

Bachelor project: Decentralisation, the new centralisation.

A study between a merged and a non-merged municipality in the Netherlands focussing on citizen involvement.



Pim Terpstra (S2306158)

First supervisor: O.Couwenberg, prof. dr.

Second supervisor: A. J. Imperiale

University of Groningen

Faculty: Spatial sciences



**university of
groningen**

faculty of spatial sciences

Abstract

Some citizens of the municipality of Hollands Kroon expressed their concern around citizen involvement. They say that since the merger in 2012, Hollands Kroon became less attractive for citizen involvement therefore claiming a relation between the merging of municipalities and the change in citizen involvement. This research tries to explore this relation by focussing on policies around citizen involvement, using literature about the policies and making a comparison between a merged, Hollands Kroon and a non-merged, Zuidhorn, municipality. This research will use surveys and analysis the results of the survey in order to argue whether the claims of the citizens are supported by statistical evidence. After analysis of hundred cases and the several policies around citizen involvement it turns out that three of the five policies are significant different. The distance towards the municipality, information and education, and funding participation are significantly different in a merged municipality. Inclusion and legitimacy are the other two not significant policies. In the end, this is an explorative research. The claims of the citizens are worth more research since this research only explored two municipalities, hundred cases and a survey. If more comparisons would be made, more cases were researched and also interviews and more deepening surveys would be used, stronger claims and arguments could be made.

Content

Introduction..... 3

Research problem 4

 Selection of the municipalities 4

 Research question 4

Theoretical framework..... 5

 Definition citizen involvement 5

 Policies around citizen involvement..... 5

Methodology 8

 Research method 8

 Data collection..... 9

 Data analysis..... 9

Results 10

Conclusion and discussion..... 15

References..... 17

Introduction

Since 1996, the number of municipalities in the Netherlands has decreased from 625 to 390 in 2016 (CBS, 2016). That means that over the course of 20 years, more than 235 municipalities have disappeared. This decrease, caused by the merging of municipalities, mostly occurred because of initiatives municipalities took themselves. Municipalities claim that because of the rise in decentralisation and the lack of administrative power, they have to merge in order to function properly (Communicatie Wieringermeer, 2009)(Twynstra gudde, 2014)(Schoof, 2009), but that does not mean that everybody is pleased about it. Often people speak of the loss of identity and the growing distance between the government and inhabitants (Ilimburg, 2010)(kplusv, 2013).

When one looks at the creation of the merged municipality of Hollands Kroon, one we can see newspapers (Trouw, 2011) and the municipalities' documents themselves (Gemeente Anna Paulowna, 2009) showing people who disagree with the fusion. People state that they are afraid of losing their identity and dislike the growing lack of involvement and interest from the government. The previous municipalities, Wieringermeer, Anna Paulowna, Niedorp and Wieringen(see attachment map 1) had a great deal in common, such as the focus on agriculture and having a lot of small villages, but each have a very different culture and background. Wieringermeer became a polder only 77 years ago, Wieringen was an island with its own culture before the Wieringermeer became a polder, and meanwhile Niedorp and Anna Paulowna had developed their own local cultures as well. From this perspective, the four municipalities are quite different from each other and yet they decided to merge into one municipality. If people believe there is a problem with citizen involvement and the growing distance towards the municipality because of the merger, it is interesting to find out if this is true. Therefore, a comparison with a municipality who is going to merge seems most likely to provide insight into this problem. Such a comparison would be more likely to provide insight into the issue of citizen involvement, as comparing Hollands Kroon to other merged municipalities will not provide any insight into how citizens truly felt before the merger, only how they remember or think they felt, which can be biased. In order to gain insight into people's opinions of mergers before they occur, the municipality Zuidhorn was chosen for this research. Zuidhorn is a municipality that is going to merge in 2019 with the municipalities of Grootegast, Leek and Marum to form the new municipality of Westerkwartier(see attachment map 2). Zuidhorn also has several villages and is focused on mainly agriculture and is therefore suitable for comparison.

First this research will start with the research problem where the issue of citizen involvement will be explained, which gap this research wants to fill and which research question, with its accompanying sub-questions, this research wants to answer. Following up will be the theoretical framework where will be explained what theories and literature is used in the research with a

supporting conceptual model. After the theoretical framework, the methodology will be discussed, where the way of researching will be explained and argued what tests are needed to draw conclusions. Following up on the methodology will be the results of the research. Every notable and interesting result will be shown and interpreted. To finalise there is a conclusion where the results will be discussed and closing arguments will be made about future research, followed by a list of references.

Research problem

Selection of the municipalities

As mentioned above, the reason why these two municipalities were chosen is because of the similarities in their agricultural focus and because of the several small villages they have. Moreover, the municipality of Hollands Kroon now exists five and a half years which gave the municipality enough time to give form to the new municipality. This means that people have now formed proper thoughts on how they think and feel about the new municipality as well. It is also interesting to take two municipalities in two separate provinces to see if there are differences. After asking some villagers in the municipality of Hollands Kroon it seems that there might be some interesting differences with the situation before the merger. They explain that they feel that the municipality does not listen to them and that this was different from the situation before the merger. Therefore, it is interesting to see if the municipality changed some policies around citizen involvement that might provide some evidence or an explanation for the argument. This research will therefore be explorative and tries to investigate if there is a reason to believe that more research is needed, since there might be a problem with the changes in citizen involvement policies after mergers.

Research question

When municipalities merge, many things will change for the citizens but for the municipality as well. In the literature there is a great deal of research about merging municipalities on how this affects the economy and more administrative power, but not so much on how a merger has an impact on policies surrounding citizen involvement. This research will focus on citizen involvement in a merged and in a non-merged municipality. The aim of the research is to understand whether a merged and a non-merged municipality differ in the rate of citizen involvement or not, and to try to understand the reasons. In order to do this, the different policies related to citizen involvement adopted by a merged and a non-merged municipality will be analysed, together with local people's perceptions about civic engagement in their own municipality. The main research question of the present paper is, therefore:

Do a recently merged and a non-merged municipality differ in the rate of citizen involvement? In order to find an answer to this question, answers to the following sub questions are required:

- What are the policies adopted by Hollands Kroon and by Zuidhorn concerning citizen involvement? Do they differ? If so, on what? Is this difference due to the merging process
- Do people living in these municipalities feel engaged by their municipality?
- Do the perception of people living in a non-merged and in a merged municipality of their being engaged, differ?
- Do the perception of people living in the merged municipality about their being engaged, differ from the past before the merging process?

Theoretical framework.

Definition citizen involvement

If we want to do research on policies and citizen involvement, then a working definition of what citizen involvement means is first required. Civil involvement is a broad theme and can have a lot of different definitions and meanings. In his article, Ben Berger would even as far as to claim that civic engagement is at its end (Berger, 2009). However, making such a claim simply because the name is too broad is problematic, but his point that the word civic engagement needs more clarification and deepening is valid. This research will focus on one side of civic engagement that has to do with decision making in the municipality and how local governmental policies can influence the rate of civic engagement. From now the word “involvement” will be used, since that word is less strong. This term was chosen because most of the time, citizen involvement is seen as just a means to legitimize government projects and not as something all decisive, which is also claimed by Ank Michels and Laurens de Graaf (Michels & de Graaf, 2010).

Policies around citizen involvement

Now that a working definition of citizen involvement for this research exists, we need to examine some policies that influence citizen involvement. The first policy would be the centralisation of the local municipality. When municipalities merge, the new municipality needs to find a central place from where they will operate. Overall this means that the physical distance between the citizens and the municipality grows, as local service points are replaced by one larger, centralised city hall, which is bad for the direct influence citizens have on the municipality since they have to travel further if they require information or need to apply for services (Seo & Bernsen, 2016). Especially for older

people, the increased travel distance might form an obstacle since it might be harder for them to reach a service point because they are more likely to be less mobile. It is therefore less likely that people will participate in citizen involvement when the service points of the municipality are further away. Therefore it is an interesting policy to take a look at because it has the potential to make a great deal of difference in citizen involvement according to Seo & Bernsen.

The second policy is inclusion. Inclusion is the process where citizens are closely involved by the municipality in the debates about certain projects (Michels & de Graaf, 2010). Most of the time this means that every stakeholder works closely with the municipality to shape projects in the best interest of the public. De Roo and Voogd capture this concept and call it communicative rationality (De Roo & Voogd, 2015). In this process the government plays a service role where it provides the means for stakeholders to shape the project and make the project happen. But I want to take this concept a little bit further where not only stakeholders are involved but everybody who wants to be involved can be involved. This is already happening when municipalities, for example, organise meetings and debates and between council members and citizens. People can also deliver their opinion by letter, which the council must react on. All of this should give the citizen a feeling of inclusion and provide a means to be directly involved in decision-making.

The third policy is legitimacy, which refers to the policy of the municipality attempting to get the citizens on her side in order to support projects. The idea is that citizens who participate and are directly involved with a project are more likely to be positive about the outcome of the project. Normally legitimacy should be a result of citizen involvement and the policy of inclusion but, as Michels and de Graaf point out, legitimacy is very important to a municipality because it gives support for projects that the municipality wants to realize (Michels & de Graaf, 2010). Moreover, it gives the municipality a positive status and allows them to argue that the citizens are happy and content about their projects and ideas. Therefore, legitimacy can be found in how people would rate and appreciate their municipality. Municipalities can gain legitimacy by, for example, building playgrounds and sports facilities, or make concessions towards citizens for the things they want, which makes the citizens feel more satisfied towards their municipality.

The fourth policy to improve citizen involvement is “inform and educate”. People who are not involved in government projects often do not know what the projects are or stand for. Therefore, according to Ricardo Morse and Tony Bovaird, the municipalities should organise more information meetings and even education programs (Morse, 2012)(Bovaird, 2007). This does not mean that there should be education programs for every project the municipality wants to realise but instead could mean providing people information by e-mail or by post. If people know what is going on and what is going to happen, then they are far more willing to participate in projects and give their opinion about it. It also means that for future projects people know what to expect and are more willing to

participate and give their opinion. Education programs are often far more expensive while giving information by post or e-mail is an easy way to let citizens know what is going on.

The fifth and last policy to investigate is the funding of citizen involvement. This often happens if the municipality wants to keep and maintain projects but no longer wants to directly be involved in them (Selman, 2004). The municipality wants citizens to be involved in those projects and let them maintain those projects. A good example is the maintenance of cultural heritage. Sometimes heritage is kept alive and under maintenance by citizens who, for example, keep monumental buildings in their former state. The municipality then provides funding for this project and then the citizens themselves are responsible for the maintenance. This idea can lead to citizens who are more involved in the municipality's plans (Selman, 2004). If citizens want to change or preserve something, the municipality can provide funding and give the responsibility to the citizens.

Both the literature and informal interviews suggest that citizen involvement policies change when a municipality merges. If this is right, there is evidence to be found in a comparison between a merged and a non-merged municipality. It might also be possible that the people who suggested this problem might have had a bad experience, but even then it might still be possible that there really is a difference which should be pointed out. Finally it is important to add that not everything in citizen involvement can go fluently. There will always be problems to overcome and there will always be angry citizens who feel left out of the process. As Karel Maier points out, it is a trial and error process and every municipality needs to find its way that works the best for her citizens (Maier, 2001). These policies are ideas that might be ideas to boost citizen involvement but the result can be different for every case.

Based on the literature discussed above, the following conceptual model of the influence of various policies on citizen involvement was made (see figure 1)

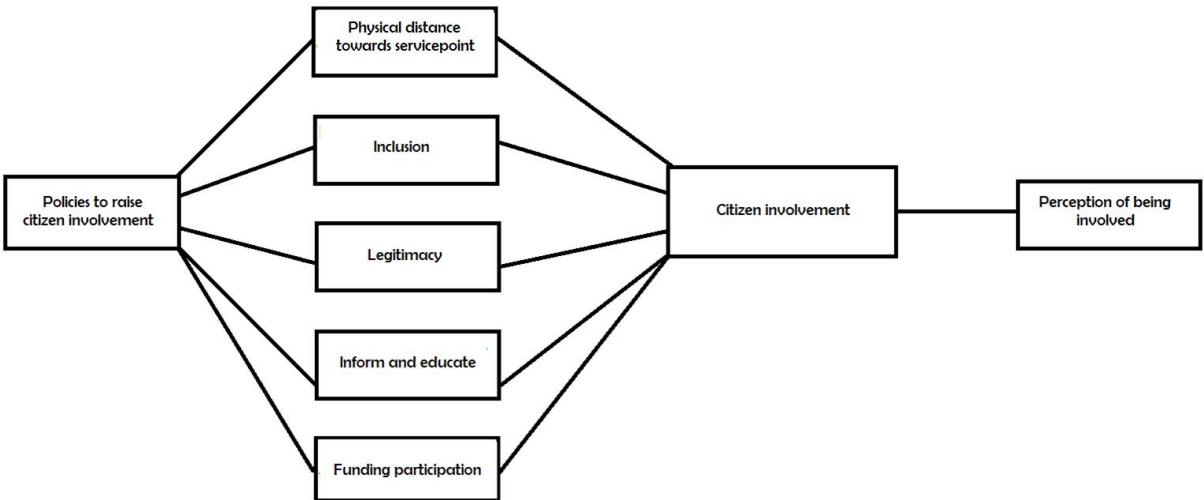


Figure 1: The conceptual model.

The changes in these policies between the municipalities will help me understand where the expected variations in citizen involvement in merged and non-merged municipalities come from. One reason for why variations in the citizen involvement between the two municipalities are expected is that the physical distance differ a rather great deal between the municipalities, which can make becoming involved in the municipality's plans harder if one has to travel further. When we look at inclusion people explain that they do not have the feeling at all that the municipality of Hollands Kroon include her citizens. They also think that there can be a lot more improvement in the inform and educate department and feel like the municipality does not help them financially at all. It can be easily concluded that the municipality of Hollands Kroon might have failed on policy-making surrounding citizen involvement, but again this might also be because of some bad experience the informally interviewed people might have had. Therefore, a more detailed research will be conducted, which will be described below, which is supported by the literature (Seo & Bernsen, 2016) (Morse, 2012) (Michels & de Graaf, 2010), whom also indicate policies change after a merger which supports the interviewees' points of view.

Methodology

Research method

In order to find answers to the research question and its sub-questions, a comparison will be made between the merged municipality Hollands Kroon and the non-merged municipality Zuidhorn. As mentioned above, it is preferable to make a comparison between a merged and a non-merged municipality to gain insight into the expectations people have of possible changes after the merger and the changes people living in a merged municipality experienced. For this research, surveys were used as a primary data source. Surveys are useful to capture the feelings and opinions of people in a quick and simple way (Clifford et al, 2010). Since one municipality is merged and the other is not yet, some specific questions were added that hear the citizens' opinions about the future merger and about the past merger.

With the survey, different aspects of the policies and appreciation were researched and analysed. The survey consists of some statements where people can fill in totally not agree, not agree, neutral, agree and totally agree which follows the Likert-type scale. This provided citizens the opportunity to fill in more than just agree or not agree which gives more dimension to the statements. In this research the answers of the Likert-type scale questions are treated as equidistant, which means that the steps between the answers will be treated as 1. This is possible because of the five answers, which consist of two negative, one neutral, and two positive answers. This provided citizens more possibilities to express their feelings towards a certain statement and are not steered

into a specific direction by have more negative or more positive answer possibilities. The neutral option gave the citizen the option to fill in neutral if he or she did not have a specific good nor bad feeling about a certain statement.

Variables which the survey attempted to give an answer to are:

- The perception of the physical distance of the municipality.
- The perception of inclusion of the citizens in projects.
- The perception of legitimacy and trust in the municipality.
- The perception of inform and educate to find out if people feel informed enough.
- The perception of funding to find out if people want to do more if they receive funding.

Combining several questions and giving every answer a score, a 1 for totally not agree to a 5 for totally agree, and then dividing them by the amount of questions of that variable gives us the mean score of a certain variable which can tell something about how positive or negative a citizen feel towards certain policies. In this way, the different questions will provide insight in the perception of the different sub-questions.

Data collection

In both municipalities fifty surveys were collected to analyse the differences between the municipalities. The total of hundred surveys ensures normality because the central limit theorem states that for assuming normality at least 35 cases are needed (Clifford et al, 2010). Stratified sampling was used by dividing the population over two municipalities. After the division, simple random sampling was used to gather surveys. In the municipality of Hollands Kroon the surveys were gathered by asking random people in the shopping district. Since this tactic did not work in the municipality of Zuidhorn, as the response was rather low, the surveys were gathered by going from door to door. The stratified sampling helps to create two groups while the simple random sampling ensures the reduction of sampling error (Clifford et al, 2010). A positive aspect of conducting face to face surveys is that the citizens can always ask for clarification if needed and it provides the possibility to gain more information besides the survey by having a chat.

Data analysis

The program SPSS Statistics was used to store the gathered data and to do some statistical tests. Since the data of the Likert-type scale is a equidistant scale and the central limit theorem ensures the assumption of normality, statistical tests like the one independent sample t-test are possible. These tests give a clear answer to whether the two groups are significantly different on the perception of the different variables. If the outcome has a p-value of 0.05 or lower, the differences between the

groups are significant. Furthermore, if the independent sample t-test provide differences in the means and a 95% confidence interval, this will give us more information about the different variables.

The data gathered by the surveys is anonymous and strictly used for this research. The citizens who responded to the survey know about this, since this is stated at the top of each survey, (see attachment), and it was explained every time someone was willing to respond to a survey. It was possible for every respondent to stop at any time and no names were gathered so the survey would be anonymous.

Results

The hundred surveys were completely filled in except for some open questions where people could fill in any comments or additions. However, the questions needed for the research to draw any conclusions were filled in by all hundred respondents. In table 1 are the means of every policy categorised by municipality. Notable are the differences in the means when we look at the policy of the distance towards the municipality and the policy of funding participation. However, there seems to exist little variation in means in the category of inclusion. It seems like the municipality of Zuidhorn scores better on almost every policy. However, this does not mean that these differences in the means are significant.

Policies	Hollands Kroon	Zuidhorn
1. Distance towards the municipality	2.23	4.14
2. Inclusion	2.67	2.63
3. Legitimacy	3.34	3.60
4. Information and education	2.50	2.82
5. Funding participation	2.58	3.04

Table 1: The means of the scores of the policies, separated by municipality.

In order to know whether these differences are significant, an independent sample t-test is needed to examine whether there are true differences between the municipalities or whether these results occurred because of chance. Table 2 shows the results of the independent sample t-test. The column "Differences in mean" shows the differences of the means of both municipalities, "Significance"

shows whether the results are significant or not by giving us a P-value, and the “95% confidence interval of the compared means lower bound and upper bound” show the boundaries that we can expect, if the test would be done again, and that 95% per cent of the means would be between these boundaries.

Policies	Differences in mean	Significance (2 tailed)	95% confidence upper bound	95% confidence lower bound
1. Distance towards the municipality	1,91	P= 0.000	2.26	1.55
2. Inclusion	0.03	P= 0.825	0.28	-0.35
3. Legitimacy	0.26	P= 0.162	0.62	-0.10
4. Information and education	0.32	P= 0.043	0.63	0.01
5. Funding participation	0.46	P= 0.007	0.79	0.13

Table 2: The results of the independent sample t-test showing differences in the mean, significance and the 95% confidence interval of the differences in the mean.

As one can see in table 2 three of the five variables have a P-value lower than 0.05, which means that the differences found in variable 1 , 4 and 5 are significant. Variables 2 and 3 have a P-value higher than 0.05, which means that the differences found can be ascribed to chance. This means that there is a difference in the perception of the policies of the distance towards the municipality, information and education, and funding participation. However, there are no significant differences between the municipalities when the perception of inclusion and legitimacy are compared.

The citizens were also asked to rate how content they feel about their municipality on a scale from 1 to 10 (see table 3).

	Hollands Kroon	Zuidhorn
Mean on how content citizens feel about their municipality on a scale from 1 to 10	6.58	6.28
Significance (2 tailed)	P= 0.350	

Table 3: The mean and significance of the question: On a scale from one to ten, how content are you with your municipality.

The table above shows the mean of how people would rate how content they are about their municipality. Zuidhorn scores lower than Hollands Kroon which is interesting when we look at the results of the different policies. On almost every policy Hollands Kroon scores lower than Zuidhorn and yet overall the citizens of Hollands Kroon seem to be more content about their municipality. In

order to test whether this difference is also significant, another independent sample t-test was needed. Table 3 also shows the P-value of the independent sample t-test. The P-value is larger than 0.05 which means that the difference found in the means of how content citizens feel about their municipality cannot be seen as significant. The differences might be ascribed to chance so people from Hollands Kroon are not significantly more content about their municipality than the people in Zuidhorn.

The citizens were also asked if they have participated in a citizen initiative and if they think there are many citizen initiatives happening in the municipality. Table 4 shows the mean of both municipalities for both questions.

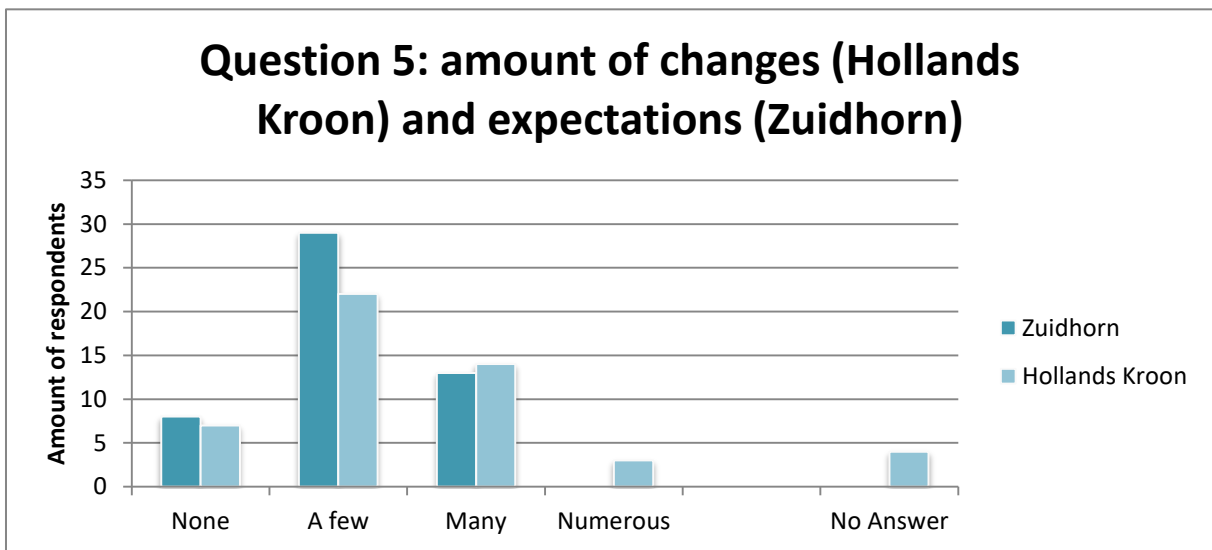
	Hollands Kroon	Zuidhorn
Mean of participation in a citizen initiative.	2.24	2.08
Mean of there are many citizen initiatives happening in my municipality.	2.92	2.68
Significance (2 tailed) participation in a citizen initiative.	P-value= 0.551	
Significance (2tailed) there are many citizen initiatives happening in my municipality	P-value= 0.160	

Table 4: The means and significance on the questions if the citizen was active in citizen initiatives and if they believe many citizen initiatives are happening in the municipality.

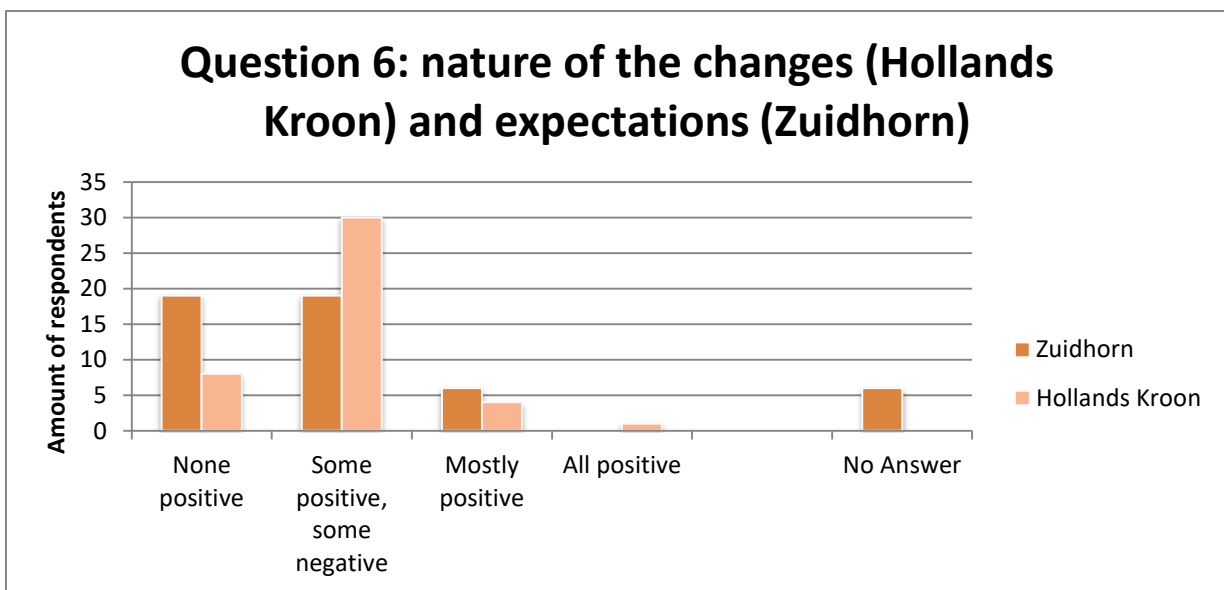
It seems that more citizens in Hollands Kroon believe that there are many citizen initiatives in their municipality than citizens of Zuidhorn think that happen in their municipality, since Hollands Kroon has a higher mean. This is interesting because Hollands Kroon scores lower on the policy variables, which suggests that less citizen initiatives and citizen involvement would exist in Hollands Kroon. Also the mean of people participating in a citizen initiative is higher in Hollands Kroon. Whether these differences are statistical can be tested with another independent sample t-test. Table 4 shows that both means are not significantly different from each other because both P-values are higher than 0.05. This means that the difference found in the means can be ascribed to chance. Another aspect that might be interesting is the low rating people give to participating in a citizen initiative. The mean of Zuidhorn is 2.08 which means that many seem do not participate in a citizen initiative. Moreover, the mean of Hollands Kroon seems low as well with a 2.24. In order to know whether people from both municipalities significantly score lower than the neutral value 3, a one sample t-test can be used. With a combined mean of 2.16, the one samples t-test gives a P-value of 0.000, which means that the combined mean is significantly lower than neutral and that therefore the

citizens of both municipalities seem to not participate much in citizen initiatives.

Another variable that might be interesting is whether citizens think that a merger brings changes to the municipality and whether these changes will be good or not. Graph 1 and 2 show that most of the people believe that a merger brings or has brought change to the municipality, but those changes appear to be more negative than positive. This suggests that people believe a merger is not a good idea. Moreover, from the open question where people could fill in what those changes might look like or what already changed, many show concern towards moving the municipality's service points to other places and the disappearance of some public services. However, very little is written about citizen involvement. Only a few respondents write that the municipality will listen even less or listen less to citizens when they merge or since they have merged.



Graph 1: The results of question 5: Did you experience changes since the merger or do you expect changes when the municipality is going to merge



Graph 2: The results of question 6: How do you receive those changes or how do you expect to receive those changes

Finally, there are observations in Hollands Kroon that show that some things have changed. Several service points in the municipalities are now closed. In the old municipalities Wieringen, Wieringermeer and Niedorp service points closed and a new big city hall with service points was built in the other old municipality Anna Paulowna. This means that the physical distance to the closest service point increased for many of the Hollands Kroon’s citizens. In this way the municipality centralises in one of the old municipalities and works from there. The result is that people have to travel further for their municipal services. However, the municipality Hollands Kroon has made some changes to counter this problem. For simple services, like applying for a driver’s license or the extending an identity card or passport, citizens do not have to come to the new city hall but instead get their license, identity card or passport delivered at home. Citizens still need to come the first time for applying but when their product is ready, it can be delivered at home, work or everywhere in the Netherlands except for the Wadden islands. This is a step towards solving the problem of an increased physical distance for municipal services.

Another result of the survey is the outcome of the statement: “I am happy with the projects of my municipality” (table 5).

	Hollands Kroon	Zuidhorn
Mean on: I am happy with the projects of my municipality.	3.34	3.60
Significance (2 tailed)	P= 0.161	

Table 5: the means and p-value of the statement: I am happy with the projects of my municipality.

Although the differences between the means are not significant, it is interesting that both means are larger than 3.0. This means that the citizens from both Hollands Kroon and Zuidhorn seem to be relatively positive when it comes to the projects both municipalities undertake. After doing a one sample T-test with the test value 3 (table 6), it turns out that both municipalities have a significantly higher mean than 3.

	Hollands Kroon	Zuidhorn
Mean on: I am happy with the projects of my municipality.	3.34	3.60
Significance (2 tailed) one sample T-test	P= 0.023	0.000

Table 6: The means and p-value of the one sample T-test with test value 3

This means that in both municipalities the citizens are significantly positive about the projects that the municipality undertakes. This is interesting because it is an unexpected result when a comparison is made with other questions and the reason why this research is done. Citizens were quite negative

about the changes they have experienced or think they will experience when the municipality merges. Besides, the research was started because people were not happy about their municipality and felt like citizen involvement declined after merging. If that is true, then this result is rather surprising since it was expected to be lower than 3. The same goes for the result from table 3 where the results are more positive than to be expected. Although it is questionable whether the means 6.58 for Hollands Kroon and 6.28 for Zuidhorn are good enough, if people were expected to be quite negative about their municipality, it can be expected that the results would be severely lower.

Conclusion and discussion

According to the literature and informal interviews with some locals, there was a good reason to conduct some explorative research into the changes in the policy making surrounding citizen involvement after the municipalities merged. After analysing the results, a case can be made that several policies have changed for the municipality of Hollands Kroon after merging. Three of the five variables of the conceptual model were significantly different in a non-merged merged municipality (table 2). However, this also means that two of the variables were not statistically different which makes the claim somewhat weaker. The same argument is weakened even further when one takes into an account that that people from the municipality of Zuidhorn do not seem more content with their municipality in comparison to people living in Hollands Kroon. Even more so the mean of how content the citizens are, was higher in Hollands Kroon although not statistically (table 3). Citizens from Zuidhorn do not have the perception that many citizen initiatives are active in the municipality. Adding these variables and results up gives the idea that the differences in policies after merging did not have a large impact on citizen involvement.

This claim is, however, not completely unfounded. The disappearance of several municipal services and the existence of 3 variables with a significant result may suggest that there are some changes in policy making around citizen involvement when municipalities merge. The distance between citizens and their municipality seems bigger in a merged municipality, and the perception of the policy information and education of a merged municipality seems to be worse compared to a non-merged one (table 2). In addition to this, the perception for needing more funding for citizen involvement seems to be higher in a merged municipality (table 2). Adding up these arguments will give someone valid arguments to express concerns.

To conclude, the citizens who were concerned about the changes in citizen involvement after the merging of the municipality of Hollands Kroon may have a point. Three policies of the conceptual model show a significant difference between a merged and non-merged municipality. But although

these points are valid, the research also shows several points against these differences like the policies of legitimacy and inclusion where no statistical difference could be found. Furthermore, the citizens of the municipality of Hollands Kroon do not seem to be less satisfied with their municipality than citizens from the municipality of Zuidhorn. However, keep in mind that this research is explorative. In order to make bigger conclusions, a larger research is needed with more respondents, a deeper research through the different kinds of citizen involvement policies and most importantly a research between more municipalities. The results of this results may be valid but it is possible that the municipality of Hollands Kroon or the municipality of Zuidhorn are coincidences and that the truth might be far more complex than this comparison. Moreover, several polices might be asked differently in the survey or interviews could be conducted to get more information and dimension in the research. Hundred respondents are a small number compared to the population of both municipalities, but a bigger and more deepening would cost more time and money than this research is meant for. Also the influence of the digital platform might be a factor for further research (Seo & Bernsen,2016). Seo and Bernsen claim that losing physical municipality service points might not be of such a big influence on citizen involvement when the digital platform of the municipality is of such quality that it can replace a physical service point. In further research it might be an idea to take a closer look at that and see if this is indeed true or if there is more going on.

Finally, it seems that the research succeeded in finding reasons to believe changes occur in the policies for citizen involvement when municipalities merge. This research can be used as an argument for deeper research in order to confirm or eliminate this problem.

References

Gemeente Anna Paulowna, Wieringermeer, Niedorp, Wieringen. (2009). Herdelingsadvies. Rapport 1. Wieringermeer, Anna Paulowna, Niedorp, Wieringen: Gemeenten Anna Paulowna, Niedorp, Wieringen en Wieringermeer.

Bovaird, T. (2007) Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of Public Services. *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 67(5), 846-860

CBS (2016). *Aantal gemeenten in 2016 daalt naar 390*. Geraadpleegd op 5-3-2017 via <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/01/aantal-gemeenten-in-2016-daalt-naar-390>

Clifford, N., French, S. and Valentine, G. (2010). *Key Methods in Geography*. Second edition. London: Sage.

Communicatie Wieringermeer (2009). Fuseren is een passend antwoord. Nieuwbrief 1. Wieringermeer, Anna Paulowna, Niedorp, Wieringen: Gemeenten Anna Paulowna, Niedorp, Wieringen en Wieringermeer.

Kplusv (2013). Herindeling vaak beter dan ambachtelijke fusie. Geraadpleegd op 13-3-2017 via <http://www.kplusv.nl/transformatie-publieke-organisaties/herindeling-vaak-beter-dan-ambachtelijke-fusie/> Amsterdam: KplusV

L1mburg (2010). Identiteitsverlies door fuseren gemeentes. Geraadpleegd op 14-3-2017 via <https://l1.nl/identiteitsverlies-door-fuseren-gemeentes-71284> Maastricht: L1mburg

Maier, K. (2001) Citizen Participation in Planning: Climbing a Ladder? *European Planning Studies*, 9(6), 707-719

Michels, A. & Graaf, L. de (2010) Examining Citizen Participation: Local Participatory Policy Making and Democracy. *Local Government Studies*, 36(4), 477-491

Morse, R. (2012) Citizen academies: Local governments building capacity for citizen engagement. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 36(1), 79-101

Roo, G. de & Voogd, H. (2015). *Abstracties van planning*. Groningen: Coöperatie In Planning U.A.

RTVNoord(2015). *Advies: 'Stel fusie gemeenten Westerkwartier uit'* Geraadpleegd op 16-6-2017 via <http://www.rtvnoord.nl/nieuws/154321/Advies-Stel-fusie-gemeenten-Westerkwartier-uit>

Groningen: RTVNoord

Schoof, N. (2009). *De kop steekt de koppen bij elkaar*. Rapport 1. Haarlem: Provincie Noord-Holland.

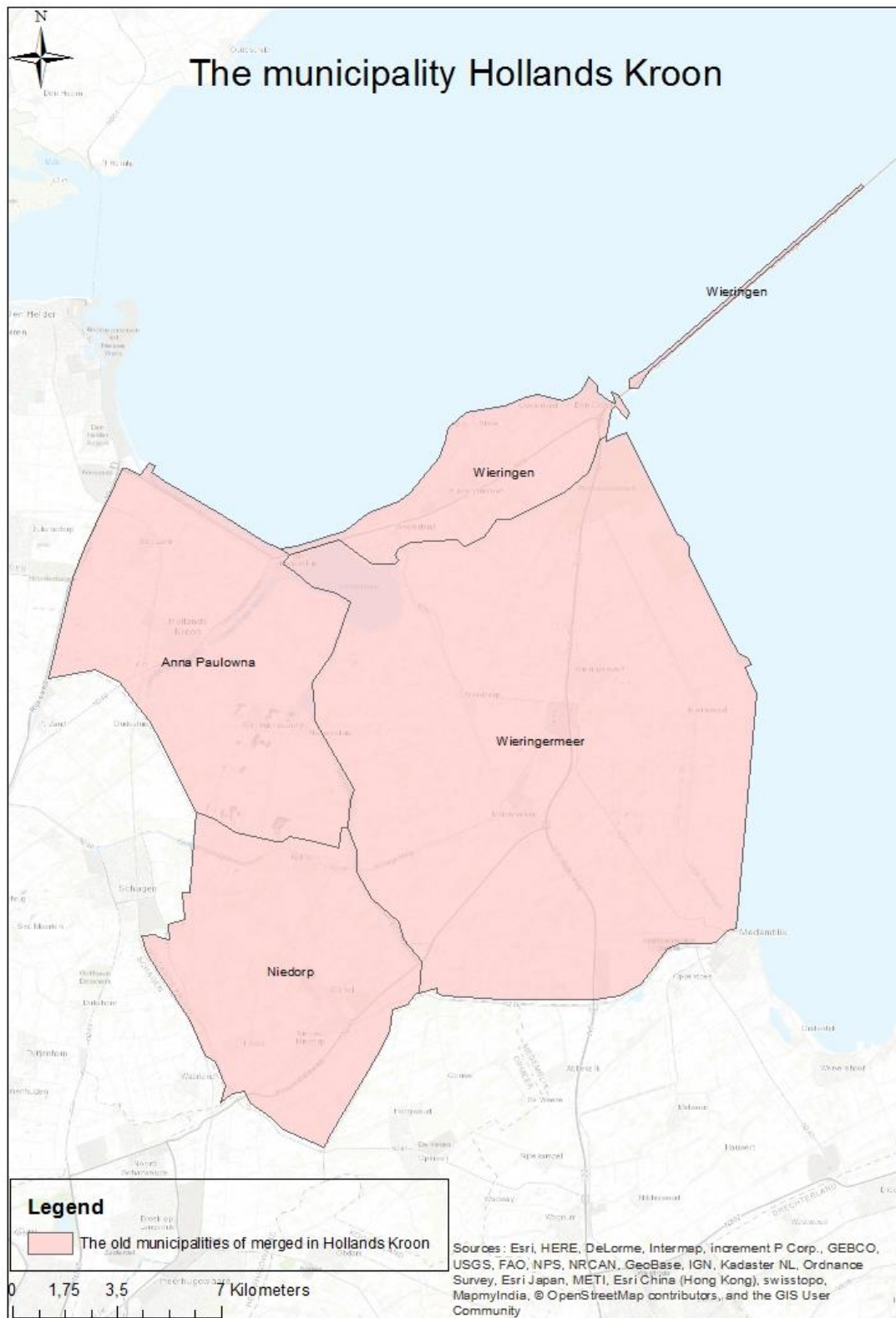
Selman, P. (2004) Community participation in the planning and management of cultural landscapes. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 47(3), 365-392

Seo, D. & Bernsen, M. (2016) Comparing attitudes toward e-government of non-users versus users in a rural and urban municipality. *Government Information Quarterly*, 33(2), 270-282

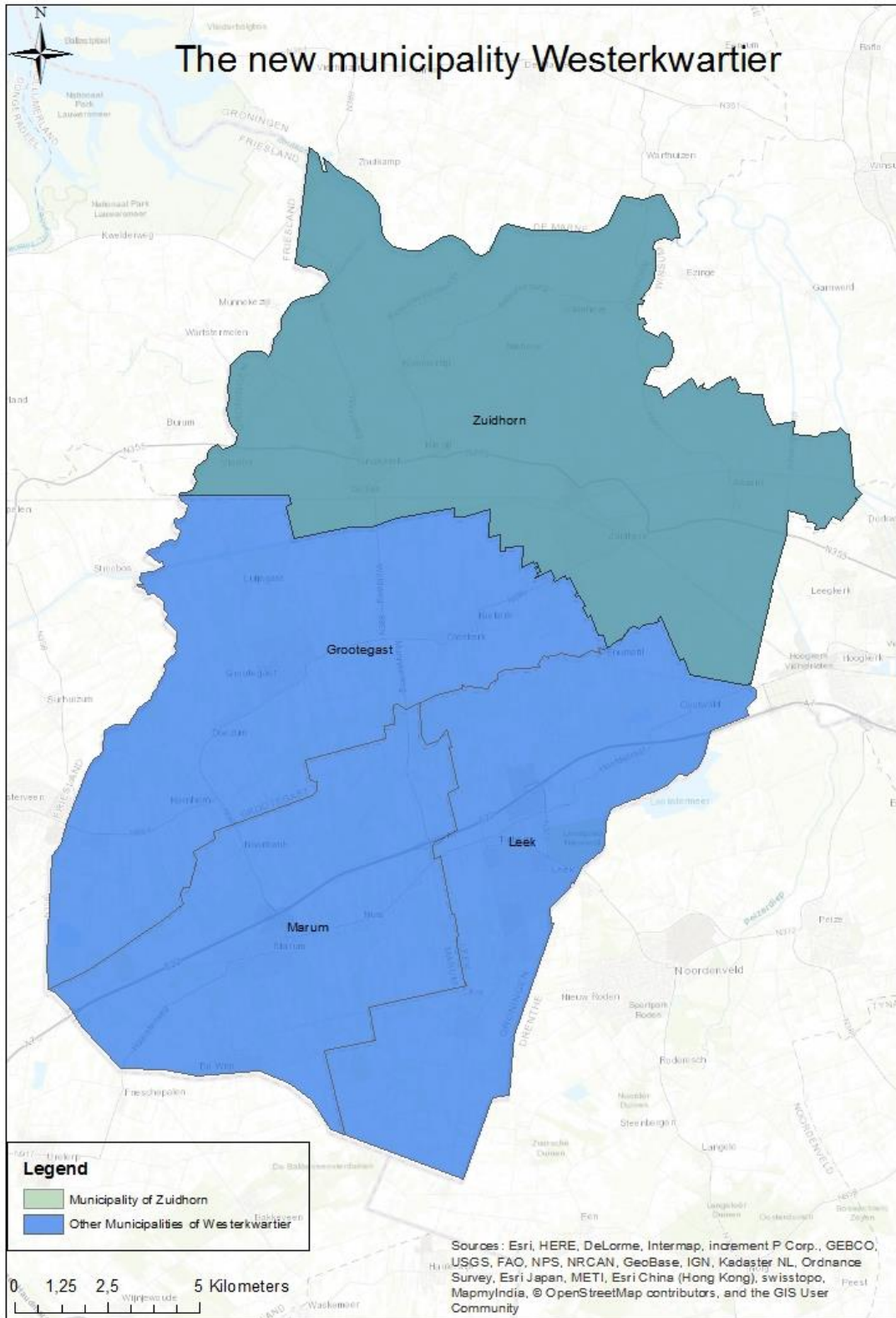
Trouw (2011). *De fusie terugdraaien gaat niet meer*. Geraadpleegd op 13-3-2017 via <https://www.trouw.nl/home/-de-fusie-terugdraaien-gaat-niet-meer-~a8ade8ac/> Amsterdam: Trouw

Twynstra Gudde (2014). *Gemeentelijke herindeling Súdwest-Fryslân, vertrouwen in eigen kracht*. Rapport 1, Sneek: Gemeente Súdwest-Fryslân

Appendix



Map 1: the former municipalities of Hollands Kroon



Map 2: The new municipality of Westerkwartier with its current municipalities

Results of comparable questions from the surveys

Questions/Statements	Mean Zuidhorn	Mean Hollands Kroon	P-Value T-test
Participated in citizen involvement in the last 5 years.	2.08	2.24	0.551
There are a lot of citizen initiatives in my municipality.	2.68	2.92	0.160
My municipality gives much attention to citizen involvement.	2.78	2.82	0.827
The municipality provides enough means for citizens to share their opinions.	3.06	2.88	0.389
I would like more meetings where the ideas and projects of the municipality are presented.	2.70	2.58	0.534
There are enough service points of the municipality for the citizens.	4.14	2.16	0.00
The municipality regularly asks what I think of their plans and projects.	2.64	2.36	0.09
The municipality needs to reserve more money for citizen involvement.	3.04	2.58	0.01
I' am happy with the projects of my municipality	3.60	3.34	0.161
On a scale from 1 to 10, how content are you with your municipality?	6.28	6.58	0.35

Enquête Burger Participatie in Gefuseerde Gemeenten

Hollands Kroon, 2017.

Deze enquête is bedoeld om inzicht te krijgen in de betrokkenheid van burgers in de gemeente Hollands Kroon. Het onderzoek is gericht op verschillen tussen gefuseerde en niet-gefuseerde gemeenten. De enquête zal anoniem zijn en uw antwoorden worden uitsluitend gebruikt voor dit specifieke onderzoek. Alvast bedankt voor uw medewerking.

Geslacht: m / v

Leeftijd: _____

Woonplaats: _____

1. Hoeveel jaar schat u dat u al in deze plaats woont?

2. Op een schaal van 1 tot 10, hoe tevreden bent u over uw huidige gemeente?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Heeft u zich in de afgelopen 5 jaar ingezet voor een burger initiatief?

Ja / Nee

4. Woonde u al in deze gemeente toen deze werd gefuseerd tot gemeente Hollands Kroon?

Ja / Nee (Bij ja, ga door naar vraag 5, bij nee, ga door naar vraag 9)

5. Heeft u zich voor de fusering zich een keer ingezet voor een burger initiatief?

Ja / Nee

6. In hoeverre heeft veranderingen gemerkt sinds het samengaan van de gemeenten? Dit kan zowel op beleidsniveau als op lokaal niveau in uw buurt zijn.

a. niet b. een paar c. veel d. heel veel

7. In hoeverre waren deze veranderingen positief voor burger initiatieven?

a. geen van allen positief b. soms wel, soms niet c. overwegend positief d. allen positief

8. Kunt u deze verandering(en) omschrijven?

9. Heeft u in de afgelopen vijf jaar in deze gemeente plannen of voorstellen bij de gemeente ingediend? Zo ja, met betrekking tot wat?

Nee / Ja, namelijk: a. omtrent mijn woning / grondgebied

b. omtrent mijn buurt / wijk

c. omtrent mijn woonplaats

d. omtrent mijn gemeente

Hieronder volgen een aantal stellingen, zou u voor elke stelling willen aangeven in hoeverre deze met uw situatie overeenkomt of in hoeverre u het met de stelling eens of oneens bent. Onderaan volgt eventuele ruimte voor opmerkingen.

1. Ik heb in de afgelopen vijf jaar meegedaan aan een burgerinitiatief, bijvoorbeeld een idee voor extra speeltuinen, een protest tegen een sloop, of een nieuwe invulling van een leegstaand gebouw/gebied.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

2. Er vinden veel burgerinitiatieven plaats in mijn gemeente.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

3. Mijn gemeente geeft veel aandacht aan burgerinitiatieven.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

4. De rol en invloed van de burger is toegenomen sinds de fusering van mijn gemeente in 2012.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

5. De gemeente toont sinds de fusering meer interesse in de meningen en ideeën van burgers.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

6. De gemeente biedt genoeg mogelijkheden voor burgers om hun mening te ventileren.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

7. Ik zou meer bijeenkomsten voor burgers willen waarbij gemeentepannen worden toegelicht.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

8. De servicepunten die de gemeente momenteel heeft zijn niet toereikend voor de vraag van de burgers.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

9. De veranderingen in regels en wetten sinds de fusie zorgen er voor dat het moeilijker wordt voor burger initiatieven te starten.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

10. De gemeente vraagt mij regelmatig wat ik vind van de gemeente en projecten in de buurt.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

11. De informatievoorziening van de gemeente is niet voldoende en de gemeente moet er meer aan doen haar burgers te informeren over de gang van zaken.

- a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

12. De fysieke afstand tot gemeente is te groot, er moet een gemeentepunt dichterbij komen.

- a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

13. De gemeente moet meer geld vrijmaken voor lokale burgerinitiatieven.

- a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

14. Ik ben over het algemeen tevreden met de projecten die de gemeente doet of laat uitvoeren.

- a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

Eventuele opmerkingen / toevoegingen:

Enquête Burger Participatie in Gefuseerde Gemeenten

Zuidhorn, 2017.

Deze enquête is bedoeld om inzicht te krijgen in de betrokkenheid van burgers in de gemeente Zuidhorn. Het onderzoek is gericht op verschillen tussen gefuseerde en niet-gefuseerde gemeenten. De enquête zal anoniem zijn en uw antwoorden worden uitsluitend gebruikt voor dit specifieke onderzoek. Alvast bedankt voor uw medewerking.

Geslacht: m / v

Leeftijd: _____

Woonplaats: _____

1. Hoeveel jaar schat u dat u al in deze plaats woont?

2. Op een schaal van 1 tot 10, hoe tevreden bent u over uw huidige gemeente?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Weet u dat er een voorstel ligt om de gemeente Zuidhorn met drie andere gemeenten in 2019 te fuseren tot één grote gemeente?

Ja / Nee

4. Wat is uw standpunt wat betreft deze mogelijke fusering?

Voor fuseren / Tegen fuseren

5. In hoeverre denkt u veranderingen te gaan merken na het samengaan van de gemeenten? Dit kan zowel op beleidsniveau als op lokaal niveau in uw buurt zijn.

a. niet b. een paar c. veel d. heel veel (*Indien aangegeven "niet" ga verder bij vraag 9*)

6. In hoeverre denkt u dat deze veranderingen positief zullen zijn?

a. geen van allen positief b. soms wel, soms niet c. overwegend positief d. allen positief

7. Welke veranderingen denkt u dat er zullen plaatsvinden?

8. Heeft u in de afgelopen vijf jaar in deze gemeente plannen of voorstellen bij de gemeente ingediend? Zo ja, met betrekking tot wat?

Nee / Ja, namelijk: a. omtrent mijn woning / grondgebied
 b. omtrent mijn buurt / wijk
 c. omtrent mijn woonplaats
 d. omtrent mijn gemeente

Hieronder volgen een aantal stellingen, zou u voor elke stelling willen aangeven in hoeverre deze met uw situatie overeenkomt of in hoeverre u het met de stelling eens of oneens bent. Onderaan volgt eventuele ruimte voor opmerkingen.

1. Ik heb in de afgelopen vijf jaar meegedaan aan een burgerinitiatief, bijvoorbeeld een idee voor extra speeltuinen, een protest tegen een sloop, of een nieuwe invulling van een leegstaand gebouw/gebied.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

2. Er vinden veel burgerinitiatieven plaats in mijn gemeente.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

3. Mijn gemeente geeft veel aandacht aan burgerinitiatieven.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

4. Ik verwacht dat de rol en invloed van de burger zal toenemen na de fusering van mijn gemeente.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

5. Ik verwacht dat de gemeente na de fusering meer interesse zal hebben in de meningen en ideeën van burgers.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

6. De gemeente biedt momenteel genoeg mogelijkheden voor burgers om hun mening te ventileren.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

7. Ik verwacht dat de gemeente ook na de fusering genoeg mogelijkheden zal blijven bieden.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

8. Ik zou meer bijeenkomsten voor burgers willen waarbij gemeentepannen worden toegelicht.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

9. De gemeente vraagt mij regelmatig wat ik vind van de gemeente en projecten in de buurt?

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

10. De informatievoorziening van de gemeente is niet voldoende en de gemeente moet er meer aan doen haar burgers te informeren over de gang van zaken.

a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

11. De fysieke afstand tot gemeente is te groot, er moet een gemeentepunt dichterbij komen.

- a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

12. De gemeente moet meer geld vrijmaken voor lokale burgerinitiatieven.

- a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

13. Ik ben over het algemeen tevreden met de projecten die de gemeente doet of laat uitvoeren.

- a. Helemaal oneens b. Oneens c. Neutraal d. Eens e. Helemaal eens

Eventuele opmerkingen / toevoegingen:
