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RegioTram Groningen

Research to the social consequences of the tram



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Summary

This article examines the social impacts of the RegioTram in Groningen, the Netherlands. This project was fully completed, they were ready to begin with the construction, yet it has been cancelled by the 1st of January this year (2013). The main question of this examination is: Why has it been cancelled? Was it because of the protest of the inhabitants of Groningen? Was the social impact of this project so big, that the municipality listened to its citizens? Or was it because of the lack of financial sources?

One theory which this article is based on is Social Impact Assessment (SIA), a method based on the investigation of social consequences of big environmental projects in a community. This examination shows that there hasn't been a proper SIA the way that Frank Vanclay & Rabel J. Burdge describe in their article "*Social Impact Assessment: A contribution to the state of the art series*". Herein they describe the process using 6 different steps. However in infrastructure project in the Netherlands, SIA is not legally required. The committee of the RegioTram has used other methods to communicate with the citizens and came to other solutions, like organizing meetings for everyone who lives in the area where the tram would come. At these meetings the inhabitants could share ideas and opinions, and these ideas were all included in the final decision. Because of this method of decreasing impact, the tram wasn't stopped because of the protest of the citizens. The municipality would have come in financial trouble because of another project that does not come off the ground. A lack of financial sources was the main reason that the municipality decided not to go through with the plans of the tram.

The research is based on interviews with key persons, primary documents, and secondary information about the RegioTram in Groningen. The study consist three main chapters. In the first chapter the history of the tram in Groningen and the future plans of the RegioTram are described. The second chapter is all about SIA and whether SIA has been used in this project. At the third chapter the two early chapters come together and make a full story complete.

1. Introduction

1.1 Justification

On March the 1st in 1906 the Gemeentetram Groningen (GTG) was founded. Until 1910 the horse traction maintained, after which it was replaced by electric traction. Through all the years there have been five tram companies in Groningen. This planned tram would be the sixth tram company in Groningen and after more than 60 years, the tram would return in the city (Gemeente Groningen, 2012).

The reason for this study is the conflict that exists between the municipality of Groningen and the inhabitants of the town due to the planned construction of the RegioTram. The plan would be 2 tramlines, connecting the Central Station, the UMCG (University Medical Center of Groningen), Zernike complex, the town and the playground/P+R terrain with each other by 2016 (Proponents tram, 2012). It would be a project that the accessibility of the city by public transport would increase. The current public transport system starts at the top of its capacity to touch and may soon no longer be expanded without ending up in traffic jams. Other hand the number of people coming to Groningen continues to grow. Therefore the question will soon be bigger than the offer, and does that sometimes already (Proponents tram, 2012). This combination has the province and municipality of Groningen think about a solution, and thought to have found this in the plan of the RegioTram. This project is discontinued on 1 January 2013. Why?

1.2 Problem

There seems to be a lot of protest among the inhabitants of Groningen, especially the downtown in streets where the tram would come, against the plans of the tram. Some arguments according to the opponents of the tram are:

- The planned tram will cause nuisance and damage to property and this will result in depreciation of property;
- There is a lot of vacancy in streets where the tram is planned to come, for example the Oosterstraat, and by closing the street for 6 months to replace the sewer, entrepreneurs are afraid the vacancy will increase;
- By riding the tram, electric cables will wear, and this will lead to an emission of lead, copper and particulates who will end up in the air and in the ground.

However, communication from the municipality and province show quite different reasons to stop this project. Besides an expected lack of SIA, too few financial resources to continue the plans of the tram is another reason. The question is then, which reason was crucial for the termination of the project? Did the protest of the inhabitants help, or would the municipality of Groningen go through with her plans anyway, if the financial resources would be sufficient? This research intends to provide insights for improving the relation between municipality and citizens in further projects.

1.3 Structure of thesis

To achieve the objective, the following research question is defined:

Was a lack of SIA the reason why the municipality of Groningen stopped the project ‘tram tracks through the city’, or were economic reasons decisive?”

The research question will be answered based on the following sub-questions:

Sub questions	Chapter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What is the history of the tram in Groningen? ◆ What were the plans of municipality for the RegioTram in the future, and how far was she with her plans before the project stopped? 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What is Social Impact Assessment? ◆ Has SIA been used during the project of the RegioTram? 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Why has the project RegioTram been stopped? ◆ Was there much resistance from inhabitants against the plans, and yes, why? ◆ Were the economic conditions decisive, or has the municipality responded to the many protests of the inhabitants of Groningen? 	4

1.4 Theoretical framework

The main theory which this research is based on is Social Impact Assessment (SIA). “Social Impact Assessment (SIA) includes the processes of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment” (Vanclay, 2003).

The literature about the theme is showing very different aspects of this conflict. It is not from the literature to determine whether SIA has been applied or at least a version of it. That I have to examine through interviews with people from the Gemeente Groningen. Therefore it is likable to assume that there wasn't proper SIA because of the conflicts between the government and the citizens, which is shown on this demonstration website: “No tram through the city” (tram Groningen 2012).

The following article says that there is another reason for stopping the project: the lack of financial sources from the government. “Definitief stekker uit regiotram Groningen” (Binnenlands Bestuur 2012).

This I want to examine, why has the project RegioTram been stopped? Were the economic conditions decisive, or has the municipality responded to the many protests of the inhabitants of Groningen? Why was there so much resistance, and how far was the government with her plans? I will use the literature shown in the bibliography, and literature that I find whilst working on this research. I will also interview people and do observations in the city, so I will have different sources for my information.

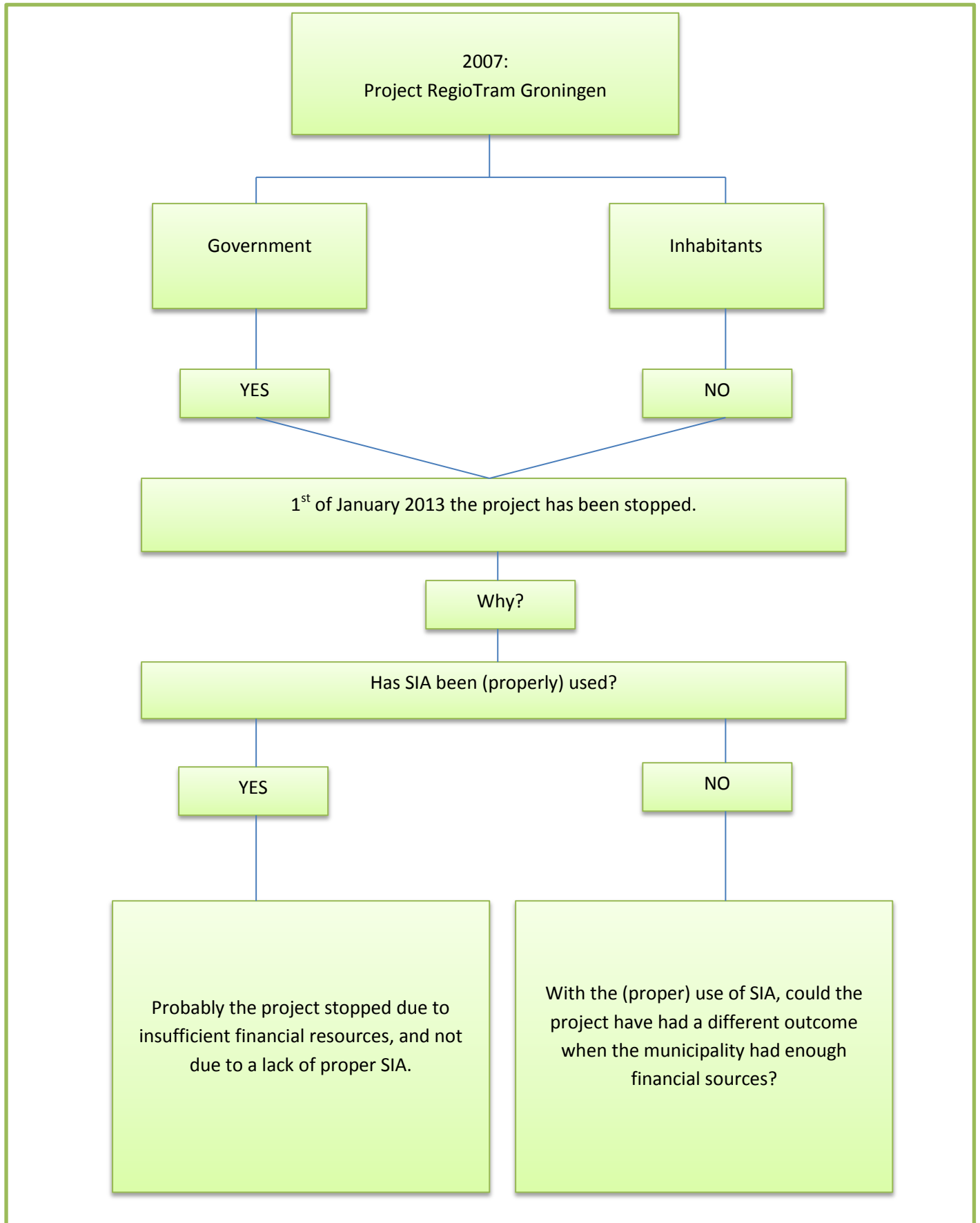
1.5 Methodology

Based on my research question I interviewed people from the municipality of Groningen and people from the community (who opposes the project) to get a better inside view on the topic, besides just doing desktop research. There was also done literature review and some participant observation in the centrum of Groningen after the interviews, on places where the tram was supposed to come, in order to imagine what effects the tram would have on the city and its inhabitants.

The interview where the most information is extracted from and used in this thesis, was with the project leader of the tram. Information from this source will be referred as “projectleader tram”.

1.6 Conceptual model

Fig. 3. Conceptual model



The conceptual model (Fig. 3.) is an image of the hypothesis. In 2007 the plans of the construction of the RegioTram were made. The government was very excited for the project. However, among the inhabitants of the city Groningen there was a mixed feeling about the idea of a tram track through the city.

The first of January this year the whole project has been stopped. There could have been no proper SIA towards the inhabitants so perhaps the municipality listened to the protest actions of the citizens. There could also be another reason why the project has been stopped, and that would be that there was a lack of financial sources to go through with the plans.

1.7 Ethical questions

- power relations in the field between respondent and researcher:

Because I have to do interviews with people from the Gemeente Groningen, it could be that they don't want to talk about the topic because it is a sore subject. My advantage is maybe, that I know people in the Gemeente Groningen because of my previous study and thesis. I went there a couple of times, also to interview some people about my previous thesis topic, so I could contact those people again and see if they want to talk to me.

- Positionality:

I'm an outsider in this project, so it could be difficult to get to talk to people from important bodies. The project has been stopped, so it could be that some people don't see the value of this research. I will explain them then that my research isn't about getting the plans back on track, but to investigate where it went wrong. That it is my personal interest to see how the communication went from government to inhabitant, and what the inhabitants of Groningen had against the plans of the tram. From my point of view, after doing some literature research, the tram would be a good idea and it would put Groningen back on the map. It would be a good focus puller, and not to mention a good solution to the problem of the current public transport system.

- Privacy, informed consent:

Of course information given to me from outsiders through interviews, will be handled perfectly confident. Before I'm going to interview someone I will explain to them that their personal data will be kept confident, and I will ask for permission to tape the interview. I will also ask if they want to see the elaboration of the interview before I put it in my rapport, so that no misunderstandings will arise.

All the people who participated in this study welcomed me with open arms and weren't skeptical at all. They all wanted to give information and are interested in the results in the end. I will send them a copy of this research when it is done.

2. RegioTram Groningen

2.1 History

It all started in 1880, the first horse tram of society with the name '*Société anonyme Belge de tramways de Groningen et de la Province*' abbreviated as TGP, was going to make its entrance in the city of Groningen. This horse tram had only one line, from headquarter (south) to the station in the North of Groningen. This gave the city its first form of regular public transport. The tram was a new means of transport and urban public transport did not exist, except for a single omnibus service. But it was not a real success. This because the tram was qualitatively very poor, the TGP didn't invest in the quality en maintenance of the tram. In 1897 the rails were laid again, this time with sleepers, to try to bring the tram at an acceptable quality level. It resulted in an improvement, but not much, the horse track remained unpopular.



Fig. 4. Horse tram.

In 1906 the TGP was abrogated and taken over by the municipality itself, who continued performing the horse track under a new name, the GTG (*Gemeente Tram Gronigen*). It was quickly decided to replace the horse tram line for an electric tram network. They also immediately decided to expand this new tram network. As said so happened, in 1910 the first electric tram drove through the city of Groningen. There were three lines constructed (Groninger tram, 2012):

- ❖ Line 1: Hereweg t.h.v. de Nattebrug – Hereweg – Viaduct – Hereplein – Herestraat – Grote Markt – Ebbingestraten – Noorderstationsstraat – Noorderstation
- ❖ Line 2: Frieschestraatweg/Kraneweg – verl. Visserstraat – Westersingel – A-Straat – Brugstraat – A-Kerkhof – Vismarkt – Grote Markt – Poelestraat – Nieuweweg – Oostersingel (Academisch Ziekenhuis, tegenwoordig UMCG)
- ❖ Line 3: Grote Markt – Vismarkt – Munnekeholm – Zuiderdiep – Stationsstraat – Emmaplein – Emmasingel – Hoofdstation

Even a fourth line followed in 1914. With the plans of the government to build new tramlines in 2013, the tram would return in Groningen after more than 60 years.

Not only was the city well known for its tramlines, from the beginning of the Christian era there were many ways to and from Groningen. First there were the ruts on the Hondbrug, later cobblestones and bricks that are increasingly branched over the growing city. Many years later it was about comfortable asphalt. Distances were measured in 'hours to go' to 'kilometers per hour'. In total, the city now has about 578 kilometer road to move on (Benno Hofman, 2010). Because rails came for the steam train and horse trams, Groningen has now one of the most beautiful train stations of the Netherlands. Groningen is also proud of her impressive network of bicycle paths, together now about 182 kilometers.

Thanks to its central location, the city Groningen has become in the course of centuries the center of the North-Netherlands. And the future is asking again for new solutions. We are now experiencing times where large-scale infrastructure projects are almost daily news. The planned construction of the RegioTram and addressing the southern ring road (zuidelijke ringweg) are intended to meet the growing amount of traffic participants and to lead them in the right direction in the next few years. In this article, the adjustment of the southern ring road will be excluded. This research will only be about the planned construction of the RegioTram and how SIA has been included in the process.

2.2 Future plans

In 1999 arises some discussion about the accessibility of the city. The city congested, there was a lot of traffic jam, many busses drove through the city and it became a problem. In this period Rob van Vliet, one of the interviewees, became director of spatial development at the municipality of Groningen. He was inter alia responsible for the traffic- and people fortification policy. The discussion led to the fact that there had to be a quality improvement in the city. The basic idea was that citizens could come to the outskirts of the town with their own car or with busses, and from there with other public transport to their final destination in the center of Groningen.

Entrepreneurs of the Oosterstraat, one of the streets where the tram would come through, started this discussion about the accessibility because they wanted the busses out of the Oosterstraat. The street became too full and too busy. Another point of discussion was that entrepreneurs also wanted the busses out of the market, the big square in the center in Groningen. But this idea wasn't supported by the municipality (projectleader tram, 2013). After all this discussion the idea arose of the tram. People could come from transferia to the edge of the town, and with the tram from the edge to the center. At this point a whole picture of tramlines was devised. Very nice, but also very expensive. The municipality of Groningen couldn't afford it on her own.

In 2004-2005 the College of citizens and councilors of the municipality of Groningen, the province of Groningen and the region Groningen/Assen congregated and started a unit. This unit found the problem so acute that they were going to collect money for it. The College of citizens and councilors made one hundred million euro's free for this project. The region contributed thirty-five million euro's, and also the province was willing to contribute a lot of money. At this point the project RegioTram was a fact, with a budget of two hundred million euro's. Then there also came national funds, so that the budget rised up to three hundred million euro's. In total there was a budget of 555 million euro, that was including the operation for 25 years. With this budged they could build two tramlines. They started the project in 2007. At this point Rob van Vliet said goodbye to his function at the municipality, and became fulltime project leader of the RegioTram.

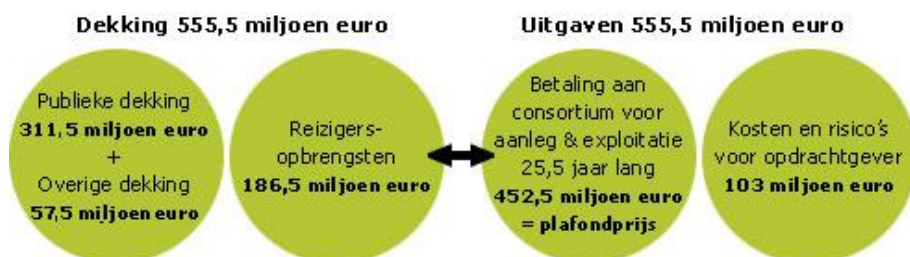


Fig. 5. Total cost of the tram

In December 2010 the tender of the project RegioTram started. The steering committee RegioTram has selected three consortia for the construction of the first two tram lines in the city of Groningen. Then the consortia entered the dialogue phase. The dialogue phase consists of three sub-phases: plan, consultation and proper communication. In the Dialogue Phase consortia interrogated the client about the tender documents (the contract, demands and wishes, etc). In these talks, the tender documents were increasingly specified. End of April 2012 the tender documents are final for the actual dialogue stage. On this basis, the consortia presented in autumn 2012 their bid. The final decision to award follows was in December 2012, then the committee knew which consortium would be awarded the contract. The two consortia participating in the tender were: Poort in Groningen and TramTeam. The third consortium (LinQ) pulled back in November 2012 because it did not expect to have a carrier with the required specialist expertise and knowledge of regional transport in time (projectleader tram 2013).

Finally the committee has been in talks with the two consortia participating in the tender for two and a half years, to discuss about how the committee wanted the tramlines to become, what kind of material would be used, how the sewer would be handled, how the price can be as low as possible, etc. The name of this kind of tender is called: integrated procurement. This method of procurement is in the U.K. originates and is called DBFMO: Design, Build, Finance, Operate. Construct, Maintain,

One very important aspect of this process with tender is that when one consortium has a good idea, the other person/consortium may not know. So that was a difficult aspect of the whole process. At the end of the process one consortium would be chosen, but it never came to this point because at that time the whole project stopped. There has never been given an assignment. Had they given an assignment, the municipality of Groningen would have lost more money, because they would have to pay the chosen consortium for the suffered damage.

3. Social Impact Assessment

3.1 What is SIA?

As said in the theoretical framework, SIA can be described as being the process of managing social issues of development, mostly those of big environmental projects. According to Vanclay, the Social Impact Assessment “includes the processes of analyzing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment” (Vanclay 2005: p.5).

SIA is originally founded in the 1970’s along with the term EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment). It is a method of getting government and inhabitants closer together in cases of big environmental or infrastructural projects. Already an understanding in the USA and Australia, but here in the Netherlands it isn’t very common to use SIA. It is also not legally required. According to Femke Niekerk & Jos Arts (1996) in the article ‘Impact assessments in Dutch infrastructure planning’, SIA should be used for infrastructure projects in the Netherlands. They plead for the supply of, and the need for, impact assessment information during the decision-making process for infrastructure. Based on the construction of a new highway in the province of Drenthe, the Netherlands, they plea for more transparency in the decision-making process and a more concerned attitude towards the victims.

3.2 Data analysis

Interviewee	Proponent/ opponent	Reasons to stop the RegioTram	Degree of resistance
Person A Projectleader	V	- Lack of financial sources decided by the council	- It may look like there was a lot of resistance, but really there wasn't. It sure wasn't the reason the project stopped. If the council had decided that there was enough money, we would just go through with the build.
Person B Councillor	X	- A bigger lack of finances in the future because of the new residential 'The Meerschap' in	- There was some resistance from the citizens, and some arguments were correct,

Person C Citizen		Paterswolde (Groningen) - D66, SP and VVD were against the project	but it was not the reason why this project won't go through.
	V	- A lack of financial sources	- Only 30 people showed up at the demonstration on the Grote Markt - There was some resistance, but not well-founded. Mostly people who look more at problems than at solutions
Person D Citizen	V	- Lack of financial sources	
Person E Citizen	X	- People in the city are against the project	- There were a lot of protest posters in the oosterstraat and some other streets where the tram would come
Person F Citizen	X	- A combination of the protest and the lack of financial sources	

Fig. 6. Reasons to stop the project and degrees of resistance.

In the tables above and below it became clear how the project RegioTram had its effect on the citizens of Groningen, and how the communication from the government went towards the inhabitants. There are six key persons interviewed for this research, 4 citizens of which two are opponent and two proponent, the project leader of the tram (of course proponent) and a person from the council who is also an opponent. The reason for making two tables with arguments from these six people, is to gain more insight into the data and to see if any relationships or connections can be established between parties and statements.

What is most striking from the first table is that there isn't given an universal answer to the question "why do you think the project stopped"? Of course the project leader and the councillor know why it has been stopped, but because of the different answers given by the citizens, it can be an indication that there wasn't a clear news program or message from the government to the outsiders with clear information. It can also be an indication of a kind of marketing strategy from the municipality, that they 'used' the appearance of a lot of protest, because they don't want to come clear about the money issue. There will be an extra paragraph about this question mark in the conclusion.

Also from table 1 can be seen that the resistance from citizens was not the reason for stopping the project. It also wouldn't been an issue when the government did had enough money.

From table 2 it can be seen what the arguments were to be a proponent or an opponent. Ofcourse the projectleader is 100% proponent and does not have any disadvantages against the tram. The councilor is an opponent and is more proponent of the new residence and sees more pitfalls in regard to the RegioTram.

What is striking is that for some people a disadvantage can be a benefit , for example with person C and person D. They are both proponent, but person D is besides just an citizen also an entrepreneur and he sees the disappearance of some parking spaces as an disadvantage, while person C sees it as a benefit because it means less cars in her living area. Also person D and person F have agreements. Person D finds it a huge benefit that the tram would be a solution to the busy mornings with busses and students, while person F says that the tram would be a solution mainly to the busy mornings with students and that it is not a problem for the whole city (including its inhabitants) to fix. He thinks that there can be found different solutions to this problem instead of building a whole tramline. He don't want to be bothered with this problem.

What can also be read from Table 2, is that certain advantages and disadvantages are the same for several people. Like the benefit of a 'safer Oosterstraat/a safer city'. It means that people see a tramline as more safe than the multiple busses that drive through the (near) streets of Groningen. Also the student problem is an issue that several people see as a solution/advantage.

But on the other hand, there are also disadvantages that are shared. Like the disadvantage of money. The councilor found that a reason to not go through with the project, but person E and F share that opinion. They are afraid that the property taxes will increase, and that the damage to property and heritage will cost a lot of money. Person F even says that a tramline is a means of transport from the 19th century, and not a solution to problems of the 21th century. Very interested to see how different people have different opinions and point of views.

A subject which cannot be seen in the table, concerns SIA. An explanation could be that SIA is not an integrated method/subject in the Netherlands, and certainly not known by the normal citizens. That's why they could not indicate that with the use of SIA, or without the use of SIA, things would have been different.

Interviewee	Proponent/ opponent	Disadvantages RegioTram	Benefits RegioTram
Person A Projectleader	V		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solution to the congestion of the city - Less traffic jam - Less costs on bus drivers - Better accessibility of the city - Attract economical chances - More efficient transportation of people
Person B Counsellor	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swich often - Very expensive project - The budgeted money can be used better - Unnecessary - Strong likelihood that the budget is going to be more expensive during the build 	
Person C Citizen	V		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A safer 'Oosterstraat' - Easy way to go to Zernike - Better accessibility of the city / Oosterstraat - Less parking spaces
Person D Citizen/ entrepreneur	V	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parking spaces would disappear in the street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive economical effets on shoppingstreets - A remained clarity of the city - A solution to the busy mornings with students, and overcrowded busses - A safer transportation
Person E Citizen/ entrepreneur	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nuisance and damage to property - increase of vacancy - businesses fail on the construction route - increase property tax (fear) 	
Person F Citizen	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - depreciation of property - Decay of herritage - A tram is a means of transport from the 19th century, not a solution to problems from the 	

	<p>21st century</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increase property tax (fear) - It's mainly a problem of the busy mornings with students from the RUG and Hanze Hogeschool, it shouldn't be a political issue for the whole city
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Fig. 7. Advantages and disadvantages RegioTram.

3.3 What social consequences would the tram have on the inhabitants?

Unlike many protest posters in de Oosterstraat suggest, there wasn't a lot of resistance against the planned tram. The people who were against it the most, were entrepreneurs in the streets where the tram would come through. They were afraid that the vacancy in these streets would increase because of the time the street had to be closed for renewing the sewer and for building the tracks. There were also two protest websites against the tram, both lead by the same man. In the beginning these website were very active, but as time passes and plans got more structured, these websites became more silent.

The tram would even have a major positive effect on the streets where it was planned to go through. As shown in Amsterdam with the Noord/Zuidlijn and in Paris where the metro is an important transportation, the tram would attract economical chances. There has been research done on the economic effects of the tram on the shopping streets and businesses, and the results were very positive. The main result was that the shopping streets in Groningen would do much better once the city was more accessible by tram. The tram would transport two and a half times more people per trip than a bus does. This would be much cheaper in terms of operation and drivers, and the city would remain manageable. Passengers would have to change more often, but the city would remain clear.

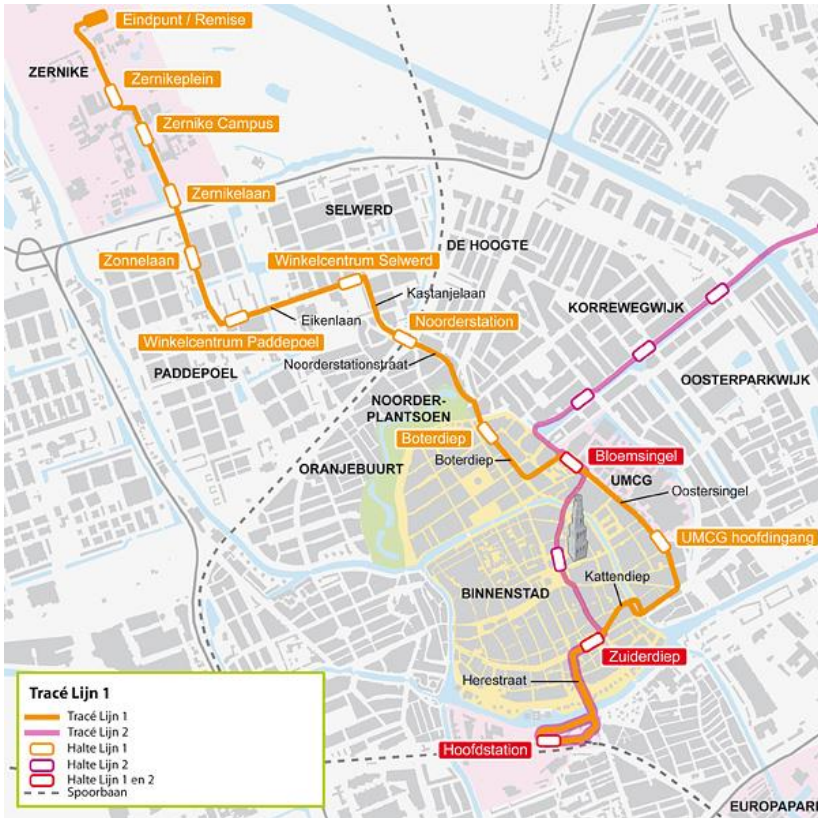


Fig. 8. Tramline.

Arguments of the residents of Groningen in General were a bit broader than just fear of turnovers in streets where the tram would come. They were afraid that the planned tram would cause nuisance and damage to property and this would result in depreciation of property. Also, by riding the tram, electric cables could ravel out, and this would lead to an emission of lead, copper and particulates who would end up in the air and in the ground (Grondmij Mouncell ICS, 2010) . It was a combination of economic aspects as well as health.

3.4 Has SIA been used during the plans of the tram?

How was the communication of municipality to residents? At the very beginning in 2007, when the municipality and the government discussed about bringing the tram back in to the city after more than sixty years, they invited people from the city to discuss and brainstorm about the plans. Where should the tram go through, what kind of ideas did the residents have, and how could the municipality take this into account. All variants are conceived, discussed and mapped. In the Martini church and on the *Grote Markt* were major events organized where the citizens could come to and share their opinions. People thought enthusiastically about the tram and several variants were discussed (projectleader tram, 2013). After all these events it showed that only 20% of the residents was against the tram, so 80% was at that point very excited.

At that stage it was not so threatening because no one knew where the tram would come. After all of these events where every interested man and woman in Groningen could give their contribution, the decision of where the tram would come was made. The next step was to invite every entrepreneur in the streets the tram would come through, and tell them what had been decided and how the plans would come to look like. The committee offered to do this in various forms but the entrepreneurs had chosen for the small-scale approach. Tables were placed on the market with a moderator and the designer of the project and the business owners could come and sit at a table. All of the ideas that came from these meetings were drawn again and again discussed back at the streets. In addition, larger meetings were organized where neighborhoods were invited to get knowledge of the plan. So there is put a lot of work into. Per street there had to be 2 or 3 evenings to discuss everything, and one evening per neighborhood. The committee really tried to deliver a custom made plan. This whole project has lasted five years and has cost 30 million euro of consultancy fees, project management and already a part of the tender.

Although there has been no proper SIA like hiring an impartial intermediary to participate in the environmental design of the planned intervention, to facilitate and coordinate the participation of stakeholders and to recommend mitigation solutions (Vanclay, 2003), the municipality of Groningen and its committee used other methods of identifying interested and affected people and trying to decrease the impacts of the tram on the inhabitants. They tried their best to involve the residents in the whole decision-making process from the outset. This was their way of doing this together with the inhabitants and to listen to all of the ideas, wishes and comments, either positive or negative, and to find solutions to the problems. In this sense there has been used some kind of SIA and community participation.

4. Social Impact Assessment vs. RegioTram Groningen

4.1 End of the RegioTram

Why didn't it go through? Why has the project RegioTram been stopped? There are many situations in which you can say that they have contributed to the end of this project. The definite decision for stopping the project was done by the council. Project RegioTram was a project of the county and township together, so the municipal and provincial councils should decide together. However, the council has decided in September of 2012 not to go through with the plans of the Tram. Main reason for this was that they would have come in financial problems because of a new residential 'The Meerschap' in Paterswolde in Groningen. The municipality of Groningen has a lot of problems with the construction of this residential, and it has cost a lot more money than budgeted so far. Would they have gone through with the plans of the RegioTram, there would have become a bigger lack of financial sources.

Another reason laid in politics. There was a lot of discussion within the council of Groningen, because the main person in charge of finances had agreed with the province that the funds would be sufficient for the tram. He had this budget presented in September of 2012. The two political parties who supported this budget were 'GroenLinks' and the 'PvdA' (Party of Labor). However, there were two other political parties who didn't trust and supported this budget: 'D66' and the 'SP'. What happened next was that Groenlinks and the Party of Labor stepped out of the College of citizens and councilors, because they had lost confidence in the board. In the board arose a majority against the RegioTram along with the two parties who were already in college (D66 and SP). So there was a major political influence on this project.

There was also some resistance from the city but that was little or limited. The only place where you saw these protest posters (figure 7) was in the Oosterstraat. Especially because of parking spaces that would disappear, but those would come back in other places, so that wasn't even an argument. There were plans for the tram to go through the Gelkingestraat, but that street proved to be too tight for the tram. That was the reason for the tram to go through the Oosterstraat. In theorie the tram would take as much space as the busses do now, so there would be no need for extra sidewalks. The main problem for protest was that there is a lot of vacancy in the Oosterstraat. By leading the tram through this street, the street would have



to be closed for six months to replace the sewer, so entrepreneurs were afraid the vacancy would increase. The committee had made arrangements with those entrepreneurs that all of the lost turnover would be compensated. After all, problems were solved as much as possible. Of course not everyone was super excited on who would come to live along the tram, but it was accepted amongst the citizens. This was shown by a demonstration of people against the RegioTram on the *Grote Markt* in Groningen. Only thirty people showed up at this demonstration. That was of course very disappointing for the people who organized this protest day. That indicated that there wasn't much counteraction against the tram. The protest was no decisive reason for the municipality of Groningen to stop the project.

Conclusion

“Was a lack of SIA the reason why the municipality of Groningen stopped the project ‘tram tracks through the city’, of were economic reasons decisive?”

The answer to the question whether a lack of SIA the reason was for stopping the project is no. During the whole process of the tram, starting with the idea in 2005, the inhabitants of Groningen were involved in project RegioTram. Not the way SIA was originally invented, but the main principle of SIA is to mitigate impacts and preventing conflicts between government and residents. That principle is being used in this case as good as possible, within the reach of the municipality and the tram committee. Of course there were some conflicts, but even with proper SIA conflicts aren't excluded. However, the media propagated that the protest of the inhabitants did play a big role in stopping the project, were it not for the real reason.

The main reason for stopping the project was a lack of financial sources and political influences on the budget. The municipality of Groningen would have come in financial problems because of a new residential 'The Meerschap' in Paterswolde in Groningen. The municipality has a lot of problems with the construction of this residential, and it has cost a lot more money than budgeted so far. A few people within the municipality didn't agree with this and there was a new budget made and presented in the council where in the tram was included. There was a discussion and agreement with the province that the funds would be sufficient for the tram. However, two political parties, 'D66' and the 'SP', didn't trust and supported this. Unfortunately the opponents on the board were in the majority and the definite decision was made: project "tram tracks through the city" has stopped.

The decision might be considerate negative, because the tram would have major positive impacts on the city of Groningen. As shown in paragraph 3.2 there are many advantages by integrating a tram in the city. The city would come back on the map, the tram would attract entrepreneurs and thus the economy of the city, with a tram the city would become more clear and safer, the peak hour in the mornings with students would disappear and the current problem with busses and a busy influx of the city would be resolved. However, it is hard to tell if they would overcome the negative impacts and be worth the financial expenditure. The municipality will now have to find other solutions for these problems, and they will also cost a lot of money on the long term. It is difficult to determine whether they have made the right decision and have a cheaper budget now. I guess we will never know.

Final word.

It was a difficult subject to write a thesis about, because you do an examination on something that is not there. And why it isn't there, is hard to answer in a few weeks and a few pages. After doing the research, talking to key persons, writing this thesis and finishing the examination, what I most noticed was the way that the decision of stopping the project has been brought to the outsiders. Or maybe better said, the way is hasn't been brought to the outside world.

When I started this examination (and that was also the reason why I wanted to this examination) I was under the impression that there was a huge protest against the tram. I saw all the protest posters mainly in the Oosterstraat, but also in other streets where the tram would come, and thought that the protest was (one of) the reason(s) why the project has been stopped. That's why when given the subject SIA, I immediately thought of this problem. But throughout the study I found out that the protest was only a small part of the whole problem, and that the real reason for stopping the project lies with money problems and political influences. Which is nowhere to be found in the news messages or other public sources. I really had to dig deep in interviews to get this information.

So maybe there can be a second conclusion made about the marketing strategy of the government and municipality of Groningen. Maybe they used the appearance of a lot of protest to make their decision in silence, and to shelter under the wings of protest. There is a lot of politics involved in the decision-making process, and that is a hard thing to explain and understand in news messages. This way they don't have to explain anything at all, it is now a vague area of 'lack of money and protest', and it will probably stay that way.

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