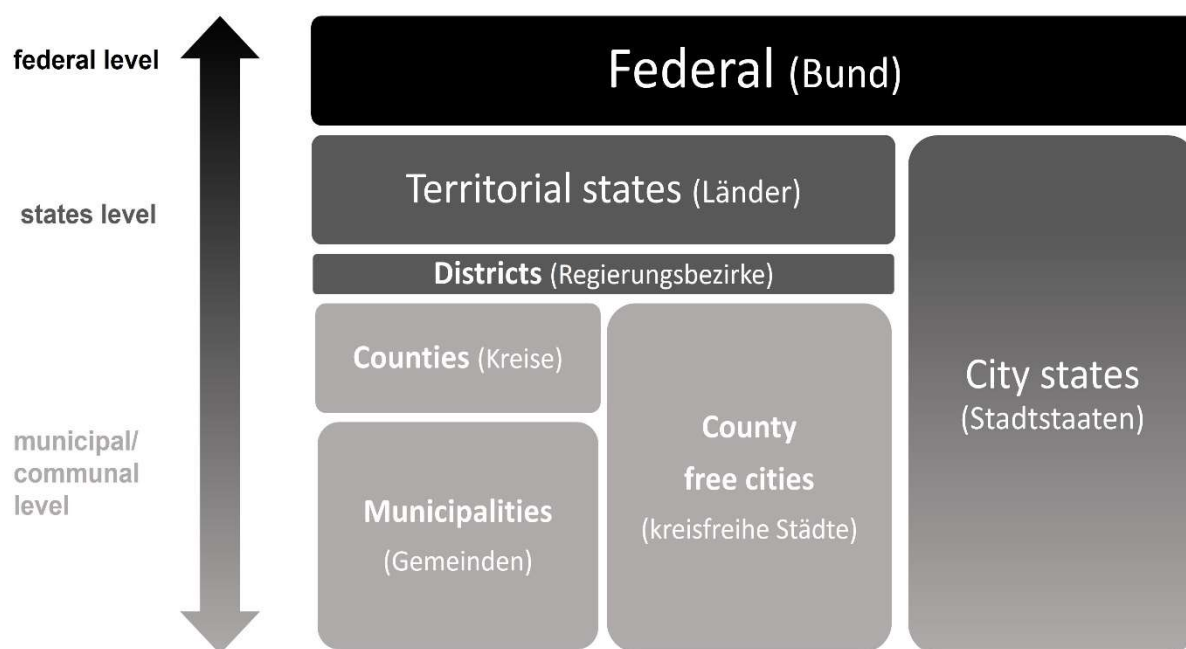


Figure 18: Administrative structures in Germany, source: own figure inspired by Wikipedia, 2008

To back this up with some figures: in Germany, there are 294 districts with an average of 100,000-250,000 inhabitants and an area of 1,100-1,500 km<sup>2</sup>, each consisting of about 37 municipalities and 107 independent cities. Sometimes the smaller municipalities merge into bigger, more powerful ones, as is the case in the Netherlands. Due to that political act, the number of municipalities decreased heavily in the 1970s. However, in 2017 in Germany, a total amount of 11,054 municipalities could be found. If they do not unite, assembling in an

association -similar to their Dutch neighbours- is another way for municipalities to gain more power (Fliedner, 2019; Ruge & Ritgen, 2021).

These different levels of administration have different authorities, which is hugely influenced by the country's history. During the Middle Ages, cities gained the power of self-government. Later, during the area of the Weimar Republic, this self-government was ensured for the local authorities by law. When the National Socialist Party took over, they shifted the power to the higher levels of administration. However, at the end of the second world war, the administrative structures on the communal level were the only ones that had survived. With the decentralisation of power in Germany, the local authorities gained their power back and are, until the present day, still of much importance for politics (Fliedner, 2019; Gunlicks, 2003).

The end of the second world war also led to the division of power into legislative, judicative and executive, which can be found in Article 20 (2) in the basic law. Communes within this power division fulfil the tasks of the executive (Ch. 2, Art. 20 GG; Fliedner, 2019; Gunlicks, 2003). Executive power in this context means that the communes, respectively municipalities, have to implement policies on behalf of the upper administrative levels. Using Gunlicks (2003), up to 80% of the local governments implement federal and state laws at the local level. However, in comparison to the Netherlands, some tasks of the Dutch national government can be found on the level of the states in Germany (Int-1).

Besides implementing laws, other tasks are delegated to the municipalities by the federal states. These tasks are mandatory and have a prescribed execution. Examples of mandatory delegated tasks are matters of registration and passports that need to be the same across the country. Nevertheless, that is just one part of the tasks of municipalities. Article 28 (2) of the basic law ensures the self-government of municipalities. Accordingly, municipalities are empowered to take care of all matters of their local communities as long as they act within the state or federal law. Due to this regulation, the self-government of municipalities can differ in the different states of the country (Ch. 2, Art. 28 GG; Fliedner, 2019; Gunlicks, 2003; Ruge & Ritgen, 2021).

Within the matters of self-government, there are voluntary and mandatory tasks. To start with the latter, mandated tasks of self-government are the ones that need to be done but are flexible in their execution. Examples, in this case, are matters concerning schools, firefighters, waste collection and social welfare. Voluntary tasks of self-government are the very individual

matters of the local community, including the maintenance of certain facilities, the support of clubs and cultural associations by the municipality, and its engagement policy. Since these tasks are not mandatory, they are the ones that get cut if there are problems with the budget or the administrative capability of the municipality (Fliedner, 2019; Gunlicks, 2003; Klie et al., 2016; Nadler, 2017). More on the public budget of municipalities will follow later in the thesis; for now, the crucial actors on the municipal level will be analysed.

The local authorities in Germany consist of two to three bodies. In all municipalities, there is an executive body which is represented by either a mayor, commissioner or (only in the state Hesse) a college. The states of Lower Saxony, Brandenburg and North Rhine-Westphalia, as well as the counties in Saarland and Bavaria, have a third body, consisting of deputies or members of the representative body and the chief administrative officer (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021). The representative body is called the municipalities parliament (Gemeinderat/ Stadtrat/ Gemeindeverordnetenversammlung). It consists of representatives of the citizens and is led by the mayor. The representants, the council members, are elected by the citizens and work voluntarily in their position. Further regulations are determined by the municipal constitution and can therefore differ in each municipality (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/ bpb, 2021-b).

## 3.2 Welfare system

### 3.2.1 The Netherlands

The social welfare system of the Netherlands has its origins in the 19th century in the implementation of insurance for waged workers. After the second world war, the system gained more importance. It was further developed like the idea of the British Beveridge model, where society and state are both responsible for organising national social protection. The model worked in a way that people with higher incomes were helping to finance the insurance of the people with lower incomes. However, this model ended during two oil crises in the 1970s, which led to public austerity measurements and a shift of responsibility to the citizens. The last decade of the 20th century was when the Dutch system recovered due to a workplace boom (van Gerven, 2019). For the time after that, van Gerven (2019) divides the development of the Dutch social welfare system into three phases. The first of which lasted from 1994 until 2006 and was characterized by neo-liberalism, which was expressed through austerity

measures, that lead to the limitation of access to insurance schemes and the activation of citizens. At the same time, the welfare provision still needed further development, thus urging certain policy sectors to expand. This expansion was inverted during the second period, that ended in 2010. The focus here laid on decentralization and shifting responsibilities for welfare provision back to families. Van Gerven (2019, p. 400) explains this further by writing that participation was the main focus of this period, where the different public and private stakeholders activated and empowered citizens on "[how to cope without the state](#)".

The last period then started in 2010 and lasts until the present day. In this period, the provision of care is even more shifted towards the citizens. Besides that, solidarity is changing from a collective to a rather local one between citizens and their communities. On the other side, the state, who over the years lost its responsibility for providing welfare services, is now more of a regulator of the different providers. Van Gerven (2019, p. 400) sums this up with the following quote:

*"The fundamentals of welfare states have been undergone a normative reorientation from a solidaristic and state-provided collective welfare state provision to a participatory state, where citizens actively engage in labour market and social service delivery and own the responsibility of their own wellbeing."*

Van Oorschot describes the present composition of the Dutch welfare system in more detail. Following his argumentation, the main focus points of the Dutch system are health, housing, education, work and income. As will be shown in the case of Germany, there is mandatory health insurance, free education for primary and secondary levels, and financial support for the higher education level. In terms of housing, tremendous attention is paid to social housing. In contrast, fiscal welfare is not that important for the Dutch system and is mainly carried out through tax provisions for working people, especially those with children; and pensioners (van Oorschot, 2006). Besides health insurance, there are a few other mandatory insurances regarding public social security. Public social securities are funded to a vast degree by public spending. The first category within this type of insurance is people's insurance for the elderly, survivors, and child benefits. The second one is the workers' insurance which covers unemployment and long-term disablement and is compulsory for every working person. The Netherlands is the only European country which does not divide between a work-related injury and a non-work-related one. They implemented an Invalidity Insurance Act (Wet arbeids-

ongeschiktheid) in the late 20th century that increased the numbers of insurance recipients and led to a work promotion act in 2006 (Wet werk en inkomen) (van Gerven, 2019; van Oorschot, 2006).

The third category is social assistance, which is meant for people with no or little income and is funded by the general taxation of the country. As a large critique van Oorschot argues that whereas this kind of system is good for the working population, the ones without a job have lost much protection throughout the past reforms. For the future, he sees three main challenges for the Dutch welfare system: globalisation, ageing and migration. In terms of ageing, he argues that people should retire later and that as many people as possible should work in order to finance the pensions of the growing older generation (van Oorschot, 2006).

### 3.2.2 Germany

Like the Netherlands, Germany is a country with a social welfare system. Its origin lies in the 1880s, when the "Reichskanzler" of the German Reich, Otto von Bismarck, implemented insurances for health, accidents, pensions and invalidity to weaken the party of the social democrats. Since then, the time has passed and not only the country but also the system has changed and needed to be adapted. Today the German welfare system can be divided into three categories, the main aim of which is to prevent emergencies and to help people who are already in them. The first category thereof is the welfare services (Fürsorgeleistungen) that aim to help people in need. Examples of this are the unemployment and housing benefits (Blank, 2019; bpb Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013). The second category is the utility services (Versorgungsleistungen) that are meant for people who made sacrifices or provided specific performances for the nation. An example of this is the state's financial support for every child born. The last category is the insurance services that prevent loss of income. In addition to that, citizens must insure themselves. This system is funded by fees and taxes of the citizens (Blank, 2019; bpb Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013). However, in recent years there was a shift from the state providing those services to a privatization, as Blank (2019, p. 115) writes:

*"[...] charities turned into charitable companies, public institutions were reformed, limiting the power of the self-administration and introducing instruments of new public*

*management to the point where public health insurance fund compete with each other and go into insolvency [...], public institutions such as hospitals where privatised [...].”*

The developments of the welfare services described in the Netherlands and Germany are a process that was described by Anthony Giddens as structuration theory. He states that there is a duality of structure, whereby structure produces the framework for people to act, but is also reproduced by them (Endreß, 2017; O’Donell, 2010). In this case the structure is the welfare services that was in both countries earlier provided by professionals and organised by the state. However through changes on the peoples side, this structure could no longer exist and was adapted, so that more services were taken over by volunteers. Now, as seen with current developments on the volunteer’s side in Chapter 2, the agency side is about to change again and the question rising up is if the structure has to answer that call. However, this question will be answered later in the thesis.

### 3.3 Budget

#### 3.3.1 The Netherlands

Dutch budget planning works according to the principle of connexity. This means that the national government will finance most of the tasks it delegates to the municipalities. The total budget for all municipalities consists of 50 billion euros and can be divided into two ways of funding, the ear-marked funds and the General grant (Figuee et al., 2008; The National Academy for Finance and Economics. Ministry of Finance, 2013). The ear-marked fund is not relocatable and represents about 27% of the municipality’s income. Since the fund is meant for social services, education or urban regeneration, municipalities might get higher funds when they need more financial support in those areas. The General grant represents about 33% of the municipalities income and is in contrast to the ear-marked fund allocatable by the municipalities. In general, it is meant to create an equal level of services, as well as an equal level of local taxes and charges in the municipalities. The amount of the fund is calculated individually for each municipality based on certain criteria. However, the municipalities can request a higher fund if needed. An additional 16% of the municipality’s income consists of local taxes, administration fees and other charges. Whereas the money from the taxes can be spent in whatever way the municipality prefers, the one from administration fees and other charges is prohibited from making a profit and only allowed to spend for the services it came from. The

rest of the municipality's income consists of money gained from the municipalities property and European grants (Int-1; Figuee et al., 2008). To combine the topic of budget with the one of participation, with the so-called citizens' budget, citizens can participate in the decision making process of what to use the municipal budget for (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2014).

### 3.3.2 Germany

German municipalities have finance sovereignty, meaning they are self-responsible for their spending and income. The basic law ensures this with Article 28 (2). The income is then further described in Article 106. Following this article, municipalities get individual shares of the income, turnover, community and, in some cases, state taxes. In addition, they get incomes from real estate, trade, excise, and expenditure taxes. Some years ago, it was common to plan the public budgets with the system of cameralistics where the municipalities' income and spending would be held against each other. However, during the last years, the double bookkeeping system has become more and more common in the different states (Ch. 2, Art. 28 GG; Ch.10, Art. 106 GG; Fliedner, 2019; Knirsch, 2019). In difference from the first one, double bookkeeping also includes non-material goods like services. Other advantages are that the use of resources is measured and made transparent, and the property and depths<sup>4</sup> of the municipalities are also made transparent for the residents (Fliedner, 2019).

Besides the taxes, Schwarting (2019) lists four other income sources for the public budget: fees and contributions, funds from the municipal financial equalisation scheme, earned income and other current earnings, and credits. There is a particular order of these income sources that starts with incomes from earnings and funds from the municipal financial equalisation scheme and goes on with fees and contributions, as well as taxes as second and third step, before it concludes with credits. In 2016 fees made up 8.7% of the municipality's income, allocations from federal and the states made up 39.4%, taxes 41.2% and other incomes 10.7%. An overview of the tax distribution can be found in Figure 19. In addition, the federal state is bound to provide the municipalities with enough money to fulfil the tasks it delegates to them. In the basic law, this can be found in Article 28 (2) and in the form of the connexity principle in Article 104 a (Ch. 2, Art. 28 GG; Ch. 10, Art. 104 GG; Ruge & Ritgen, 2021; Schwarting, 2019). Fliedner (2019) finally remarks that for municipalities to balance the adverse effects of their

decreasing and ageing population, they should get a higher amount of the taxes through laws on the federal or county level. Like the Dutch citizens, also German citizens can participate in distributing the municipal budget in the form of a citizens' budget. However, in contrast, this tool was not as common in Germany for a long time and had only recently started to be used more often (Grohs, 2021; Zepic et al., 2017).

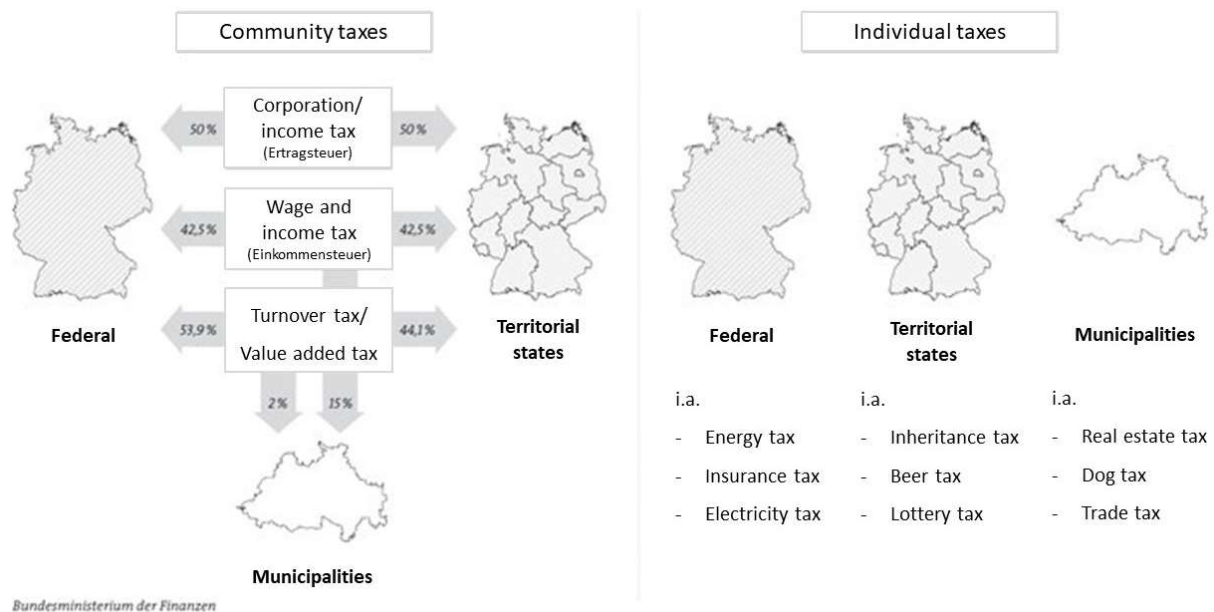


Figure 19: Distribution of taxes, source: Bundesministerium der Finanzen, as shown by Hacke, 2012, own translation

### 3.4 Volunteering and participation

#### 3.4.1 The Netherlands

Some developments of citizen participation were already discussed in Chapter 3. However, since the focus there was on welfare provision, Michels (2006) is providing a different one more for the development of the (political) participation. She thereby describes four phases, starting with the phase of “Pillarization” (ibid., p. 327) from 1945 until 1965. During that time, the society was organized into the three rather religious pillars of Catholics, Protestants and secular people, whereby the last one was sub divided into a liberal and a socialist group. The citizens within these pillars would accept the authority of the societal elites and would behave more in a passive way. In the second phase, that lasted until 1985, the separation into the different pillars became loose, with former individual organizations merging to bigger ones and citizen engaging in a growing number of political parties or initiatives within a democratisation movement. Thereby the participation was only from a verbal nature, dominated by high

educated men and only done when politicians had already made their own decisions. This led to a gap between politicians and citizens, that was tried to overcome during the third period until 2004. Michels describes that during the 1980s, citizens, social organizations, as well as companies were increasingly and in various forms involved in doing and implementing policies. This was inter alia due to the neo-liberalisation with its austerity measures, but also due to the governments urge of being more transparent and accountable in their policies and outcomes. As for the time after 2004, Michels (2006, p. 329) states:

*“Citizens increasingly expect government to solve their problems and sometimes even seem to be less satisfied with government efforts than ever before.”*

In 2013 the king addressed the Dutch citizens as Participation Society, where responsibilities are shifted from the national to the regional and local governments. Additionally, the responsibility of the social wellbeing, or tasks as the maintenance of facilities are this time not forced by the government to the citizens, but this time actively taken by volunteers. This process reached a point, where the participation is no longer called citizen participation, but government participation, where the local government gets involved in such processes again, but just in a supporting role (de Haan, 2019; Gieling & Haartsen, 2016; Meijer & Sysner, 2017; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2014).

Earlier it was discussed that the state is urging to make its processes transparent for its accountability. If the citizens take over more and more of these tasks, the questions arises of how their decision making processes will be controlled to ensure their legitimation. In terms of the state this was done through a representative democracy, where actors were chosen either direct or indirect by the citizens. If citizen initiatives take over these responsibilities now, this control instance is missing. Negative aspects of that have been already discussed with the non-representativeness is Chapter 2.4 and announce problems that go beyond the scope of this thesis (memo, July 01, 2022).

As for the volunteers, the Netherlands started implementing around the turn of the millennium. In 2001, during the United Nations International Year on Volunteering, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport set up a commission for volunteering policy that helped provincial and municipal governments to develop effective volunteering policies. In 2007 the earlier mentioned social support act was implemented, which provided a framework for volunteering on a municipal and national level (GHK, 2010).

On the national level, there are two central bodies for volunteering, the already mentioned Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, as well as the Ministry Directorate for Youth People. The first mentioned Ministry then coordinates the matters with the different government departments and holds the overall responsibility, whereas the second only focuses on younger volunteers. Additionally, there are some national volunteer organizations, the most important ones being NOV (Association of Dutch Organisations Voluntary Effort/ Vereniging Nederlandse Organisaties Vrijwilligerswerk) and MOVISIE (GHK, 2010). NOV's aim is to serve the interests of the volunteer sector, to network between different actors and to ensure that the public recognises the efforts of the volunteers. It has 350 participating organisations, which are either volunteer organisations or ones for the support of volunteers (GHK, 2010; NOV Vereniging Nederlandse Organisaties Vrijwilligerswerk, n.d.). The second organisation, MOVISIE, is "[p]romoting, modernising and boosting volunteer work" (MOVISIE, n.d., par.1). The former CIVIQ is a non-profit organisation that is funded by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports and acts mostly as a consultant agency (GHK, 2010; MOVISIE, n.d.).

On the regional and local level, the central bodies for voluntary work are volunteering centres and volunteering support points, as well as organisations that support the communication between all three levels. The tasks of the centres and support points are to give advice, to help with vacancies and the promotion of volunteering. The local level of municipalities is thereby the most crucial level of action, and volunteering policies are primarily a local matter. Local authorities provide facilities like sport centres and are responsible for executing welfare services. In order to fulfil these tasks, the municipalities are supported by the provinces. To combine forces, municipalities are provided with the joint regulations act, whereas on the vertical level, this instrument is called the joint social agenda. When volunteers want to interact with official actors, they have multiple ways to do so. One way is to contact civil servants (ambtenaren) of the municipality, such as the dorpsondersteuner. Besides that, volunteers can also contact the council members and the mayor (Int-1; Figuee et al., 2008; GHK, 2010). As E1 (Int-1, ll. 186 f.) states it: "Everything is possible and everything happens [...]."

In addition, Dutch municipalities work together with one or more "welzijnsstichting", an organisation that is in charge of supporting, organising and generally interacting with the volunteers (Int-10).

Two more things are of importance at this point, insurance and funding. First of all, volunteers need to be insured for their work. Unfortunately, there is no legal insurance provision for volunteers; however, since 2009, the government has been helping municipalities provide insurance for their volunteers. Besides the insurance, another important point is the financing of volunteer projects. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports is providing 2 million Euros per year to do so. Besides that, parts of the municipality's budgets, funds, donations, and member contributions are used (Int-1; GHK, 2010).

All in all, the main aspect of the political framework of volunteering in the Netherlands is the same as in the general politics of the country, namely communication. This includes communication on the horizontal level, as seen with the joint regulations act, as well as on the vertical level between national, regional and local governments as seen with the joint social agenda (inter alia Figuee, et al. 2008; GHK, 2010; Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2012).

### 3.4.2 Germany

*“In order for engagement to develop its positive effects for all population groups and regions, conditions and frameworks must be maintained respective created at all levels that promote and strengthen engagement in its diversity and in its civil society orientation.”* (Klie et al., 2016, p. 9)

To follow the argumentation of Klie et al., the diversity of engagement has been shown so far (Chapter 2), as well as the general administrative structures in Germany. Now, the conditions and frameworks for volunteering will be considered in more detail.

The development of participation in Germany differed in the BRD and DDR. In the 1950s and 1960s, both parts of Germany were led by the respective government and strong hierarchies, leaving a huge gap between politicians and citizens. In the BRD starting in the 1970s, education levels began to increase, leading to participatory processes expressed in protest movements. Whereas in the DDR participation was increasing through a civil rights movement in the 1980s. Later in both parts of Germany, citizens could politically participate in form of referendums. After reunification, participatory movements increased (Gabriel, 2020; Selle, 2007). Since then, the gap between politics and the people has narrowed, as Selle (2007, p. 63) writes:

*“The distant electorate seems to have become a partner to be taken seriously and whose involvement in many issues is obvious.”*

Although there has been a national policy to support volunteers since 2009 (Swiaczny, 2010), respectively 2010 (Angermann & Sittermann, 2010), the different strategies at the different administrative levels are often uncoordinated, as Klie et al. (2016, p. 39) state:

*“The following applies overall – with a few exceptions: Strategies to promote engagement are usually not coordinated with each other. They are often carried out accordingly to departmental responsibilities and pursued without an overall strategy.”*

Therefore, closer cooperation and co-thinking on the vertical level (federal, states and municipalities) and horizontal level (actors in civil society, state and private sector) are needed. In 2021 the new government of Germany was elected and formed a coalition between the three parties SPD, BÜNDNIS 90/ DIE GRÜNEN and FDP. To be able to govern together, the parties agreed on a coalition contract. Within this contract, they, among other things, focus on volunteers and their benefits to society. To support the volunteers, some of the coalition's strategies are to make it easier for retired people to get financial compensation for their time spent, to develop a whole new volunteer concept and to enact more protection laws for them, as well as to support engagement, whereby the focus lays especially on the youth and structurally weak regions. To ensure this, they want to develop an engagement supporting law until 2023 (SPD et al., 2021).

The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) is a network of over 60 organisations in Europe. For the Dutch side, NOV and MOVISIE already have been introduced earlier. The German members are ARBES and BBE. ARBES, [the "state working group for civic engagement and senior citizens' co-operatives"](#) (ARBES e.V., n.d., par. 2) or Arbeitsgemeinschaft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements resp. Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Bürgerschaftliches Engagement und Seniorenengagements in German, is an organisation in the federal state Baden-Württemberg. It functions as a communicator and networker on the vertical level between regional and local actors and is funded by local support, fees of its members and the Land network of which it is part (ARBES e.V., n.d.). The Bundeswerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (BBE, National Network of Civil Society in English) is another actor on the national scale. Its goal is the ["improvement of general legal organisational and institutional conditions for civic involvement"](#) (Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement, n.d., par. 1). Besides that, the BBE

works as a networker between volunteer sector and civil society (Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement, n.d.).

As in the Netherlands, the promotion of volunteering is mainly a task of the local level. Although Grohs (2021, p. 323) argues that citizens have gained more acknowledgement as "[a partner \(and resource\) of public administration -on the input side as well as on the implementation side of public policies](#)", Klie et al. are pointing out some problems with current policies. One critique lies in how volunteer organizations are funded, mainly focusing on huge, well-known organisations but not helping small, new ones. They recommend that, especially in structurally weaker regions, the federal government should work together with the states and the municipalities to provide funding for implementing policies. In addition, they recommend the implementation of an acknowledgment culture for volunteers, as well as a de-bureaucrat-isation of volunteering processes (Klie et al., 2016).

04

CASE  
STUDY

## 4. Case study

### 4.1 VOLUNTEERS 2.0

As mentioned in the introduction, the research for this master thesis was done within the INTERREG VA project "Volunteers 2.0". To give more background information about Volunteers 2.0 and the position of this thesis within it, it was part of "INTERREG Deutschland-Niederland", a support programme for the cooperation between the Netherlands and Germany. It, therefore, was part of the association "Euregio Rhein-Waal", which has the same aim. Two earlier projects were carried out in this constellation, namely "Smart Villages" from 2012 until 2016 and KRAKE from 2016 until 2019. They focused on villages and gained the underlying knowledge for Volunteers 2.0 (Euregio Rhein-Waal, n.d., 2020; HAN University of Applied Sciences, n.d.; Hochschule Rhein-Waal, n.d.; INTERREG Deutschland-Niederland, 2022). The current project aimed to stimulate the "cooperation between the municipality and citizens' initiatives for quality of life", to sustainably strengthen voluntary work and to reduce "border barriers between Germany and the Netherlands" (HAN University of Applied Sciences, n.d.).

Partners of this project were the HAN University of Applied Sciences and the Hochschule Rhein-Waal (HRW). Additionally, there were four participating municipalities on the Dutch side, being Overbetuwe, Nijmegen, Apeldoorn and Horst an de Maas. As for the German side of the boarder, the six municipalities Geldern, Duisburg, Moers, Weeze, Kalkar and Udem were represented (Euregio Rhein-Waal, 2020; HAN University of Applied Sciences, n.d.). At the end of the project, the HAN University of Applied Sciences and the Hochschule Rhein-Waal wrote a handbook about their findings from this project. Thereby findings of this thesis were used for the handbook, which can be found in the HAN blog on the following website: <https://blog3.han.nl/volunteers/opbrengsten/>.

In the following, first, the communities will be introduced before country-specific approaches to the cooperation with citizen initiatives and volunteers in general, are elaborated and compared.

## 4.2 The Dutch communities

### 4.2.1 Horst aan de Maas

#### Portrait

Location: province Limburg

Size<sup>5</sup>: 191.92 km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>6</sup>: 42,487 (in 2021)

Mayor<sup>7</sup>: Ryan Palmen

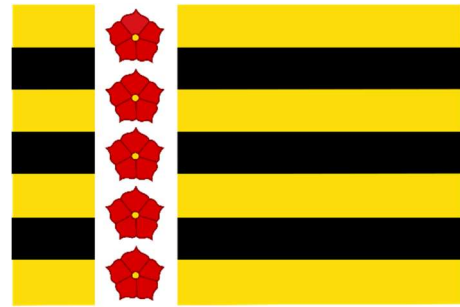


Figure 20: Coat of arms Horst aan de Maas, source Wikipedia, 2004

Horst aan de Maas lies in the southeast of the Netherlands, close to the German border. In the east, it is flanked by the river Maas. The municipality was created in 2001 by merging the three villages Horst, America and Broekhuizen. In 2010 more villages joined the municipality, which increased the number of inhabitants from nearly 30,000 to over 40,000. Since then, the population has been slowly growing, up to 42,487 in 2021. Compared to the rest of the country, Horst aan de Maas has an older population, with 25.6% of the inhabitants aged 25 and younger, as well as 22.3% aged 65 and older. Considering that the group of elderly was continuously growing in recent years, it can be expected that the overall natural population will decline in future (CBS, 2022-a,-b).

The average number of people per household with 2.33 is above the national average of 2.17. In addition, the types of households are nearly equally distributed, with 30.1% single households, 35.2% without children and another 34.7% households with children (VNG, n.d.).

#### Project

The idea for the project in Horst aan de Maas was to rewrite the policies "regarding working with citizen initiatives and volunteers" (Int-6, ll. 289 f.). However, and although some interviews were done, the project could not be launched yet due to two events, the first one being the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the second one the elections in 2021 for the municipal government, making it difficult for new policies to be developed (Int-6; Melis et al., 2022).

#### 4.2.2 Overbetuwe

##### Portrait

Location:	province Gelderland
Size <sup>8</sup> :	115.08 km <sup>2</sup>
Inhabitants <sup>9</sup> :	48,218 (in 2022)
Mayor <sup>10</sup> :	Patricia Hoytink-Roubos, Eva Gül (children's mayor)

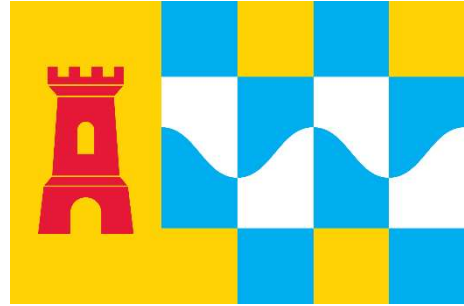


Figure 21: Coat of arms Overbetuwe, source: Wikipedia, 2003-c

The municipality Overbetuwe lies central in the Netherlands, but is close to the German border in the east. It is surrounded by the rivers Nederrijn in the north and Waal in the south, and consists of the former villages Elst, Heteren and Valburg, which merged in 2001 (Brouwer, n.d.). Since then, the population has been steadily increasing, up to 48,218 in 2022. 28.9 % of these inhabitants were younger than 25 in 2021, and 19.8 % older than 65. Compared to the rest of the country, Overbetuwe has a younger population. In addition, the average household consists of 2.42 people, which is more than the national average. Thereby most people live in households with children (40.4 %) or with someone else but no children (32.5 %), and only 27.1 % live alone (CBS, 2022-a,-b).

##### Project

The project of Overbetuwe within Volunteers 2.0 focussed on strengthening "[cooperation between the municipality and the 'welzijnsstichting'](#)" (Int-10, l. 164), a welfare organisation that every Dutch municipality has (see Chapter 3), and is called Forte Welzijn in this municipality. The focus thereby laid on how to make working with volunteers more sustainable, especially when considering the current changes of volunteers and their work, which were already described in Chapter 2.2. Additionally, it was analysed with the "Leefplekometer" how the citizens perceive their village (Appendix XIV; Int-10; Melis et al., 2022).

### 4.2.3 Apeldoorn

#### Portrait

Location: province Gelderland

Size<sup>11</sup>: 341.15 km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>12</sup>: 164,781 (2021)

Mayor<sup>13</sup>: Ton Heerts

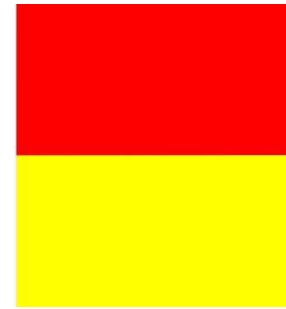


Figure 22: Coat of arms Apeldoorn, source: Wikipedia, 2003-a

Apeldoorn lies in the centre of the Netherlands; in the northwest, it borders the park Kroon-  
domein Het Loo. The origins of Apeldoorn date back over a century ago. In the Middle Ages,  
it became an essential point for members of the Hanseatic League. Later, it became an inter-  
esting area for hunting for the house of Orange, who then built the Palace Het Loo. Finally,  
after the second world war, the city began to grow. Twenty years ago, Apeldoorn consisted of  
only around 153,000 inhabitants. However, the number has increased to 164,781 since then,  
of which 27% are below the age of 25, and 21.4% are above the age of 65 (CBS, 2022-a,-b;  
Gemeente Apeldoorn, n.d.-b).

On average, 2,22 people live in Appeldoorn's household, which is more than in the rest of the  
country. However, like Horst aan de Maas, the household structures are distributed nearly  
equally, with 36.5% single households, 30.7% without children, and the remaining 32.8% with  
children (VNG, n.d.).

#### Project

Apeldoorn's Volunteers 2.0 project was inter alia a future workshop, that aimed to strengthen  
neighbourhoods, especially by connecting generations. Therefore, several already existing  
neighbourhood projects were selected and interviewed to analyse what these initiatives need  
for their success and appear more attractive to other neighbourhoods. Additionally, a group  
was formed between professionals and volunteers. Finally, to appreciate the initiatives and  
let them inspire other municipalities, the citizen initiatives were introduced in short videos,  
which were shown at the end conference of Volunteers 2.0 and can also be found on the HAN  
blog about the project: <https://blog3.han.nl/volunteers/> (Int-11, Melis et al., 2022).

#### 4.2.4 Nijmegen

##### Portrait

Location: province Gelderland

Size<sup>14</sup>: 57.6 km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>15</sup>: 177,359 (2021)

Mayor<sup>16</sup>: Hubert Bruls



Figure 23: Coat of arms Nijmegen, source: Wikipedia, 2003-b

Like the other municipalities, Nijmegen is close to the German border. It is crossed by the river Waal and the Maas-Waalkanaal. Nijmegen's name is a remnant from its earlier name Ulpia Noviomagus Batavorum that the Romans gave the city. Besides that, this oldest city of the Netherlands has had interactions with Barbarossa, the Hanseatic League, and the Allies during the second world war (Into Nijmegen, 2022; Radboud University, 2022).

Its residents have increased in the past twenty years from 152,200 in 2000 to 177,659 in 2020 but decreased to 177,359 during the last year. With 30.3 % of the inhabitants aged under 25 and 16.4 % above 65, Nijmegen has a relatively young population compared to the rest of the country. Additionally, with 1.85 people on average per household, Nijmegen is below the Dutch average. This trend is reflected in the distribution of household structures, with 53.4% living alone, 23.1 % living with someone else, and 23.5% living with children (CBS, 2022-a,-b).

##### Project

Within the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0, the asked administrative employee of Nijmegen interviewed five citizens about the tool MijnWijkplan and the municipality's role during and after the project's initiation. MijnWijkplan is a digital platform where citizens can point out projects for improving their neighbourhood and connect with other citizens and the municipality to talk about the realisation of the projects. During the cross-border interactions of the municipalities, this tool was introduced to the German municipalities. Additionally, citizen initiatives, communes and the social welfare agency Bindkracht 10 worked together to find solutions to any existing questions. Such questions were for example the difference in the end of a project for the municipality respective the initiatives (Gemeente Nijmegen, n.d.-b; Int-12; Melis et al., 2022).

## 4.3 The German communities

### 4.3.1 Moers

#### Portrait

Location: state North Rhine-Westphalia, district Düsseldorf,  
county Wesel

Size<sup>17</sup>: 67.68 km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>18</sup>: 104,354 (in 2021)

Mayor<sup>19</sup>: Christoph Fleischhauer

Moers became a city in 1300 when King Albrecht I gave it its town rights. After that, the city changed its rulers several times, with inter alia Spain (16th century), the House of Orange (17th century), Brandenburg-Prussia (18th century), as well as France. Today Moers is part of Germany and a "lively centre of the Lower Rhine with economic and cultural diversity" (Stadt Moers, 2013, p. 5). As for the socio-economic data, Moers's number of inhabitants has slightly decreased from 105.633 in 2000 to 104.354 in 2021. Furthermore, 22,6% of these inhabitants were aged below 25 in 2021, and with 24%, almost one quarter in the age group of 65 and older. The average household size in Moers is 2.3, with 34.8% containing children, as well as 31.9% single households (Stadt Moers, 2022-a, geofy GmbH, n.d.-e).

#### Project

Moers was participating in the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 with the local district Meerbeck and the redesign of the Volkspark near the former Rheinpreußenstadion (Stadt Moers, 2021). The plan was to create a "place of community, sport, culture, recreation and togetherness" for all generations, and through a focus on barrier-free access, also for people with different degrees of mobility (Stadt Moers, n.d. -b, par. 1). The role of Volunteers 2.0 within this process was to create a place attachment for the citizens and provide a pool of knowledge and methods that the city of Moers can use. One project for achieving this place attachment was a travelling board created in cooperation with the Hochschule Rhein-Waal and an artist. Citizens could write on the board what they associate with Meerbeck/Hochstraß. The outcomes were then visualised by two photographers. Additionally, to the park, a volunteer festival was organized to give the associations and initiatives after the long pandemic related break the chance to come back into contact with the citizens and potential volunteers (Int-8; Melis et al., 2022; Stadt Moers, 2022-b, n.d.-e).



Figure 24: Coat of arms Moers, source: Stadt Moers, n.d.-d

### 4.3.2 Duisburg

#### Portrait

Location: state North Rhine-Westphalia, district Düsseldorf

Size<sup>20</sup>: 232.8 km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>21</sup>: 495,885 (in 2020)

Mayor<sup>22</sup>: Sören Link

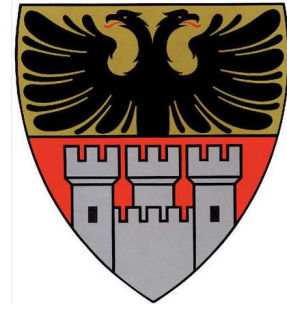


Figure 25: Coat of arms Duisburg, source: Stadt Duisburg, n.d.-d

Duisburg has a history with the Romans and the Franks but is first mentioned in 883 A.D. under the rule of the Normans. In 1873, it got its status as county free city. The 20th century was then marked by territory enlargements, so as the merger with Ruhrort and Meiderich in 1905, the merger with Hamborn and the "Duisburger Süden" in 1929, and with Walsum, Homberg, Rheinhausen, Rumel-Kaldenhausen and Baerl in 1975. Some of the former cities still remain within Duisburg as one of the seven districts (Stadt Duisburg, n.d.-a, -e). The city's number of inhabitants decreased in the past years and is only since 2010 started increasing again. Nevertheless, with 495,885, the number of inhabitants in 2020 still lies below the one of 2000 with 514,915. In 2020, the number of citizens below the age of 25 was 25.4%. In contrast, the number of citizens above 65 was relatively low, with only 20.6% (Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022a; Stadt Duisburg, n.d.-f). With 2.1, Duisburg's average household size is relatively small. This is additionally reflected in the distribution of household types, with a high amount of single households (41.3%) and fewer households with children (29.4%). With 2.1 Duisburg's average household size is relatively small. This is also reflected in the distribution of household types, with a high amount of single households (41.3%), and less households with children (29.4%) (geofy GmbH, n.d.-a).

#### Project

Duisburg's project within Volunteers 2.0 was supporting the community centre Hagenshof in a neighbourhood characterised by vacant properties. To revitalise this quarter and to strengthen the social cohesion again, especially after two years of the corona pandemic, the district office needed the help of volunteers to carry out projects like sewing groups. In this cooperation, the community centre, as representative of the municipal government, created the overall framework, in which the volunteers would then carry out the various projects (Int-3, Melis et al., 2022).

### 4.3.3 Weeze

#### Portrait

Location: state North Rhine-Westphalia, district Düsseldorf, county Kleve

Size<sup>23</sup>: 79.49 km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>24</sup>: 11,228 (in 2020)

Mayor<sup>25</sup>: Georg Koenen



Figure 26: Coat of arms Weeze, source: Gemeinde Weeze, n.d.-a

The history of Weeze goes back to 859 A.D. when it was mentioned for the first time by König Lothar II. From immense importance of the region is the airport Laarbruch, which was used between 1954 and 1999 by the British army. Today, a primary characteristic of the municipality is its focus on associations and club life (Gemeinde Weeze, n.d.-a, b). In contrast to the state's average, Weeze's number of inhabitants has increased from 9,662 in 2000 to 11,228 in 2020. In the same year, the municipality had a comparatively large group of young people, with 26.2% aged below 25. In line with that, the group of the elderly was comparatively small, with 17.8% aged above 65 (Gemeinde Weeze, n.d.-d; Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022f).

The average household size in Weeze is relatively large at 2.4. Consequently, the share of single households is relatively low at 30.7%. In addition, the number of households with children (29.2%) is lower than in other municipalities in the district (geofy GmbH, n.d.-c). The average household size in Weeze is with 2.4 relatively big. Consequently, the amount of single households is with 30.7% relatively small. Additionally, the households with children are with 29.2% less than other municipalities in the county (geofy GmbH, n.d.-c).

#### Project

Weeze's project within the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 was the creation of a joint vision of the already existing association of local retailers named Werberings Weeze e. V. and the municipality for future actions after the corona pandemic. Thereby, the municipality then organized together with the HRW, meetings with the association, where they analysed the deficits and the goals of the Werbering. Focus points were digital communication, as well as the accompaniment of civic engagement (Int-7, Melis et al., 2022).

#### 4.3.4 Geldern

##### Portrait

Location: state North Rhine-Westphalia, district Düsseldorf,  
county Kleve

Size<sup>26</sup>: 97.11km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>27</sup>: 34,923 (in 2022)

Mayor<sup>28</sup>: Sven Kaiser



Figure 27: Coat of arms Geldern, source: Stadt Geldern, n.d. -d

Geldern was first mentioned in 1237. It got its current form in 1969, through the merger of Kappeln, Pont Veert, Walbeck and Baersdonk to the current city Geldern (Stadt Geldern, n.d. -c). The city increased its citizens from 33,074 in 2000 to 34,923 in 2022. In 2020, 23.3% of the citizens were aged below 25, whereas 22.1% were 65 and older. Geldern's average household size is 2.4. Regarding the type of households, the share of households with children is comparatively high at 36.7%, while the share of single households is low at 30.7% (geofy GmbH, n.d.-b; Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022-b; Stadt Geldern, 2022).

##### Project

In contrast to the other municipalities, Geldern had not one but a few projects to participate in within Volunteer 2.0. The first and main one was a communication model consisting of administration, politics and citizens. The model was created through "several survey and participation formats" (Int-5, l. 275) and interviews with the local mayors (Ortsbürgermeister:innen) and roundtables. Other projects were about how to improve Geldern's online visibility (in cooperation with the local association Werbering Geldern e. V), as well as the usage of digital participation formats and the support of the ideas and participation initiative for the inner city (IMIs), where they also worked as a mediator (Int-5, Melis et al., 2022).

#### 4.3.5 Kalkar

##### Portrait

Location: state North Rhine-Westphalia, district Düsseldorf,  
county Kleve

Size<sup>29</sup>: 88.23 km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>30</sup>: 13,944 (in 2020)

Mayor<sup>31</sup>: Dr. Britta Schulz



Figure 28: Coat of arms Kalkar, source: Stadt Kalkar, n.d.-c

Kalkar was planned as a drawing board city by the count of Kleve and built in 1230. Twelve years later, the city got its city rights. In the 16th century, Kleve joined the Hanseatic League. In the following years, the rulers constantly changed, starting with the conquest by the Spanish in the 16th century, the French in the 18th century, and Prussia in the 19th century, when Kalkar became part of Kleve. In 1969 Kalkar happened to be reorganized, like other municipalities in North Rhine Westphalia around that time (Stadt Kalkar, n.d.-a,-d).

Since 2000 the number of citizens has slightly increased, from 13,639 to 13,944 in 2020. As for the age distribution, in 2020, the number of people under 25 was 25.6%. The number of people over 65 was almost the same at 21.3 %. The average household size in Kalkar is 2.4. With 30.7% single households and with 29.2% a comparatively low amount of households containing children, Kalkar is similar to the average of the county (geofy GmbH, n.d.-d; Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022-c).

##### Project

As part of the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0, Kalkar participated with an online survey on communication and appreciation to understand how business, volunteers, politics and administration work together. As a second project, students of the HRW made an analysis of Kalkar's appearance on the internet that will now be used as a foundation for creating the municipality's new website to improve the interaction between citizens and the administrative employees of the municipality (Int-2; Melis et al., 2022; Stadt Kalkar, 2020).

#### 4.3.6 Uedem

##### Portrait

Location: state North Rhine-Westphalia, district Düsseldorf,  
county Kleve

Size<sup>32</sup>: 60,94 km<sup>2</sup>

Inhabitants<sup>33</sup>: 8.305 (in 2020)

Mayor<sup>34</sup>: Rainer Weber



Figure 29: Coat of arms Uedem, source: Gemeinde Uedem, n.d. -b

The region around Uedem was once ruled by Romans and later by the French. The name Uedem thereby has its origin in Odeheim, which means a settlement that was ruled by a chief called Oda. It was first mentioned in 866 and got its city rights in 1359. Afterwards, it changed ownership several times, starting with Prussia in the 17th century, France in the 18th and 19th century, Prussia again in the 19th century, and the British Allies after the Second World War. Finally, in the 20th century, Uedem was influenced by the spatial reorganisation, where the former cities and villages Uedem, Uedemfeld, Keppeln and Uedembruch merged into the current city of Uedem (Gemeinde Uedem, n.d.-d). Starting with 8,330 inhabitants in 2000, the population of Uedem was in- and decreasing in the past twenty years. However, it has been slowly increasing since 2010, reaching 8,305 inhabitants in 2020. The amounts of younger and older people, with 23.8% below 25 and 20.8% above the age of 65, are relatively small, leaving a bigger group of working-age people (Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022-e). The average household size in Uedem is 2.4 persons per household, which is larger than the average for the county. 29.2% of the households thereby contain children, whereas only 30,7% are single households (geofy GmbH, n.d.-f).

##### Project

For the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0, Uedem started a project to revitalize an old mill called "Hohe Mühle", which is supervised by the local heritage and tourist office (Heimat- und Verkehrsverein). The municipality helped mediate and network between the HRW and different associations to develop the mill into a "destination for excursions" (Int-4, l.95 f.). With the help of volunteers, the area around the mill, with offers for inter alia skating and football, should be revitalized. The mill was then also the location for the Volunteers 2.0 end conference (Int-4; Melis et al., 2022).

#### 4.4 Working with volunteers

In the previous part, the participating municipalities have been presented. It has been shown that they vary in size, density, as well as socio-demographic situations. Additionally, it was shown that the projects with which they participated in the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 differ significantly. In a second step, it will now be analysed if there is a common approach for German respectively Dutch municipalities to interact with volunteers and citizen initiatives. For a better overview, the table underlying this comparison can be found in Appendix XV.

##### 4.4.1 The Dutch approach

The motivation for the interviewed experts of the Dutch municipalities to work with volunteers and the positive effects of this cooperation contained many different aspects. Some of the reasons were that the citizens provided a different perspective. They know best what they need, so they should have a say in the matter of public space. Additionally, their importance for providing (welfare and healthcare) services and, therefore, for the quality of the community were mentioned. From the experts on the municipal side, it was also argued that the volunteers are highly motivated to do their voluntary work and that this motivation, this energy would rub off on the cooperation partners (Int-6, Int-9, Int-10, Int-11).

As for the interaction, the municipality's role was seen less active compared to the volunteers one within this cooperation. The first step for a project was mainly argued to be on the initiative side, although, for example, in the case of Nijmegen, it was mentioned that the municipality sometimes takes the first step in larger projects:

*“It depends on the size, for instance if it is a smaller project it is usually the citizens that contact us but [...] in one part of the city there is a lot of new areas being developed and build and then [...] we contact the people who will live there in the future, ask them if they desire to participate in the public space.” (Int-9, ll. 46 f.)*

Regarding the start of a new project, the visited symposium concluded, that the country specific difference is that Dutch volunteers just need to have an idea and would be ready to start then, whereas it is more difficult for German volunteers to start an initiative (memo, May 31, 2022).

After the initial step is done, a second aspect is implementing contact between the initiatives and the municipality, consisting of the ways of interaction, as well as the persons in charge for the contact. Regarding the latter, the municipal experts said that the right person for the interaction depends on the topic or the district. Additionally, in every Dutch municipality, there is one or more "welzijnsstichting", an organisation "to organise and support volunteers with their volunteer job" (Int-10, ll. 10 f.). For the interaction with volunteers, this means that the municipality would finance such a "welzijnstichting", so that the organisation takes care of the initiatives. Having not only one central contact person in the municipality but several to choose from might be confusing for the volunteers. In the case of Horst aan de Maas it was mentioned that volunteers often see the municipality as one entity, a "6000 headed monster" (Int-6, l. 65), where it is difficult to find the right contact person for the initiative. To prevent this, but also in general, personal contact with the volunteers respectively initiatives is seen as very important. E10 (Int-10, ll. 52 f.) illustrates this as follows:

*"The best way to communicate is the personal way, just call or have a meeting. A quite old fashioned way. I see that it is helpful in understanding each other. A lot of people do not read very well or [...] not correctly and have another interpretation of the same thing. So it is always good to have a personal way to explain what you really mean."*

Additionally, digital (social) and printed media is used, as well as e-mails, telephone calls, and simply knowing each other due to the small size of the municipality (Int-6, Int-9, Int-10, Int-11). An exception is Nijmegen, where the first contact for initiatives is aspired to be done via a website and only changing to personal contact in a second step. This stands in contrast with another Dutch expert's opinion, which is as follows:

*"But in my opinion, they [the websites] are always [...] really static. I know a lot of municipalities [...] have these, I think Nijmegen has this as well, [...] there is web format screen, where you can [...] put your initiative on and then ask for money, or support, etc. I do not believe in this type of communication. I think it is a badly created systematic view on how interaction between initiative and municipality should be. I think a lot of the beauty of initiatives is lost in this digitalisation." (Int-6, ll. 77-82).*

For further cooperation, the municipality's role is mostly seen to be of financial support. Additionally, support in the form of knowledge (for example, with writing proposals), mediation

and networking is given, as well as acknowledgement policy, that was already mentioned in the case of Germany in Chapter 3 (Int-6, Int-9, Int-10, Int-11).

Despite the positive aspects of starting cooperation with citizen initiatives, there are some risks that municipalities have to keep in mind, as was already mentioned in Chapter 2 with the dark side of volunteering. When asked about a typical volunteer, the municipalities experts' consent was that although the type of volunteer depends on the field of work, and although the stereotypes are starting to change, the most represented type of volunteer is still middle-aged and older, with high education. The only exception here was the municipality of Horst aan de Maas, where additionally a high degree of younger people was experienced to be active. This specific type recognisable among the volunteers bears the risk that the initiative is not representable to the whole community. The interviewed municipalities were aware of the risk of initiatives not being representative, thus implementing policies to be more accessible for and reaching out to other types of volunteers (Int-6, Int-9, Int-10, Int-11). Nevertheless, as E11 states, "it is better to start with something, than with nothing" (Int-11, ll. 137 f.), meaning that it is better to start with a group of volunteers, although they might not be representative of everyone in the beginning than to start no project at all (Int-11).

As for the representativeness on the municipality's side, it was added that in job interviews, it would more likely be searched for persons fitting in instead of enriching the perspectives that are already represented and that for the future, this should be changed (Int-10).

Another consensus was the question of sustainability in a system dependent on voluntary work. Since projects with volunteers would work better with at least one paid person on the side of the initiative involved, who takes care of the organisation (Int-6, Int-10), one expert mentioned the idea of creating a new type of volunteer that is in between a volunteer and a paid professional (Int-6). Other negative aspects where the dependency of an initiative from the administrative person and the politicians in charge in the municipality; the delay of projects due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the underestimation of the project duration and costs through the volunteers (Int-6, Int-9, Int-10, Int-11).

Besides these common aspects, the experts of the Dutch municipalities disagreed on whether volunteer overload was a risk or not. Although some municipalities considered it necessary to watch out not to overburden the volunteers, another opportunity was that it is the responsibility of the volunteers not to overburden themselves (Int-6, Int-9, Int-10, Int-11).

As for the overall interaction with the volunteers, many experts saw the municipality's role in the help for self-help for the initiatives, as it was described with the government participation in Chapter 3.4.1. Another point of consensus was the importance of understanding each other, initiatives and the municipality, as well as the regaining of trust in the municipality, for example, through transparent working processes. Lastly, another question was how much the municipality should be involved in the cooperation at all. Whereas some experts already saw or wished for a power shift towards the initiatives, leaving the municipality with a more supporting role (Int-6, Int-9, Int-10, Int-11), risks were mentioned that if a project fails, it is often the municipality that is left with a "mess to clean" (Int-9, l. 96).

On the volunteers' side, the Dutch municipal experts had less suggestions for improvement, just mentioning that the volunteers should agree on a consensus before reaching out to the municipality and that change can only happen if everyone changes (Int-6, Int-10).

#### 4.4.2 The German approach

The interviews conducted revealed that a common reason for the German municipalities to cooperate with the volunteers was the pure need to do so. This is due to the disadvantages of the structures of small rural municipalities that lack enough staff to provide public services and the money to pay for professionals. Like the Dutch neighbours, another reason was that citizens know best what they need, so involving them in the process will lead to better-fitting outcomes. Accordingly, the cooperation with volunteers was seen to bear great potential for increasing the liveability and social cohesion in the municipalities (Int-2, Int-3, Int-4, Int-5, Int-7, Int-8). E3 (Int-3, l.23 f.) comments the reason for municipalities to cooperate with volunteers as follows:

*“For the same reason that all cities do the same. First of all, the cities have to provide public services for their citizens, and part of that is road construction or waste collection, so that other institutions that take care of public services can function well and live well. And [...] they can only do this to a limited extent with their own staff, which they have to pay for. And voluntary commitment as an add-on has always been a must, not only for municipalities, to look for something”*

As for the interaction, the role of the municipality was perceived differently. Whereas three municipalities saw the initial step for a project on the volunteers' side, two argued that both

sides could take the initial step. One expert described the municipal administrations self-perception thereby as:

“We as the administration actually see ourselves more as implementers and service providers, and in *Volunteers 2.0* we often speak of a triangle between citizens, politics and administration. The citizens, who are represented by the politicians, both make contact with the administration in the best case. With participation formats, the feedback is actually collected proactively, the wishes, the suggestions, in order to then implement them in the administration's efforts” (Int-5, l. 7 f.).

In the case of Moers, the expert's description was an even more active one, motivating citizens to engage and providing new ideas for projects, where the initiatives on their side have to say no when there are not enough resources (Int-2, Int-3, Int-4, Int-5, Int-7, Int-8). After these initial steps, the contact persons within the municipalities for establishing cooperation varied from different persons depending on the topic, or parts of the city, to one department that takes care of volunteers besides other tasks or even as the main task (Int-2, Int-3, Int-4, Int-5, Int-7, Int-8). The aspect of "you know each other" was here -as in the Netherlands- common. Engaging in this aspect was that Duisburg, as the largest German municipality in terms of surface and inhabitants, was the municipality with one sub-department dedicated only to civic engagement. In contrast, the other municipality with only one department in charge of the cooperation was Weeze. Weeze's department for the cooperation with volunteers is for youth, culture and tourism, but assuming here that the specialisation of contact points is positively correlated to the size of the municipality would be wrong, since Weeze is only on fourth place in terms of surface and on fifth place in terms of number of inhabitants within the participating German municipalities (Int-3, Int-7).

Personal encounters were given immense importance for the interaction itself, as with the Dutch neighbour. This was exemplary stated by E4 (Int-4, ll. 61 f.) as follows:

“Yes, [personal conversations with the volunteers are] very important, definitely. That's one of the most important things, I think, in person, by phone, preferably directly on site. So I also go there briefly if something is wrong and check if everything is working [...].”

Besides that, digital (social) and printed media, as well as e-mails, phone calls and the municipalities website, are used to stay in contact with the volunteers and initiatives. In terms of the

website, one common tool is a volunteering portal that many municipalities either already have or plan to implement. In contrast, one of the Dutch experts mentioned that, in comparison, the German municipalities were perceived to have less experience with digital tools (Int-2, Int-3, Int-4, Int-5, Int-7, Int-8, Int-12).

In difference to the Netherlands, the municipality's role was then mostly seen in being support through knowledge and networking, mediation or public relations work for the initiatives, as well as providing room for them, both metaphorically and physically. Furthermore, financial support was, in most cases, critical and only marginal since the municipality's budget in that way is often limited. Experts from the symposium mentioned here, that fundraising is done in the Netherlands by professionalised people, whereas on the German side of the border improvement in that case is needed (memo, May 31, 2022). Another obstacle here is the large amount of time you have to plan in advance, as E5 (Int-5, l. 189 f.) describes:

“[W]e as a city, as an administration, get a budget approved [...] by the politicians, at the request of the administration. So the administration works out a proposal and the politicians then agree to it, or reject it, or have suggestions for changes, improvements, adjustments. And then that is, so to speak, the money that is available with the corresponding use for the financial year. If there is money for the support of associations, the city can also provide financial support [...]. If there are no funds available, the city can't invent anything, that always has a relatively long lead time. So we always start planning the budget in August, September, the budget discussions then take place in November, December, and normally the budget is passed in March of the following year and the funds can be used for the current calendar year. And what is additional, but that also depends on the type of investment and the type of funding programme, we can give a little bit of advice and assistance for external funding.”

As in the case of the Dutch municipalities, the policy of acknowledgement, here in the form of the "Heimatpreis", was a common support tool (Int-2, Int-3, Int-4, Int-5, Int-7, Int-8).

On the German side of the border, the type of volunteers depends likewise the Dutch one on the type of work but has as well still the overrepresentation of older generations. This contrasts with the findings from the content analysis in Chapter 2, where the most volunteers were seen to be between 35 and 44 years old in the Netherlands, respectively between 30 and 49 years old in Germany.

Typical motives in the interviews were the problem of finding new volunteers since it is difficult to reach out to the younger generations; and like in the Netherlands, the change of commitment from long term to short term and having the same volunteers engaging in several projects. The last aspect can lead to the overload of these volunteers, especially since there is a shift of responsibility towards them. However, when interviewing the municipal experts, the perception of this risk was not uniform. Whereas most of the municipalities argued that this risk exists, E3 was stating, citing a Telephonic Pastoral Care member from an earlier conversation: "[W]e know exactly that voluntary work is voluntary work. The notice period of a volunteer is 30 seconds. I can't tie down a volunteer" (Int-3, ll. 216 f.), meaning that it is the responsibility of the volunteers to react when they feel overburdened (GHK, 2010; Int-2, Int-3, Int-4, Int-5, Int-7, Int-8; Simonson et al., 2021).

Other risks lie in the dependency on the administrative person responsible for starting an initiative as well as in the degree of involvement of the municipality, whereby the municipal staff should not overload the initiatives with new project ideas but, on the other hand, also have to take responsibility for poorly run projects in which they were sometimes not much involved. This is similar to Nijmegen, where it was mentioned that the municipality has to "clean up" (Int-9, l. 96) when volunteers decide to stop a project (Int-2, Int-8, Int-9). Regarding the degree of the municipality's involvement, it was mentioned at the Dutch-German symposium, that such cooperation bear the risk of local governments taking over the initiative. One expert from that event even mentioned that it takes two to tango, meaning in this case that someone, either the municipality or the initiative, has to lead, but that this position can change (memo, May 31, 2022). This mirrors in the shift from government to governance that inter alia Netherhand et al. (2014) and Casper and van de Wijdeven (2010) mention.

As for the interaction within Volunteers 2.0, many municipalities experienced no significant changes due to staff fluctuations, Covid-19-related project delays, or insufficient exchange during the "Stammtische". Reasons for the latter were no time for the experts to attempt the meetings, as well as language barriers. Nonetheless, besides facing the same problems such as having fewer volunteers available than needed and difficulties in gaining new young ones, different solution approaches between the municipalities, especially across the border, could be experienced. Aspects that play a role here are the different commitments of volunteers; a perceived lower bureaucratic burden for volunteers or initiatives to receive (financial)

support, and more freedom for citizens to decide what the funds should be used for on the Dutch side of the border. (Int-2, Int-3, Int-4, Int-5, Int-7, Int-8).

When asked about ways where the municipalities respectively the volunteers had to improve during the last years for better cooperation, the answers given exhibited a great diversity. For example, whereas one municipal expert was experiencing a shift in its politics from a focus on party intern interest to shared interests, another municipal expert saw a change in the openness towards working with volunteers respectively initiatives. Additional impacts were transparency on the municipality's side, as well as necessary improvement in time for and patience in working with volunteers. As for the volunteers, there was only one wish to improve, being at least one paid full-time person for the organisation of a project (Int-2, Int-5, Int-8).

**05**

**FINAL  
WORDS**

## 5. Final words

### 5.1 Discussion

What is left now is a final answer to the questions raised in the introduction (Chapter 1). To avoid having to scroll back the pages to the beginning of the thesis, they shall be mentioned again in the following:

**Q. How can local governments sustainably cooperate with citizen initiatives in order to maintain and safeguard local liveability?**

*Q.1 What aspects exist on the volunteers' side that the local governments must observe to (re-) act early and thus ensure sustainable cooperation?*

*Q.2 What aspects exist on the local governments' side that help respective hinder such cooperation?*

In order to answer the research question (Q), the sub-questions will be answered first. The aspects on the volunteers' side (Q1) have been discussed in Chapter 2, which had the following key findings:

- People tend to engage more in a rural setting or when they feel connected to the place, and the rural population in both countries decreased in the last years.
- If the population declines, the number of volunteers might also decline. The German population reduced until 2015 and is supposed to decline in the upcoming years again. As for the Netherlands, the population number was steadily increasing and is supposed to reach its peak in 2040. But since their urban population increases more strongly than the German one, they will also have to deal with fewer citizens and thereby volunteers in rural areas.
- The type of work done by volunteers depends on their age. In both countries, the age group of 65+ grew in the past years and is supposed to continue growing in future. Combined with findings of the GHK study and Simonson et al., who found out that older people tend to engage less than the group of around 30-50-year-olds, this is another argument for a decreasing number of volunteers in the future.
- Research on binary gender distributions showed that different genders prefer different types of work. However, the preferences varied between the countries. In

the Netherlands, the binary genders are nearly equally distributed; in Germany, there are 1.2% more males than females.

- The more connected people feel to a place, the more likely they engage.
- People with higher education tend to engage more likely and in higher positions.
- Wealth, employment, religion and earlier experiences of being helped are as well correlated to voluntary engagement.
- Digital media plays an increasing role in the voluntary sector.
- The type of work done changed by volunteers from long-term commitment to short-term, project-related engagement.
- Voluntary engagement has many positive effects on a community, such as social cohesion.
- Voluntary engagement bears some risks, such as a group not being representative of the whole community, or volunteer burnout.

All in all, the number of volunteers is declining and the ways they engage are changing. Municipalities have to observe these changes in order to plan ahead. Considering the accountability part, from Chapter 3.4.1, the employees of the municipal administration have to pay even more focus on whom they are working with and if that group can speak for the whole community.

The aspects on the municipalities side that hinder or benefit corporations with volunteers (Q2) were then answered in Chapter 3. Key findings here were:

- The Netherlands and Germany differ in their political structures and administrative levels; thus, they have different basic conditions for starting cooperation.
- As for the welfare systems, it was argued that in the Netherlands, those services are getting more decentralised, with shifting more responsibility from the state to the citizens and communities. In contrast, welfare services in Germany have been shifted from the state's responsibility to private providers. This creates different environments for the volunteers to act in.
- Regarding budget, with about 60%, most of a Dutch municipality's finances come from the state, in the form of earmarked funds and the General grant. In contrast, the budget of German municipalities only comes to less than 40% from the higher hierarchical levels, making them more independent but at the same time

vulnerable to population decline. The different situations create different possibilities for the municipalities to support initiatives financially.

- There are bodies for volunteers on all administrative levels in the Netherlands. The local level is thereby the most important one. Citizens can contact several different representatives and employees of the municipality. All hierarchical levels work closely together. In Germany, however, policies still need to be more coordinated along the different hierarchies. As in the Netherlands, the local level is the most important for voluntary work. Citizen participation in the Netherlands was in the ending 20<sup>th</sup> century supported by neo-liberal ideas. Citizen participation increased in a way that nowadays the talk is of government participation instead. In Germany, participation movements came up after the division of Germany in both states with the urge for more democracy and as a protest movement. Nowadays the gap between politics and citizens is tried to be overcome by cooperating.

After these two rather theoretical chapters, the case study gave more practical insight into the situations in ten Dutch and German municipalities. The following key findings resulted from this chapter:

- Every municipality differed in size, number of inhabitants, type of project within Volunteers 2.0 and success of these projects.
- Nevertheless, similarities were the motivations for municipalities to start a cooperation with citizens; personal contact as the most important form of interaction; different municipal employees being responsible for the volunteers, depending on the topic of their initiative; additionally, the person in charge, therefore, being essential for the initiative's success<sup>35</sup>; a type of volunteer depending on the type of work, but nevertheless an overrepresentation of older people with higher education; a shift from long-term to short-term commitment; the municipality's role mainly being a supportive one; the municipality being responsible for a project, even if it is not really involved in the execution and the from experts on both sides perceived country-related differences in structures for a cooperation.
- Differences between all municipalities were the question of how much a municipality should be involved in a project without doing too much or too less<sup>36</sup>; if the

municipality should do the initial step of a project or not and if it is the municipality's responsibility to not overburden the volunteers, or if it is not.

- Differences between the countries were that Dutch municipalities tend to primarily support through money, whereas German municipalities mainly help through non-financial support, as well as regrowth problems for volunteers, which were seen in German municipalities but not mentioned by the Dutch experts.

Having answered the two sub-questions still leaves the main question to answer. In the theoretical and conceptual frameworks it was argued that local liveability can be maintained respectively achieved through several capitals, with one being the political capital, the possibility for citizens to engage and being heard. It was argued, that one type of cooperation to achieve this in a sustainable way, is participation in the form of co-production. Therefore, Löffler and Timm-Arnold's concept of co-production was chosen. To figure out the analysed municipalities position in that concept, the latter will be applied to the first in the following:

As was shown in the theoretical framework (Chapter 1.3), Löffler and Timm-Arnold's co-production contains the four co's: co-control, co-development, co-implement and co-evaluate. Therefore, to answer the question if the municipalities are using co-production or not, for each of these co's, it will be analysed how active or passive the municipality respective the citizens are.

### 5.1.1 The Netherlands

In the case of **co-control**, it was shown that with the decentralisation, more power in terms of welfare services was shifted to the citizens. In contrast, it was also shown that the majority of the municipal budget (~60%) is provided by the higher hierarchical levels, making it more difficult for the municipality to act independently. However, the so called citizens' budget is a tool already used in the Netherlands. For that, citizens can decide what to spend the money on. As for **co-development**, the municipal experts stated that one part of the municipalities' motivation to work with citizens is because they know better what they need, making policy outcomes more suitable. In the case of **co-implement**, it was shown that since the municipal experts see the municipality's role as more supportive, most of the implementation is on the citizens' initiatives side. For the **co-evaluation**, as an example, Nijmegen created the MijnWijk-plan to give the citizens a digital platform for ideas and comments on projects. Additionally,

in the framework of the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 the municipalities designed projects to get feedback from the initiatives. Compared to Germany, it is much easier for Dutch volunteers to get active and start a project. However, considering these arguments, in Löffler and Timm-Arnold's table, the volunteers will be placed towards the left, whereas the municipality will be placed between the upper edge and the middle.

### 5.1.2 Germany

As in the case of **co-control**, German municipalities are like the Dutch ones in charge of financing cooperative volunteer projects. Although they generate a higher budget locally, they are still around 40% reliable on financial allocations from higher hierarchical levels. This can be a positive aspect, but as shown by Fliedners (2019) comment (see Chapter 3.3), it makes the municipalities more vulnerable to demographical decline. In terms of finances, it was shown that citizen budgets are used in Germany as well although they are not so common as in the Netherlands. In the case of human resources, the volunteers themselves have to decide how and where to use them.

In contrast to the decentralisation in the Netherlands, it was also shown that welfare services in Germany are more and more privatised and that processes tend to still rely on hierarchical structures. As for **co-development**, using citizen engagement as "user experts" was one of the motivations for German municipalities as well to start such cooperation. Within **co-implementation**, most of the work is done by the volunteers. Here, the municipalities' role is mainly supportive, as shown with the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the municipality sometimes does the initial step and motivates the volunteers if the need for that is perceived. In the case of **co-evaluation**, one municipal expert mentioned a personal evaluation after each project in the interview, but without the involvement of the volunteers. However, many of the projects within the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 were carried out to get feedback from the citizens on various topics, as could be seen in the case of inter alia Geldern and Kalkar.

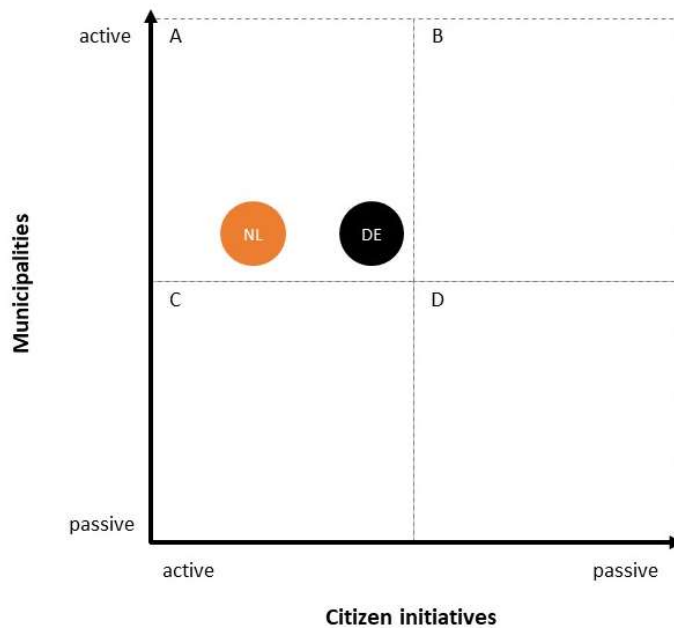


Figure 30: The Netherlands, Germany and the degree of co-production, source: own figure

All in all, the volunteers in Germany have slightly fewer possibilities to make their own decisions. The municipalities on their side tend to follow hierarchies and therefore bureaucratic steps more, but they are to a higher degree responsible for their own budget, which has both negative and positive aspects. For the placement in Löffler and Timm-Arnold's table, Germany is placed slightly more to the right side than the Netherlands (see Fig. 30).

## 5.2 Conclusion

After having discussed both sub-questions and having connected the case study to the theoretical framework, it is time to finally answer the research question:

**How can local governments sustainably cooperate with citizen initiatives in order to maintain and safeguard local liveability?**

It was argued that one way to achieve this sustainable cooperation is by implementing co-production. Municipalities in both countries do so; however, some details must be considered to maintain this form of cooperation. One detail thereby is inclusion. It was shown that different factors such as age or wealth impact who engages and where. For example, both countries have to face an aging population and face the increasing importance of digital tools for communication with volunteers and public relations work, although Dutch municipalities use digital tools already more than German ones. However, age, in this case, can exclude citizens from participating since older generations might not be able to operate these digital tools. Another aspect is that both countries have citizens with migration background, even more so since the refugee crisis in 2015 and the current situation with Ukraine. Migration can thereby

be a positive factor against the negative effects of the demographic transition, especially if the average age of the migrants is younger than the current one in the countries. But since -as was shown in Chapter 2- volunteering is correlated to place attachment, it is even more important to integrate the new residents into the existing communities. Inclusion would then also milder the risk of an initiative not being representable to the whole community and therefore would increase the legitimacy of the outcome.

Another aspect is the question of how much the municipality is involved in a project. The interviewed experts mainly saw the initial step with the initiatives, and the municipal role mainly as a supportive one, being it primarily financial support in the Netherlands or mostly non-financial support in Germany. Nevertheless, they disagreed on whether they should motivate the volunteers if needed or not intervene at all to keep the initiative a citizen's one. Additionally, there were disagreements on how much freedom volunteers should have in a project, considering that they need to have some to operate but that the municipality has to take responsibility for a project's outcome. Ubels even noted that although initiatives might search for autonomy, they are dependent on the government by writing:

*"Altogether this study came to the paradoxical conclusions that novel and tailor-made forms of intensive government engagement seem crucial to support communities' self-steering capacity to ensure rural liveability and that communities are unlikely to have the self-governance capacity to provide a reliable and enduring solution for government retreatment from public services themselves. Government engagement then may, however, affect the (sense of) autonomy at the initiative and the community level due to the obligations that may come along with it." (ibid., 2020, p. 153 f.)*

Regarding the municipality, an additional aspect was initiating contact with the volunteers. Most of the analysed municipalities had different people in different departments and positions in charge of cooperating with volunteers. This structure can lead to volunteers not knowing whom to approach, which was only overcome in smaller municipalities because citizens and municipal employees would know each other. In this case, more transparency could be established to make it easier for volunteers to find the right person for their initiative. An additional risk is that this municipal person in charge can influence a project's implementation and success. Considering that trust issues from the citizens to the municipality were

mentioned, more transparency would be helpful here as well, as it was already mentioned in two municipalities in both countries.

Another question on the municipal side was whose responsibility it is to activate new volunteers. Especially the German municipalities claimed that their initiatives have regrowth problems since it is challenging to motivate younger people. Nevertheless, the task of activating new volunteers was mainly seen on the side of the associations and organisations. Having fewer volunteers to deal with ever more demand for welfare services can overburden existing volunteers. The responsibility to prevent that was seen with the municipality, the associations, and the volunteers themselves. Although they do not see themselves as responsible for maintaining enough volunteers to cooperate, the analysed municipalities saw a risk in the sustainability of a system depending on voluntary work. Considering also that another risk is the need and the pressure for volunteers to professionalise and the interaction between them and paid professionals, the idea of E6 seems to be a good solution. In the interview, the expert mentioned that there could be a new type of volunteer between an unpaid volunteer and a paid professional (Int-6). Especially since having paid people for the organisational part of an initiative was seen by other municipalities as well as being a success factor.

Lastly, to come back to Gidden's structuration theory and to stress that the improvement of the municipality-volunteer-cooperation discussed in this thesis is a neverending process, it is as E7 states it:

*"You generally can't stop there [in the interaction]. The world outside is changing, and so are the demands of the volunteers, but also the demands of the work"*  
(Int-7, ll. 220 f.).

### 5.3 Reflection and open aspects

Before this thesis ends, some remarks have to be made. The first is that I, as a researcher, am a German citizen who did this research in a Dutch setting. Therefore, German is my mother tongue, and the language used at the university and during my Internship was English. However, I am not able to speak Dutch. To expand this argumentation, Kvale (2011) discusses the influences of cross-cultural interviews. He mentions that not only language barriers influence the outcome, but also non-verbal, cultural differences might lead to differences in what the interviewee meant and my interpretation of it as the interviewer. Additionally, I

could read English but, more importantly, German materials for the German side of the literature research. On the other hand, I was almost exclusively bound to English material for the Dutch side of the research.

A second remark is the focus of this thesis. I have analysed the cases of two neighbouring European countries. This means that my findings are rather specific. Further research will need to be done to check if the outcomes can be applied to other European or even to non-European countries. To dive even deeper into this topic, all municipalities on the German side of the case study are located in the same (territorial) state, North-Rhine-Westphalia. Since, as was mentioned in Chapter 3, the policies within the states can differ, it would be interesting to see if the findings from this thesis differ from other German states. On a smaller scale it would then also be interesting to analyse if there are differences in the way bigger or smaller, respectively more urban and rural municipalities/cities have to interact with volunteers.

Additionally, to avoid exceeding the scope of the thesis, the analysis focused only on the municipality's perspective. For further research, it would be interesting to confront their point of view with volunteer interviews to see if they experience the cooperation differently.

Furthermore it would be interesting to dive deeper into the role of the different municipal actors, since, as it was shown, it is not "the municipality" but different, individual actors of the municipality involved, that influence a projects success. To give an example, during my research it was often mentioned, that the position of a mayor is of more importance for projects in Germany and closer to the citizens, whereas dutch mayors seem to have a bigger distance to small projects (memo, June 30, 2022).

The last two perspectives missing are those of the LGBTQ+ or queer community and disabled people. For the first, all long-term data available for the demographical analyses contained binary gender distribution. For future research, it would be interesting to do a more inclusive analysis, which also deals with the genders. Secondly, the other perspective is the one of disabled persons. One of the Stammtische within the INTERREG VA project Volunteers 2.0 dealt with the topic of disabled volunteers. There, the speaker mentioned that they are stigmatised as causing extra effort for volunteers without disabilities when engaging. However, the presenter disagreed with that stigma and even argued that it is vital for inclusion to involve people with disability in volunteering (memo, March 22, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> Rural area in the Netherlands is defined by the CBS as “Area with a surrounding address density of less than 1 000 per square kilometre.” (CBS, 2022a)

<sup>2</sup> The federal statistics office in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt) defines rural areas since 2010 as “Regions in which less than 33% of the population lives in large and medium-sized cities with a population density of less than 150 units/km<sup>2</sup> and regions in which there is a large city but the population density excluding large cities is less than 100 units/km<sup>2</sup>.” (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021-b, p. 18, translated from German)

<sup>3</sup> Another word for council member is aldermen. Since this word is not gender neutral, the term council member or alderperson will be used instead.

<sup>4</sup> The current government in Germany, a coalition build in 2021 wrote in its coalition agreement that they plan to release communes from old debts to help them with their financial situations (SPD et al., 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia, 2004

<sup>6</sup> CBS, 2022-c

<sup>7</sup> Gemeente Horst aan de Maas, n.d.

<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia, 2003-c

<sup>9</sup> CBS, 2022-c

<sup>10</sup> Overbetuwe, 2021, 2022

<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia, 2003-a

<sup>12</sup> CBS, 2022-c

<sup>13</sup> Gemeente Apeldoorn, n.d.-a

<sup>14</sup> Wikipedia, 2003-b

<sup>15</sup> CBS 2022-c

<sup>16</sup> Gemeente Nijmegen, n.d.-a

<sup>17</sup> Stadt Moers, n.d.-c

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<sup>18</sup> Stadt Moers, 2022-a

<sup>19</sup> Stadt Moers, n.d.-a

<sup>20</sup> Stadt Duisburg, n.d.-b

<sup>21</sup> Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022-a

<sup>22</sup> Stadt Duisburg, n.d.-c

<sup>23</sup> Gemeinde Weeze, n.d.-d

<sup>24</sup> Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022-f

<sup>25</sup> Gemeinde Weeze, n.d.-c

<sup>26</sup> Stadt Geldern, n.d.-b

<sup>27</sup> Stadt Geldern, 2022

<sup>28</sup> Stadt Geldern, n.d.-a

<sup>29</sup> Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2020

<sup>30</sup> Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2020

<sup>31</sup> Stadt Kalkar, n.d.-b

<sup>32</sup> Gemeinde Uedem, n.d.-a

<sup>33</sup> Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022-e

<sup>34</sup> Gemeinde Uedem, n.d.-c

<sup>35</sup> This was also mentioned in a project meeting about the lessons learned from Volunteers 2.0 (memo, May 16, 2022)

<sup>36</sup> This was also described by Brandsen (2016) as a hedgehog's dilemma

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### 6.5 Figures

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