Preventing lock-in situations in citizens-initiated infrastructure projects

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Abstract

Bottom-up initiatives are on the rise and the participation society is highly supported by governmental institutions. Successful examples of citizens' initiatives are often discussed in literature and used to promote community-led practices in rural depopulating areas. This focus results in a bias towards useful practices. Understanding the conditions of challenging initiatives can be of great use for learning more about the support of initiatives. In the village of Holwerd the citizens want to create a dike breach to increase the livability and attractiveness. This thesis will elaborate on preventing lock-in situations and presents recommendations to deal with challenging citizens' initiatives. A single case study of Holwerd aan Zee was carried out to research how theory and practice are interacting in the institutional processes. Combining literature review with semi-structured interviews, will provide in-depth insights in the way challenging citizens' initiatives are dealt with. Results obtained highlight that literature lacks in understanding of challenging citizens' initiatives. Interesting perspectives on how to deal with such initiatives were found in the qualitative research, yet this remains a tailor-made process that varies across other depopulating rural areas. Three recommendations for Dutch municipalities are provided: 1) involve relevant expertise, citizens may not have all the in-depth knowledge; 2) communication is key, direct collaboration between the citizens and institutions will benefit the process; and finally, 3) stay open for alternatives, citizens' initiatives can open doors to other development opportunities in the region. These recommendations will help other rural municipalities in preventing lock-in situations in challenging citizens' initiatives.

Keywords: *Citizens' initiatives, Depopulating rural areas, Participation society, Collaborative Planning, Single case-study*

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List of abbreviations

HaZ – Holwerd aan Zee
EGT – Evolutionary Governance Theory

Justification images

Front picture: Holwerd aan Zee project via:
https://www.holwerdaanzee.nl/over-haz/project/

Chapter 1 | Introduction

1.1 Background

The population of several regions in the Netherlands is declining, and this process is nothing new. In 1996 the Dutch Demographic Society organized a convention on population decline (Dykstra & Van Wissen, 1996). After a decade, researchers warned policy makers that rural populations in the Netherlands were about to decrease substantially (Derks et al., 2006). This warning led Van Dam et al. (2006) to write a report about the chain of circumstances of population decline in The Netherlands. The report stated that the consequences of the decline was not as great as in other countries. However, they also revealed that the population decline could directly affect the housing market, quality of the living environment, and the availability of facilities and services. North-Netherlands is one of the peripherally located regions. This region also has the lowest residential density of the Netherlands and therefore the population decline becomes a rural affair, visible in figure 1 (Rijksoverheid et al., 2012).

Shrinkage areas

1. Noardeast-Fryslân
2. Het Hogeland
3. Eemsdelta
4. Oost-Groningen
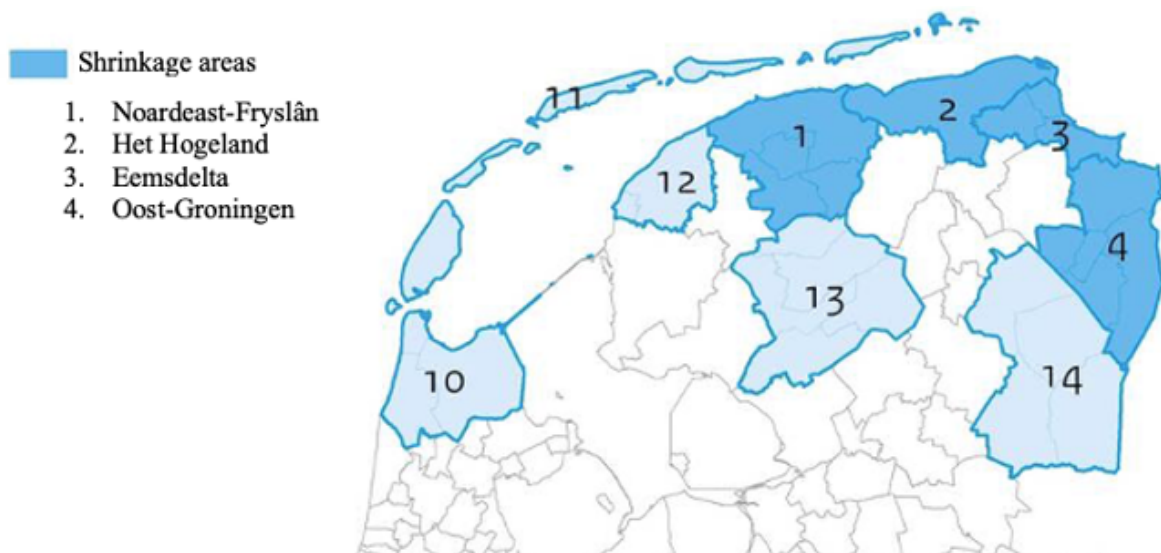
Figure 1: Overview of shrinkage areas in North Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2019)

Citizens' initiatives are often seen as a potential way of dealing with the disappearance of public services in rural areas, where facilities and amenities are under particular pressure (Meerstra-de Haan, 2020; Shucksmith et al., 2006; Thiede et al., 2017). Literature has proven the benefits of citizens' initiatives by showing how the eagerness to do something can lead to community empowerment and possibly provide opportunities to public service delivery (Bailey and Pill, 2015; Sellick, 2014; Vermeij, 2015; Meerstra-de Haan, 2020).

In 2013 the 'participation society' was officially introduced (Central Government, 2013) and has developed steadily ever since. Citizens have been requested and offered a chance to be responsible for their own physical living environment (De Haan, 2019). Entailing more active citizen participation, suggests a change in role patterns, responsibilities, and power relations for both citizens and governments. This changing context leads to greater empowerment of

citizens because they are having more say over their living environment. The citizens have gained the 'right to challenge' with the belief of better being able to provide a service compared to a government institution (de Haan, 2019; Steiner and Farmer, 2018). In the participation society, citizens' initiatives are a particular form of bottom-up movement in which individuals account for the opportunity to take the lead in managing their living environment (de Haan, 2019). While numerous advantages of public participation in planning and decision-making can be named, there are also disadvantages. It can be a time-consuming process and sometimes expensive. It requires effort, budget and resources, expertise, skills and commitment of organisations and people involved (Steen and Nauta, 2020). Public participation is adding viewpoints which can increase the complexity of projects and governmental institutions have less control (ibid.). Another disadvantage is that it's hard to manage expectations of parties and people involved, if organisations do not have enough capacity to serve the initiative it can result in loss of faith in the agency (Wouters, et al., 2011).

In recent decades, numerous plans and visions have been developed for the municipality of Noardeast Fryslân by various governments to lift the region out of impoverishment. However, these actions did not result in a turnover in the migration flow. The number of inhabitants of Holwerd has shrunk from 2,000 to less than 1,600 and the decline is continuing. To stop this negative development, residents of Holwerd have set up a foundation in 2013. This foundation, consisting of members of village interest and (agricultural) village entrepreneurs, has extracted all the good elements from all those plans and visions, resulting in the Holwerd aan Zee (HaZ) plan. The plan is to force a breach in the seawall in order to restore the connection between the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site and the hinterland. This not only represents an economic opportunity for the village and the entire region, but also an ecological opportunity for the salt marshes, wading birds, migratory fish and all other species that benefit from more variation in the salt marshes, brackish zones, and a natural freshwater system.

1.2 Research statement

This study takes citizens' initiatives as a central concept and aims to provide governmental institutions of Dutch rural areas with lessons on how to prevent lock-in situations in citizens' initiatives to increase the livability and attraction to rural depopulation areas. This thesis uses a single-case study research to investigate a challenging citizens' initiative which has a high spatial and economic impact and where the start-up phase already takes 10 years, namely, the project Holwerd aan Zee. This approach provides knowledge on the relation between challenging citizens' initiatives and the arrangements of governmental institutions and consequently provide insights for municipalities on how to prevent lock-in situations in citizen-initiated projects. Findings of the research are valuable for other Dutch municipalities and provinces through provision of potentially meaningful guidelines.

According to the research aims, the main research question is formulated as: **Which institutional arrangements can be taken to support challenging citizens initiatives in**

depopulating rural areas? To answer this question, the following sub-questions are developed:

1. Can citizens' initiatives serve as the cure for population decline in rural areas?
2. What are the current Dutch planning strategies in dealing with bottom-up initiatives?
3. Which factors contribute to the success and failure of citizens' initiatives?
4. What is a good strategy to prevent a lock-in situation in a large citizens-initiated project?

1.3 Academic relevance

According to Boonstra (2016) rural community initiatives are often small-scale and characteristic for the community. Community shops and community gardens are examples of successful citizens' initiatives. These examples are often discussed in the media and used to promote community-led practices (Meerstra-de Haan, et al., 2020). This focus results in a bias towards useful practices and the processes and consequences of challenging citizens' initiatives is therefore lacking value. Understanding the conditions, factors and development phases of these initiatives can be of greater use for learning more about citizens' initiatives (Meerstra-de Haan, et al., 2020).

The first aim of this study, linked to the academic relevance of this research, is to better understand how to deal with citizens' initiatives, in municipalities with few resources, which have an enormous spatial impact and demand high funding to realize the project. Results of the case study can be valuable for governmental institutions to better understand how challenging citizens' initiatives can be approached and to learn from the process of initiatives in depopulating rural areas. These results can help the understanding and support of initiatives in other Dutch villages or regions which are also dealing with population decline. Depopulating rural areas are the leaders when it comes to the performance of citizens' initiatives (Rocak et al., 2016; Meijer, 2020). Examples of best practices are often discussed and reproduced but how to cope with less obvious and challenging initiatives? This thesis wants to highlight the opportunity and barriers of community-led practices and learn from the grey areas in the process of challenging citizens' initiatives.

1.4 Societal relevance

The second aim of this study, linked to the societal relevance of this research, is discovering the opportunities and barriers in coping with challenging citizens' initiatives and how this can be efficiently supported by government institutions. The policy in the Netherlands at this moment is highlighting the governmental support of citizens' initiatives. Expected results for planning practice are finding institutional arrangements to support challenging citizens initiatives in depopulating rural areas. This is needed since initiatives are a tool for citizens to organize themselves and set up activities that otherwise would not take place but are nevertheless important to them. The government is supporting the rise of the participation society and should therefore also be able to assist and deal with challenging initiatives. The

recommendations highlighted in the last part of the thesis specifically aim at guiding the process of the project Holwerd aan Zee and thereby provide useful information with concrete suggestions for planning practitioners in Holwerd and in comparable challenging circumstances.

1.5 Reading guide

This master thesis consists of five chapters. It has the following structure: Chapter 1 gives an introduction of the research background and describes the research statement, the academic relevance and the societal relevance. In Chapter 2 the relevant theories and concepts related to the rural depopulating landscape and citizens' initiatives are described. The conceptual model is presented at the end of this chapter. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including the research design, data collection and analysis and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the case study on the project of Holwerd aan Zee and shows the findings. In chapter 5 answers to the research questions and recommendations will be given. This chapter also contains the reflection of the research.

Chapter 2 | Theoretical framework

This chapter explores the key concepts of this research, namely citizens' initiatives and depopulating rural areas. These concepts will be addressed in combination with lock-in situations in large infrastructure projects and with the so-called 'grey area' in academic literature of failed citizen's initiatives. First, both concepts are elaborated individually, and clear definitions are given. Then the relationship between citizens' initiatives and depopulating rural areas is given. Furthermore, an analysis will be made of failed citizens' initiatives. To close this chapter, the key concepts including their relations are provided in a conceptual model.

2.1 Understanding the rural depopulating landscape

2.1.1 Rural decline – insights in rural shrinking areas

Most shrinking regions in the Netherlands have a rural character (Bock et al., 2019). This applies not only to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, North-Friesland and the Achterhoek, but also to parts of Limburg, Drenthe and Overijssel. The areas are – by Dutch standards at least – peripheral, sparsely populated and have a relatively large amount of open space. The issues that the so-called peripheral land is struggling with resemble those that have been playing out in rural areas for some time (Meier et al., 2015):

-   The migration of young people to the city
-   Concerns about a declining level of facilities
-   Problems in agriculture

The issues of rural shrinking regions are left behind in Dutch politics due to the growing attention for the major 'social challenges' of our time. Climate, energy, the labour market and healthcare are particularly high on the policy agenda. Little attention is paid to the contribution that shrinking rural areas could play in tackling these issues (Akkoyunlu, 2015; Meier et al., 2015; Bock et al., 2019). The definition for rural areas of CBS (2019) is used for this research, 'rural areas consist of open countryside with population densities of less than 500 addresses per square kilometre and places with fewer than 2500 people'.

City and rural at regional level

The 21st century is already known as 'the century of the city'. There is urbanization worldwide. As a result, politicians and the media pay a lot of attention to cities and their dynamics. At the same time, there is also a lot going on in the rural: in addition to shrinkage, there is also an energy transition, changes in agriculture, and increasing concerns about quality of life and accessibility (Bock, 2018). But how do city and country differ from each other? In the Dutch dictionary 'Dikke Van Dale', the rural is described as 'the open field, the land outside the cities that is less densely populated'. On the one hand, it concerns landscape aspects: the rural as a vast space outside the city, a rural environment. On the other hand, population density plays a

role: you will find relatively fewer people there than in the city. As useful as it may be, the description remains general. In recent years, the city-versus-country-thinking for policymakers no longer does justice to reality – there is more focus on 'coinciding tasks in the region' (Rli, 2019). Moreover: in the Netherlands the rural is mentally urbanized, while the city is becoming more rural thanks to sustainability (think of urban farming). It is important to look beyond the clichés, especially in view of the major societal challenges. What does the shrinking rural area have to offer? The next 2 themes will be addressed:

1. Housing and quality of life
2. Economy and labour market

Housing and quality of life

Many people involuntarily think of empty villages, boarded up houses and farmers looking for a partner when they hear the term 'shrink region' or rural decline. Cities are in demand, is the prevailing discourse. Young people would move all together from the rural to the city, while those who stayed behind would have to watch with sorrow as their living environment deteriorates. The media continues to emphasize that the gap between urban and rural areas is increasing (Bock et al., 2019). This standard image ('the city is growing, and the rural is shrinking') – in the Netherlands at least – requires nuance. In addition to 'adventurous leavers', there are also 'rooted stayers'; young people who continue to live in the village where they grew up – provided they can find a suitable home (Haartsen, 2013). At the same time, villages themselves sometimes contribute to the image that they are shrinking at the expense of the city (Bock et al., 2019; Piro, 2016). Take the fuss about the disappearance of shops, ATMs, and letterboxes. But the loss of these facilities has little to do with population decline. Rather, it is a signal of the growing convergence between urban and rural areas: the digital world (online shopping, internet banking, mobile communication) is penetrating everywhere. In our country, remote villages also have access to the global village: thanks to the ICT revolution, the world itself has become a village (Bock et al., 2019).

More important than population decline and concerns about the level of facilities in rural shrinking areas are aging and the vacant agricultural buildings (Trendbureau Overijssel, 2019). The percentage of over-85s in particular is steadily increasing in these areas. Problems arise because many people want to continue living in their own house and village for as long as possible. This makes the relationship between housing and care more important. The fact that more and more farmers are ceasing their business also has major consequences for the living environment.

Economy and labour market

How do residents in rural shrinking regions earn their living? Many city dwellers will say: they are rural areas, so agriculture must be a major employer. The agricultural sector is a major user of land and therefore clearly visible in the landscape. But in terms of employment, agriculture lags far behind other sectors. Just like in the city, industry and especially services (retail, healthcare, catering) are important employers in rural areas (Bock, et al., 2019). Most rural people simply work at a company, in the office or in care, in their own municipality or in a city further away. The rural area itself is also a breeding ground for industry (Hospers, 2018). We

find a relatively large number of companies in the field of recreation and tourism, the transport and construction sector and cottage industries (creative companies that operate from home, such as consultants, architects, and internet specialists). There are also traditionally a lot of specialized companies in the food and manufacturing industry located in the rural areas that are active far beyond the national borders. Take the municipality of Bronckhorst in the Achterhoek, for example: we find the companies Aviko (a potato processor), PB International (legionella filters) and Reiger Suspension (shock absorbers) there. In Germany, such companies are known as hidden champions. Just like our eastern neighbors, the lack of accessibility by road and a shortage of qualified workers creates barriers for the rural economy. Good connections between city and country are crucial, while the call for personnel is becoming louder due to the aging population and a growing number of specific vacancies (Bock, et al., 2019).

2.1.2 Rural revival – opportunities for rural shrinking areas

In society, media and policy, urban and rural areas are still often seen as opposites (Bock, et al., 2019). However, they should be seen as complementary parts of the national and regional economy (Schaeffer, et al., 2014; Akkoyunlu, 2015; Meier et al., 2015; Bock et al., 2019). Familiarity with only the urban or only the rural limits understanding of the whole, 'an entire economic system cannot be understood unless there is reliable knowledge about both rural and urban elements, including their interactions' (Castle, Wu, & Weber, 2011, p. 179). One of the consequences of this discussion is that neighboring urban and rural municipalities largely go their own way. In this chapter, we have argued that the qualities of rural shrinking regions lend themselves well in theory to solving the major social challenges of our time, such as climate change and an aging population. The rural area, for example, appears to be of value for urban climate adaptation, while transport for the elderly to nearby cities can contribute to maintaining quality of life in rural areas. It is important to connect with the living environment of residents. This means that when identifying city-land connections in rural shrinking regions, the daily urban system – the region of daily life, or the regional level – is an obvious scale (Bock, et al., 2019). A learning point from the process is that most administrators still do not know each other enough to immediately arrive at promising projects – they must first gain insight into each other's living environment and look behind the scenes. It always starts with acquaintance, dialogue, and awareness (ibid.).

2.2 Planning strategies in dealing with population decline

Big cities draw more attention in the shrinking cities debate, while the impact of shrinkage in small villages may be often relatively larger (Wiechmann and Bontje, 2015). Europe generally concentrated investments in bigger cities, particularly national capitals, but towns and smaller villages in rural regions managed to keep a stable economic base. After the 1990s the impact of the post-socialist transformation in Europe was particularly large in the towns, smaller villages and rural peripheral areas that often lost their economic future perspective (Kabisch et al., 2006; Steinfuhrer and Haase, 2007). However, recent research shows that citizen initiatives

are arising and can be able to cope with economic and demographic decline. Wiechmann and Bontje (2015) describe the shift in planning strategies from 'passive local destinations' of high-level administrative strategies to 'pro-active localities' making effective use of their endogenous resources. The local social capital is highlighted as an important driver of ways for towns and small villages to put a stop on a vicious circle of decline.

There is still a lack of coherent strategies in the Netherlands in dealing with population decline. This is caused by two major factors: the lack of transparency and lack of understanding of best practice (Syssner, 2016). Local governments should demonstrate descriptions of how they want to deal with the challenges resulting from demographic decline. As a result, transparency could be improved; citizens and researchers would have an opportunity to grasp the conflict of interest in suggested policies. Systematic descriptions can help to differentiate between policies supported by separate political actors and can serve as tools for learning (ibid.). Local governments could come forward as role models in the efforts to define strategies for dealing with population decline. In general, the capacity of small and shrinking municipalities to develop strategies is relatively low (Hospers and Reverda, 2015). These municipalities do not have the same resources to undertake investigations as bigger and growing municipalities (Syssner, 2016). This results in contradictory circumstances, municipalities that have a great need to develop strategies to cope with population decline are the ones with the least resources and capacity available for developing the strategies (Grossman et al., 2013). The limited capacity of shrinking municipalities to develop consistent strategies on highly complex issues must be complemented with additional resources. Syssner (2016) highlights that regional and national actors might have a critical role in terms of supporting local knowledge and policy development.

2.2.1 Path-, inter- and goal dependencies

The institutional capacity of a community is an important factor in dealing with population decline (van Assche et al., 2019). This capacity is formed by the role of governments, the time horizons of governance systems, the ability to imagine alternative futures and the availability of particular land use instruments (ibid). The Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) will support us to gain better understanding of the importance of these different factors on the selection of strategies and land use instruments. EGT can be according to van Assche et al., (2014) described as a theoretical vision which focuses on the ways in which the different essentials of a governance system, for example actors, institutions, and discourses, co-evolve, shape change processes and the possibilities and limits to planning and steering. The evolutionary vision is relevant because current forms of governance influence issues which are framed as significant problems, how these problems are understood and how responses are defined. At the same time, forms of governance are dynamic due to the consequences of ongoing social dynamics, including the discussions on problems and solutions and the decisions that follow from these discussions (Beunen et al., 2020). A central focus in EGT is that decision-making processes are marked by several dependencies, such as path-, inter- and goal- dependencies, that shape the abilities as well as limits to planned interventions. These dependencies and their influence on governance help identifying an answer why certain

strategies are chosen. It also explains how the selection of strategies and instruments influences the further development of governance.

Path dependency can be described as a concept which addresses how traditions from the past influence current decision-making processes and as a consequence shape particular development paths (Pierson, 2000). Literature on path dependency acknowledges that institutional arrangements or the existence of powerful actors reduce the options for change (Tonts et al., 2014).

The actions of one actor which depend on those of other actors are called interdependencies (Alexander, 2001). The interdependencies have an influence on how actors can and will act, the ways of cooperation, and how actors handle conflicting ideas or interests. The main objective to overcome conflicts is trust, this is the basis for a smooth process between interdependent actors (de Vries et al., 2014). Looking at the planning context, interdependencies are thus able to shape roles and competences of governmental actors and their relationship with various agencies, businesses, and citizens.

Goal dependency can be understood as the influence of shared ideas about the future on decision-making (van Assche et al., 2014). Ideas on the intensity and impact of population decline can form powerful attractors that pull decisions in a specific direction. The explanation why certain decisions are preferred over others can also be based on other ideas on the future of a region, these ideas are integrated in visions, plans, norms, or other institutions and can therefore act as a point of reference (Beunen et al., 2020). The focus in goal dependencies is not necessarily on positive images about the future, negative images can be included as well. The analysis of the three different dependencies can help to verify the selection of planning strategies and land use instruments at a certain moment in time. This process helps to unfold the temporal dimension of governance in which decisions made earlier can have an influence on the path that develops afterwards. Thus, decisions made earlier can have an influence on the dependencies and they can create new ones. After choosing a particular strategy, it could lead to new institutions, to changing relations between actors involved, and it can have a consequence for discourses on population decline and spatial planning (ibid). We can hereby conclude that the selection and use of strategies is part of a governance direction which is a driver and at the same time an outcome of the selected strategies.

2.3 Citizens' initiatives in depopulating areas

Citizens' initiatives are nothing new in the planning arena. Unified action in communities with a shared purpose date far back in history (De Moor, 2008). Financial crises, market failures and downsizing of welfare states are examples of circumstances which have triggered more interest in the topic of citizens' participation. Additionally, citizens are asked to initiate or even take over the responsibilities from the local and regional governments (Tonkens, 2006). This shift in organizational focus is called a 'localism agenda', participation at the local level has gotten rising attention (Jones and Ormston, 2014; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008). The expectation behind this shift is that more active participation of citizens will have a positive effect on the local public domain, this trend is called a 'participation society' which has been officially introduced in 2013 (Central Government, 2013; Movisie, 2017). Citizens get the

opportunity to be more in charge of their own living environment, and at the same time being partly responsible for domains such as health, digitalization, social wellbeing, and public transport. This transition calls for a change in roles and patterns, authority measures and power relations for citizens and governments. Citizens receive greater empowerment because they are having more say over their living environments and have gained the 'right to challenge', since they should be able to provide a better service compared to a government institution (Espejo and Bendek, 2011; Jones and Ormston, 2014; Steiner and Farmer, 2017; Verhoeven and Tonkens, 2013 and de Haan, 2019). Citizens' initiatives are a form of bottom-up movement within the participation society, the individuals get the opportunity to take the lead in their living environments (de Haan, 2019). The working definition of citizens' initiatives; 'formally or informally organized groups of citizens' who are active in and contribute to the public domain' will be used (de Haan, et al., 2017a; de Haan, et al., 2017b).

This thesis focuses on citizens initiatives in rural areas. Citizens' initiatives can differ from region to region, and active participation is dependent on different processes and expectations in rural areas and urban areas (Gieling and Haartsen, 2017; van Houwelingen et al., 2014; Syssner and Meijer, 2017). In rural areas it becomes visible that there are more, in comparison with urban dwellers, volunteers and in general there is more contact between neighbors (Steenbekkers et al., 2006). Additionally, active participation is most often urgent in rural areas since these areas can face depopulation, ageing, digital exclusion, and unemployment for example (Gieling and Haartsen, 2017; Syssner and Meijer, 2017). These shifts in society have a stronger impact on rural communities compared to urban areas (Copus et al., 2011; Salemink, 2016; Skerratt, 2010; Steiner and Atterton, 2014; Woods, 2006). Syssner and Meijer (2017) found evidence that communities of rural areas more frequently take over tasks of former local government than urban settings do.

De Haan (2019) highlights three types of citizens' initiatives that provide services and facilities. The first type of citizens' initiatives is about which citizens have taken advantage of the opportunity to provide a service which is lacking or has disappeared. The maintenance of public green spaces, like parks, is an example of such an initiative (Sellick, 2014). A second type of initiative is taking over current facilities or services that are not government-initiated. An example is the preservation of a village shop (Calderwoord and Davies, 2018; Meijer, 2018). The final type of citizens' initiative includes the supply of a new type of service or facility. Something which has not been in the region before like a small restaurant or sustainable energy are examples of the third type of initiatives. Citizen participation in the above-mentioned types of service delivery is seen as essential for keeping the service to local needs, it could in the end also lead to higher quality services (Bock, 2016; Boonstra and Boelens, 2011; Healey, 2015). Therefore, it can be stated that citizens' initiatives have the ability to improve the quality of life and the livability of rural communities to be retained or enriched (Syssner and Meijer, 2017). Livability is in this case defined as the extent to which the living environment is matched with the needs and desires of the citizens (Leidelmeijer and van Kamp, 2003). Nevertheless, the direct relationship between participation and livability, and between the availability of services and livability is an ambitious assignment to demonstrate (Gieling, 2018). However,

the importance of meeting, collaborating, and expanding contacts of rural citizens to engage and reinforce a sense of community and livability seems generally agreed upon.

The participation society in connection with the arrangement of services in rural areas has started debates around three central issues: democracy, accessibility, and continuity. Three models of democracy can be noted according to Edelenbos et al. (2017). The first one is representative democracy; this refers to the classical welfare state model. The classical model is based on the assertion of the representativeness of citizens, given that the elections for governments happen through voting. The second form is participatory democracy, it entails the involved participation of inhabitants in decision making, including policy formulation. The third and final form is the self-organizing democracy. This form also entails the involved participation of inhabitants, however inhabitants have now also the opportunity to implement their own ideas and plans. In other words, inhabitants do not fully rely on the government's terms. Looking at the citizens' initiatives within the participation society in this way it would seem to suit best with the self-organizing democracy (Tonkens and Verhoeven, 2018). Not all communities are committed to this type of participation (Salemink, 2016; Skerratt and Steiner, 2013). There are several communities that lack the capacity or eagerness to start citizens' initiatives, with a change of growing imbalance in levels of service supply.

There could be differences as well in the accessibility of services emerging from actual differences between communities and if they in any case have developed citizens' initiatives. Skerratt (2010, p.1737) presented how 'hot spots', communities with services and facilities, and 'not spots', communities without these services and facilities can appear in rural areas when service supply is dependent on citizen participation, this could be in the form of citizens' initiatives. Under these circumstances rural regions can increase in inequality, exclusion from services and eventually uneven rural development (Ashmore et al., 2014; Salemink, 2016).

The final central issue which is being discussed is continuity. Continuity has a key role in the connection to the capability of citizens' initiatives to serve as an option for otherwise disappearing services or facilities, even when these services were previously state led. Until now, it remains unclear whether or not citizens' initiatives can function as a long-term alternative in the extent of service provision (de Haan, 2019).

The stability of citizens' initiatives can be separated at different levels: participant, group, and initiative (de Haan, 2019). At the participant level, members of an initiative can continue or stop their activities. This can happen for example because they have other priorities at that time or are experiencing volunteer burnout (Allen and Mueller, 2013; Salemink, 2016). The stability of citizens' initiatives at the group level is becoming visible when all members of a group cooperate for the initiative to be maintained. Furthermore, social capital, leadership and decision-making skills have a high contribution to the continuity (Brandsen and Helderman, 2012; Jicha et al., 2011; Lambru and Petrescu, 2016; Liu and Besser, 2003). The participation of group members can change along the process, but this does not have to result in a negative impact on the initiative. The stability of the levels above is dependent on the work of individual members of the initiatives. The insights collected into the stability of citizens' initiatives and their impact in rural service provision make an important contribution to the policy and practice, taking in consideration the possible risks resulting from collaboration in citizens'

initiatives. Examples of these risks are the before mentioned volunteer burnout (Allen and Mueller, 2013; Salemink, 2016), and accountability (David et al., 2013; Flinders and Moon, 2011; Sellick 2014), but also the exclusion of individuals which are not part of the initiatives (Ashmore et al., 2014; Salemink, 2016; Skerratt, 2010).

Changes in role patterns and power relations between government institutions and citizens are necessary when citizens are willing to take over the responsibility for their living environment by providing services (van Houwelingen et al., 2014; Sellick, 2014), for example to release the burdens of their previous responsibilities. The relationship between governments and citizens' initiatives is an important factor, especially in considering the changing responsibilities, role patterns and power relations. Generally, citizens' initiatives rely, to a large extent, on financing or other forms of support provided by governments (Nederhand et al., 2016). To get these finances or other assets the initiatives need to meet the specific requirements of governments. This means that citizens have to take full responsibility for their initiative while they need, at the same time, to match the requirements of local and regional governments. According to research, citizens' initiatives which are at the same level of existing government policies have a greater chance to be successful (Li et al., 2016). However, included in this level is the freedom of the initiatives to chase their own course of action. This entails that even when the responsibilities have changed and shifted, the dependence on governments can still be pursued. Resulting in a complicated relationship between governments and citizens' initiatives. Meijer (2016) defines this situation as 'an institutional misfit in which required role changes associated with the 'participation society' have not yet been into practice.' Accordingly, it can be stated that there is a lot of work left to achieve the realization of a society in which citizens have more responsibility over their own living environments (Movisie, 2017).

2.4 Failed and challenging citizens' initiatives

Case studies of citizens' initiatives have been increasing in the last couple of years, in community and rural development research (Boonstra, 2016; Li et al., 2017). But also, in the respect of planning practice and public administrations a rise in interest in the participation society becomes visible (Bisschops and Beunen, 2018). In depopulating rural areas responsibilities are distributed to the level of the inhabitants, since governmental plan-making is most often too expensive and not profitable (Meijer and van der Krabben, 2018). In these areas the competency of communities in developing initiatives, while dealing with population decline and trying to develop the area is admired (Feldhoff, 2013; Hospers, 2014). Nonetheless, what most of these case studies are sharing is a focus on positive experiences and successful initiatives, this leads to a bias in research (Talò et al., 2014; Wandersman, 2009). Best practices are frequently analyzed and reproduced (Meijer, 2020). These cases are useful; however, they do not completely include the complexity of planning or the establishment of a citizen initiative. It happens regularly that initiatives do not go according to plan, in such situations simplified best practices do not support challenging citizen's initiatives (Scott and Teasdale, 2012).

According to Vettoretto (2009) promoting good practices in citizen's initiatives is a complex approach. Allowing other rural areas in similar situations to learn from success and assisting in policy transfer is resulting in generalizing success and creates a universal story of how bottom-up planning should be done. Vettoretto (2009) analyzes the usage of best practices in the following way: "As a result, a good practice is cleansed of the political dimension of policymaking and of the historically defined local social and cultural differences. In the repertoires, local actions do not seem associated with any significant conflict, doubts regarding principles or uncertainties. Such issues may be present in interactive processes of confrontation and production, but they disappear from formal representations" (Vettoretto, 2009, p. 1079). On the other side, there are also authors which state that citizens' initiatives and self-organizing communities are difficult to generalize from (Agger and Jensen, 2015; Shucksmith, 2010). Local social structures, networks of initiators, path dependencies and coincidental encounters form the basis of the planning process of these initiatives. This theory is supported by Boonstra (2016, p. 372) who describes citizens' initiatives as 'small, local, specific, and contextual'. Although there is a general agreement that citizens' initiatives are specific and contextual dependent, the production of best practices is still dominating in community development studies (de Haan et al., 2017a). Therefore, the analysis of challenging citizens' initiatives in their context, causes and consequences can raise awareness and boost our understandings of the complexity of these initiatives (Bisschops and Beunen, 2018; Meijer, 2020).

Even though we can learn a lot from challenging unsuccessful citizens' initiatives, it is hard to research these subjects since they are often difficult to approach and likely stay under the radar. Initiators of failed community initiatives are often afraid to be blamed and do not want to be associated with what went wrong in the processes (Meijer, 2020). In addition, most planning process are not linear and contain rough and smooth situations (Forester, 1993). When the project is finished people start to idealize the planning process. In this way, new narratives are formed which put a spotlight on the positive aspects rather than the negative experiences (Mellahi and Wilkinson, 2004). In literature and practice unsuccessful or challenging initiatives are inadequately represented since the outcome does not advertise the promising outcome of citizens' initiatives which the policymakers and advisers predicted (Scott and Teasdale, 2012).

Getting in depth insights of challenging and failing citizens' initiatives is unavoidably connected with understanding successes (Meijer, 2020). A theory or interpretation of failure of citizens' initiatives hardly exists. However, multiple authors have tried to find out what the indicators are of failure and success in a systematic way (Helmig et al., 2014; McConnell, 2010; Scott and Teasdale, 2012; Seibel, 1996; Meijer, 2020). Current literature on organizational failure of non-profit organizations and governments focuses on two directions: one perspective highlights the aspects of failure which are internal to organizations (Gillespie and Dietz, 2009); and the other perspective, the evolutionary understanding, highlights on the environmental dimension of failure and organizational flexibility (Scott and Teasdale, 2012). In the following section the combination of these two perspectives will be described, along with the implications which arise for studying failure at public level. Furthermore, a contrasting view on the understanding of failure and success will be provided.

For citizens' initiatives failure is not an easily defined status. For businesses for example organizational failure is most often characterized by financial loss or bankruptcy, these essential factors hardly exist for communities (Drucker, 2012). Failure and success of community initiatives is instead of economic indicators more often based on social indicators. These initiatives can be framed as successful when they have achieved their goals or have reached the right people. There are multiple dimensions of organizational failure and success for non-profit organizations (NPO's) (Helmig, et al., 2014), examples of this are a village board representing a community interest or a group of initiators. Dimensions of organizational failure can vary from financial performance to stakeholder involvement, survival, efficiency, and mission accomplishment. For stakeholder involvement satisfaction and reputation are key aspects and for efficiency productivity and operational performance are the main factors. Helmig, et al. (2014) states in their findings that organizational failure is still dominated by financial achievement and when an organization stops to exist. They also state that nonprofit does not define the success of such organizations, but goal achievement and other soft indicators are more suitable. According to Meijer (2020), checking the success and failure of NPO's and community initiatives is an ambiguous task.

Helmig et al (2014) came up with a model for a transparent understanding of success and failure (see Figure 2). This model has a focus on the transformation of resources. To reach ends, for example prevent decline, inputs must be converted into an output, i.e., the establishment of new facilities. Examples of certain inputs are various: subsidies or other financial resources, volunteers, adequate organizers for the purchase of new land. The transformation from inputs to an output is a critical dimension when measuring success. It occurs that inputs cannot be transformed, this could happen due to inefficiency, inadequate project plans or non-compliance with legal planning. In such a situation an organization can hardly create a successful outcome (Gunn et al., 2015).
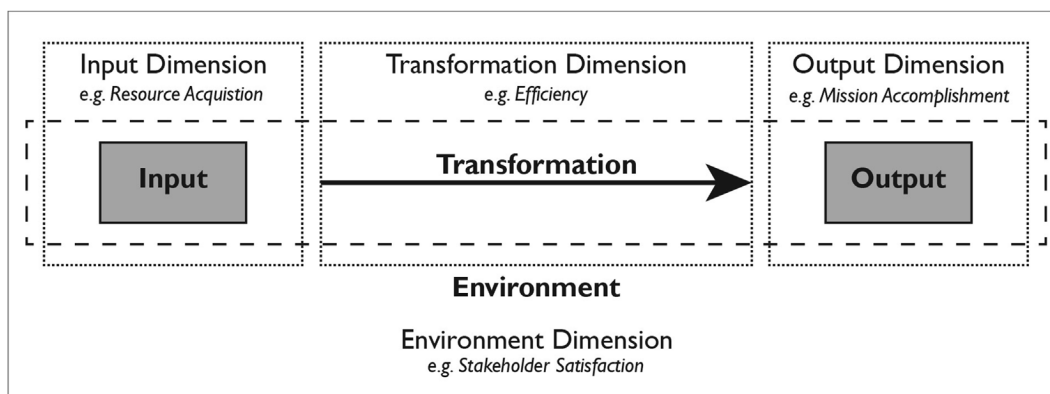
Figure 2: Dimensions of NPO success (Helmig et al., 2014)

The fourth dimension in the model is named as the 'environment'. The environment includes several factors, stakeholder satisfaction, legitimacy and public support are examples of this. This dimension is key in understanding community performance: most citizens of the community should support the ideas for an initiative. If that is not the case the initiative is bound to fail, even when there are adequate resources, efficient transformation, and achievement of the goals (Curry, 2012; Gkartzios and Norris, 2011). This model supports the

understanding of failure of organizations in an integrated way, instead of the problems of one-dimensional explanations like organizational death or financial performance. Even though the model gives a more in-depth and multidimensional understanding of organizational failure, it still sees success and failure as a linear and static process. The findings of this model are based on the actions of easy and clear-defined projects (Meijer, 2020). Additionally, NPO's are often 'communities of interest' instead of 'communities of place' (Helmig, et al., 2014; Meijer, 2020). Communities and non-profit organizations have a lot in common, and most of the time community organizations are NPO's. Almost all observed communities were characterized by formal, legal bodies such as a village organization (Meijer, 2020). Communities have a holistic character, unlike non-profit organizations, and the actions they do not completely have to be in line with statutes or mission statements. Additionally, communities are not formed by the projects they operate. Goodwin-Hawkins (2016), therefore, defines rural communities as social settings. The progressive interaction between inhabitants and their environment is central (Liepins, 2000). The ultimate bottom-line for failure, a so-called death community, is extremely exceptional. Contra wise, NPO's can reach this bottom-line when certain goals have been achieved or when financial problems occur. To reduce these weak points of the multidimensional model on failure, the next section will focus on a constructive view on success and failure.

McConnell (2010, 2015) did similar research as Helmig et al., 2014, discovering concrete failures and the distinction of single case studies. However, McConnell (2010) sees failure as a social construct, more than Helmig et al., (2014). Therefore, McConnell (2010) highlights the importance of governmental and policy failure. Communities and governments both have long time horizons, failure is often corresponding and dependent on 'how' and 'by whom' failure is recognized. McConnell (2010) has a focus on 4 different aspects when studying failure as a social construct:

1. Failure is relational – perception of failure is context dependent
2. A matter of degree – failure can be partial or complete
3. Time-dependent – at what moment is a failure seen as a failure
4. Requires someone to classify a failure as such

These aspects generate several implications when studying community failure. In the first aspect, failure is relational, it entails that the understanding of failure is always in relation to something. Examples are, extra time that was necessary to complete a project (and additionally the patience of the audience), the relation to an expected output or the acceptance of the ideas within the community and local government, in comparison; Helmig et al., 2014 describes this as the environmental dimension. A community initiative can be seen as a failure, success, or something in between dependent on the contextual circumstances. These circumstances can thus not always be influenced from the inside of the community.

The second aspect, failure is nearly always a matter of degree, needs a distinction between severable types of failure. Three types of failure are standing out, tolerable failure is also renamed as resilient success; a second-best option is being used. Conflicted failure means that the initiative is controversial, it could also be used as conflicted success. Finally, outright

failure means that goals are not achieved and that the support for the initiative is barely there or does not exist (McConnell, 2015).

The third aspect, the perception of failure is time-dependent, is referring to the time an initiative is measured. This time is all-decisive whether it can be classified as a failure or not. A community center which is not used can find a new destination after some time, overspending of the budget can become less of a problem when new pools of resources are open up or when the initiative results in increased social cohesion over time (Kay, 2017). Particularly with community initiatives the planning projects are often very adaptable. Opportunities for funding or vacant buildings come and go, just in such a way as every generation has its own wishes and needs (Meijer and Syssner, 2017).

The fourth aspect, requires someone to classify a failure as such, is being described by McConnel (2015, p. 222) as 'bound up with issues of politics and power, including contested views about its existence, and the power to produce an authoritative and accepted failure narrative'. Previous research stated that there are communities which fear power inequalities and exclusion as an aftermath of failed or challenging initiatives (Holman and Rydin, 2013; Walsh, et al., 2014; Meijer, 2020). Failure is a topic which is not easily classified from inside the community and is highly controversial. People outside the community often do not have all the information at their disposal and find it therefore hard to identify failed community initiatives (de Haan et al., 2017b). Contrarily, communities also label themselves as successful even when they are being inefficient and in financial debt (Seibel, 1996). Such organizations can be marked as successful failures, they just continue to exist for political reasons: 'Undertaking services of public interests' governments cannot or do not want to provide, many NPOs are financially supported by the state as long as demand exists for their services. As such, NPO survival is artificially constructed. This prevents [financial success] from being an objective criterion for NPO success' (Helmig et al., 2014, p. 1513). Generally, communities receive extra financial and political support for developing and maintaining their initiatives. Local governments, such as municipalities, often finance village boards, subsidize for individual projects, and grant funds regularly for the exploitation of community-owned meeting places (Meijer, 2020). Therefore, it can be stated that the success of community initiatives relies on the enthusiasm of governments to uphold community development and the construction is thus artificially (de Haan et al., 2017a; Meijer, 2020).

2.5 Conceptual model

The previous sections describe the key concepts which are central in this research, rural depopulation and citizens' initiatives in the context of preventing lock-in situations with institutional arrangements of governments in dealing with opportunities and barriers. The participation society is addressing the empowerment of citizens. But with large-scale bottom-up initiatives the control cannot fully be with the citizens since they might not have enough knowledge, facilities, and resources to realize the project. This results in a model connecting the main concepts of this research (see figure 3). The conceptual model functions as a backbone of the research to connect empirical findings to the theoretical framework. What can be drawn from the model is that rural depopulation is the point of departure in this research, which leads to challenging citizens' initiatives. This last concept is to be solved through highlighting the

opportunities and barriers which come along with such a project. From that point it can be visualized what a good strategy is to approach such an initiative. The ownership should not only be in the hands of the citizens' nor the municipality or other governmental institutions since there are too few resources available to set up a large-scale project. Rather the collaboration between the individual parties will benefit the process. This collaboration and shared ownership will result in an integrated approach in realizing a challenging citizens' initiative. With the integrated approach the governmental institution can provide arrangements in integrating the project goals in its aims and objectives.
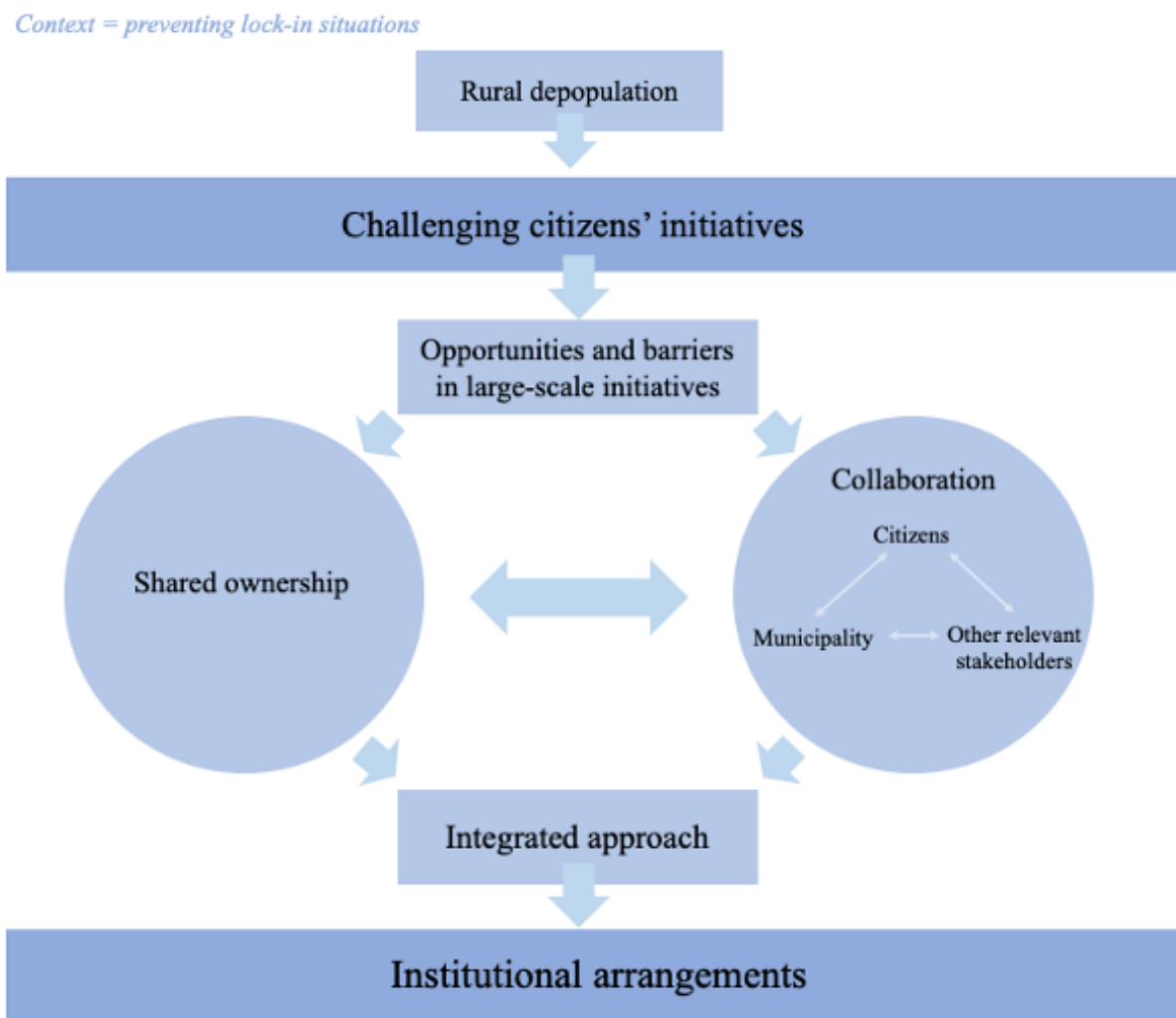

Figure 3: The conceptual model (Source: author)

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Chapter 3 | Methodology

This chapter will dive into the research design and research methods of data collection and analysis. First the research design will be discussed, highlighted will be the choice for a single case study approach and elaborating on the selection of the case for this research. After the research design the data collection and data analysis will follow. Finally, the ethical considerations of this research will be specified.

3.1 Research design

The research design helps to connect the research questions to the data, these are crucial elements since it is the basic plan for doing research (Punch, 2014). This research focuses on qualitative, intensive research through a single-case study approach. The next sections will justify this choice.

3.1.1 Single case study approach

In order to find out how governments can help prevent lock-in situations in citizens'-initiated infrastructure projects a qualitative research method is chosen. This 'how'-question is focusing on institutional arrangements, in literature the development and use of these arrangements by governments are described as a process (Yin, 1994). Citizens' initiated projects can be seen as a contemporary phenomenon (ibid.). By finding out how institutional arrangements can help prevent lock-in situations in bottom-up initiated infrastructure projects, the focus within this research will lie on the process. A qualitative research method supports this focus. Denzin & Lincoln (2011, p.8) describe qualitative as 'processes and meaning that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency'. This research can be seen as intensive, the goal is to describe a single case with the greatest amount of detail (Clifford et al., 2016). An intensive research design is favored since it gives the opportunity to study a phenomenon more in-depth as it supports a deeper and more detailed investigation of a phenomenon in its natural setting. When the 'how'-question is being stated about a contemporary set of designs over which the researcher has no control, case study research is often useful (Yin, 1994). Yin (2009) explains a case study as an empirical research method which is investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (natural setting). In this research, citizens' initiatives are investigated as the contemporary phenomenon to see how its processes, the institutional arrangements, can help to prevent lock-in situations in large infrastructure projects.

In this research a single case study approach is chosen over a multiple case study approach. One of the benefits of single case studies is that a high-quality theory can be created. According to Dyer and Wilkins (1991) single case studies produce extra and better theory in comparison to multiple-case studies. Also, the more cases research has, the less observation and study time the writer has. The researcher has the opportunity to get a deeper understanding of the exploring subject when doing a single case study (Gustafsson, 2017). In that sense, single case studies

are not so time consuming as multiple case studies. Another benefit is that old theoretical relationships can be analyzed, and new relationships can be explored, because of this a more in-depth study is made (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). According to Siggelkow (2007), the development of phenomenon can richly be described and analyzed by single-case studies.

Defining the case is crucial in case study research. The scope of the research will be limited by placing boundaries. This boundary assures what will and what will not be researched in the case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The unit of analysis will function as a basis for the case in determining its boundaries. The boundary of single-case study research will be done by setting a theoretical, a temporal and spatial boundary (Yin, 2009). The theoretical boundary has been done in the theoretical framework of this research. The temporal boundary can be seen as the data collection period, which lasted from February 2022 to May 2022. However, it needs to be noted that preventing lock-in situations by citizens' initiatives could potentially be based on experiences of institutional arrangements prior to February 2022. Furthermore, the spatial boundary is set out by the case selection of Holwerd aan Zee, which forms the unit of analysis. This will be discussed extensively in the next section.

3.1.2 Selection of the case

As stated above the spatial boundary relates to the selection of the case and the unit of analysis. The goal of this research is to provide municipalities of rural depopulating areas with lessons on how to prevent lock-in situations in citizens'-initiated infrastructure projects. The selected case is a depopulating village in a depopulating area in the Netherlands. Compared with local governments, citizens are more innovative in coming up with tailor-made services to local needs (Healey, 2015). Moreover, bottom-up initiatives are characterized by the ability to empower the quality of life, or the livability of rural communities, to be maintained and even enhanced (Syssner and Meijer, 2017). Given these acknowledgements, Holwerd is considered as an interesting research area. The citizens-initiated project Holwerd aan Zee is finding itself in a lock-in situation. Therefore, the impact of institutional arrangements is interesting to research in the development and continuation of large bottom-up infrastructure projects.

In the literature a case study which is not randomly selected is called a typical or representative case (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). This type of case is shaped by the puzzle of interest of the researcher that lies within that case. Specifically, the case is used to find a certain phenomenon in a way that the researcher will be able to explore the causal mechanisms at work in general, cross-case relationships (ibid.). The exploration of causal mechanisms, in this case institutional arrangements, can lead towards different conclusions. If in the theoretical framework a specific causal pathway comes forward the researcher can perform a pattern matching investigation. This investigation will highlight in which the evidence in the case is analyzed according to whether it corresponds to the fixed causal mechanisms or not. If that is not the case, the researcher will try to demonstrate that the institutional arrangements are different from those that had been previously stated in the theoretical framework. Another outcome is that there are no plausible causal mechanisms connecting this independent variable to the lock-in situation in citizens'-initiated infrastructure projects. In the last case, a typical or representative case

design may invalidate evidence of a general causal suggestion (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). For this research the Holwerd aan Zee case is selected as a unit of analysis (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Map of selected case (Source: maps4news, Trouw)

This case is relevant to investigate since the residents of Holwerd want to force a break in the trend in two negative developments that the area has known for decades: socio-economic contraction and ecological decline with a 'hole in the dike'. The objective of Holwerd aan Zee is quality of life, revenue, and jobs. In 2019 the Holwerd aan Zee Foundation, Bird protection organization, province of Fryslân, municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân and Wetterskip Fryslân signed a letter of intent to jointly bring the Holwerd aan Zee project towards a realization. In the end of 2021, a draft concept report of the research of the Holwerd aan Zee project is exposed. This report, from three engineering firms, Deltares, WaterProof and Arcadis, reflects critically on the plans and contains many negative points. The question is whether the project can be carried out as it was originally conceived. In this description it becomes clear that the selected case is a bottom-up initiated project and is currently experiencing a lock-in situation. Another criterion for selecting a case is that there is enough data available. This has been checked beforehand and for the Holwerd aan Zee case sufficient data could be found.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

As stated before, according to Yin (2009) case study research typically uses a variety of evidence by using different sources. For that reason, multiple sources of evidence are integrated in the case study approach. This section discusses the multiple sources of data which are collected and analyzed within this research. To answer the research questions, literature research and qualitative research through interviews are combined as data collection and analysis methods.

3.2.1 Literature research

The literature research in chapter 2 forms the theoretical framework of this research. The main theoretical concepts central to this research are discussed and visualized in the conceptual model (see figure 3). This model is based on the core concepts discussed in the literature touching citizens' initiatives, collaborative planning, rural decline, and planning strategies. The goal of this literature research is to gain insight into the main concepts in order to provide useful answers to the following sub-questions:

- What are the current Dutch planning strategies in dealing with bottom-up initiatives?
- Which factors contribute to the success and failure of citizens' initiatives?

The literature used in this theoretical framework mainly consisted of English academic and scientific peer-reviewed articles, however there are also sources in Dutch used. To get the most recent theoretical and academic insights from literature, the main selection was on peer-reviewed articles from the last decade, so mostly after 2011. However, older literature also provided interesting insights. The main concepts as rural decline and citizen's initiatives have been analyzed and discussed for quite some time and therefore older literature could also provide an understanding of how the concepts evolved over time. Search engines were used to gather the different articles, such as Google Scholar and SmartCat (provided by the University of Groningen). The literature was useful to define the main concepts of citizens' initiatives and rural decline in relation with planning strategies and relating them with other meaningful concepts. Terms that have been used to gather relevant literature, often in combination, are 'citizens' initiatives', 'rural decline', 'bottom-up planning', 'collaborative planning', 'community participation', 'depopulating areas'. Furthermore, the reference list of a paper and citations in the paper have been used to identify additional papers to find literature related to the key concepts, an efficient and effective method, also named as the snowball method (Wohlin, 2014).

3.2.2 Qualitative research

The second method of collecting primary data is done through qualitative semi-structured interviews. Key actors in the Holwerd aan Zee project and actors with in-depth knowledge about citizens' initiatives and depopulating areas are interviewed. With interviews the researcher gains practical insight into the case study and the relevant perspectives. Together

with the literature research, a connection can be made between theory and practice. This connection helps to provide answers to the following sub-questions:

- Can citizens' initiatives serve as the cure for population decline in rural areas?
- What is a good strategy to prevent a lock-in situation in a large citizens-initiated project?

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, to gain more insights in practice of citizens' initiatives and planning strategies used. To provide a more in-depth understanding of experiences and perspectives, qualitative research is chosen (Kelly, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are seen as an appropriate type in these research situations since the researchers want to focus on specific research interests (ibid.). In this case the aim is to investigate the role of planning strategies in providing lock-in situations in citizens' initiatives. The semi-structured interviews are set with topic areas which are discussed in depth with room for new questions to emerge, which assures enough room for follow-up questions. The interviewees are selected through meeting certain criteria (Bryman, 2012). The criteria are necessary to ensure appropriateness of the sample. The following criteria list is set up for the interviewees, followed by an overview of the interviewees (see table 1):

- Interviewees are familiar with the Holwerd aan Zee project
- Interviewees are familiar with bottom-up initiatives
- Interviewees are familiar with the governmental processes of coping with bottom-up initiatives

Who		Length	Date	Type of interview
Respondent 1	Senior project leader - Rural Area and Region	35 min.	01-04-22	Phone call
Respondent 2	Member Doarpsbelang Holwerd	30 min.	05-04-22	Phone call
Respondent 3	Professor University of Groningen	35 min.	05-04-22	Physical interview
Respondent 4	Founder of the Holwerd aan Zee foundation	30 min.	07-04-22	Video call
Respondent 5	Former project leader of Holwerd aan Zee	45 min	26-04-22	Video call
Respondent 6	Alderman Noardeast-Fryslân	40 min	03-05-22	Physical interview
Respondent 7	Expert in strategic spatial planning and governance of tourist destinations	35 min	09-05-22	Phone call
Respondent 8	Advisor morphology and coastal safety of Rijkswaterstaat	55 min	13-05-22	Physical interview
Respondent 9	PHD researcher at the University of Groningen – Citizens' initiatives in rural areas	40 min	24-05-22	Video call

Table 1: Overview of interviewees (Source: author)

Within a semi-structured interview, the researcher works with a list of fixed questions, these questions are used as a guideline. The interview will evolve in a conversational manner which makes sure that the participants get the chance to further elaborate on issues they feel are important (Longhurst, 2003). A list of questions was prepared beforehand to make sure the relevant research topics are discussed and explored in depth during the interviews. These prepared questions are based on the insights from the theoretical framework (chapter 2) and form the interview guide (see appendix B). The interview guide has a couple of fixed questions for all interviewees and some additional questions based on the expertise of the interviewee. The interviews are all recorded, these recordings are used to transcribe and code each interview. All the interviews were held in Dutch, as this is the native language of the interviewees and the researcher.

3.2.3 Data analysis

First off, the theoretical framework is used to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts and theory. The theoretical framework forms a basis which is used to prepare for the interviews. Next, the interviews are studied to find shared or contrasting experiences and processes between the interviewees, this provides in-depth knowledge and insights. To analyze the interviews a qualitative data analysis software program, ATLAS.ti, is used for the coding process.

3.2.4 Coding process

Coding is the main step to analyze the interview data. Coding means attaching one or more keywords (tags or labels) to a text part in order to help later identification of a statement (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018). Codes is a different word for tags or labels based on relevant categories or themes concerning the research. A codebook is used to gather codes, definitions, and examples as a guide to analyze and apply the interview data. In the codebook deductive and inductive codes are used. The theoretical framework helps to develop a deductive set of codes which is used to structure the analysis. The deductive codes are applied to the interviews which form the basis of the gathered data to answer the research questions. Inductive coding is the result of analyzing the interviews where new concepts can emerge leading to new theoretical insights. Combining these sets of codes, a coding scheme emerges that is used in the analysis of the interviews (see Appendix C).

3.3 Ethical consideration

Within carrying out research, ethical considerations have to be made. The interviewee needs to provide permission for the use of the interview in this research. The ethical issues which are considered are confidentiality and privacy (Longhurst, 2010). To ensure these aspects, before the interview starts the interviewees are made aware of their rights. These rights include, for example, withdrawing from the interview at any moment, changing their answers, withdrawing their answers altogether. Only the function/status of the interviewee will be made public in this research, names will remain anonymous. Additionally, the interview will only be used for the

purpose of this research (Longhurst, 2010). The interviewee has the option to choose between a face-to-face, call or video call interview. Recording the interviews makes it easier to transcribe, therefore participants were asked whether recording was allowed. It is important that the data is handled securely. This was done by saving the gathered data in a password locked folder in a password protected computer. Additionally, the interviews were transcribed, and the recordings were deleted afterwards. If the participant wishes to receive a copy of the transcript this will be emailed to them a couple of days after the interview. The interviews are taken by me as a master student Environmental and Infrastructure Planning at the University of Groningen and independently of any other organizations. This will not lead to any conflicts.

Chapter 4 | Case Study on the project Holwerd aan Zee

This chapter analyses the data collected from the theoretical framework and interviews. First, an introduction to the Holwerd aan Zee case is given. The results are presented in the following headings, goal of citizens' initiatives, obstacles of citizens' initiative and strategies in dealing with citizens' initiatives, combining insights from the theoretical framework and interviews. The interviewees are numbered and referred to according to Table 1.

The theoretical insights are enriched with more detailed information through the interview analysis which provide more in-depth information that contribute to answer the question: *Which institutional arrangements can be taken to support challenging citizens initiatives in depopulating rural areas?* This question is divided into three sub-questions, namely:

1. Can citizens' initiatives serve as the cure for population decline in rural areas?
2. What are the current Dutch planning strategies in dealing with bottom-up initiatives?
3. Which factors contribute to the success and failure of citizens' initiatives?
4. What is a good strategy to prevent a lock-in situation in a large citizens-initiated project?

The results are structured per sub-question, first focusing on the goal of citizens' initiatives followed by the obstacles challenging initiatives are facing and ending with the best way for governmental organizations to cope with the challenging citizens' initiatives. Within these sections, the main concepts, principles, and elements are mentioned with the key message extracted from the interview analysis. This is expanded with more detailed information from the theory and interviews.

4.1 Introduction of Holwerd aan Zee & relevance

'Dike of a breakthrough, Holwerd aan Zee', is the name of the proposal to literally cause a dike breach. The project is an initiative of the residents, supported by the province of Fryslân, the municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân, Wetterskip Fryslân, the Wadden Natural Coalition, the government, the bird protection organization, and other parties.
With a 'hole in the dike' the residents want to force a break in the trend in two negative developments that the area has known for decades: socio-economic contraction and ecological decline. The hole in the dike will provide access to a saltwater lake located within the dike with bird islands, a marina and boulevard, unique recreational homes, nature experience and saline crops. The spatial impact is made visible in figure 5, the current outline of Holwerd and figure 6 the Holwerd aan Zee project. Crossing a dike and restoring natural fresh-salt transition is a major step towards a vital coast and restoration of the food web and the linking function of the Wadden Sea for birds and fish.
The objective of Holwerd aan Zee is quality of life, turnover, and jobs (HaZ, 2013). This can be achieved by restoring the original relationship between Fryslân and the Wadden Sea. By reconnecting freshwater and saltwater and by creating a robust natural connection between the Wadden Sea via the Holwerdervaart (Holwerter Feart) to the Frisian Lakes. But also, by

approaching tasks in the area in an integrated manner and by concentrating them in one place, so that synergy effects for people and nature are within reach.

Figure 5: Holwerd with the ferry to Ameland visible on the left (LC, 2021b)

Figure 6: The plan of citizens' initiative Holwerd aan Zee (HaZ, 2013)

On December 16, 2019, the Holwerd aan Zee Foundation, Bird protection organization, province of Fryslân, municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân and Wetterskip Fryslân signed a letter of intent to jointly bring the Holwerd aan Zee project towards a realization. With the signing of this agreement, the actual implementation of this ground-breaking project is a big step closer. By breaking through the seawall and digging a sailing route to the center, the village wants to become a tourist attraction. For almost ten years, villagers have been pulling and pushing governments for support and money for their dreams. In Holwerd aan Zee, people and nature come together, according to the initiators (HaZ, 2013). With the breach of the dike and the construction of a navigation channel, the Wadden Sea will reach the front door of every inhabitant of Holwerd. The village will be accessible from the Wad with an access channel to be dug. A lock separates the Wadden Sea and the inland water. Behind the dike will be a tidal lake, with ebb and flow and brackish and salt water. A navigation channel keeps the village accessible; salt marsh nature and bird islands color the landscape. There must be room for holiday homes on an island in the tidal lake (ibid.).

In the end of 2021, a draft concept report of the research of the Holwerd aan Zee project is exposed. This report from three engineering firms, Deltares, WaterProof and Arcadis, reflects critically on the plans and contains many negative points. The question is whether the project, with a breakthrough in the sea dike as the eyecatcher, can be carried out as it was originally conceived to breathe new life into the village on the Frisian Wadden Sea coast. The researchers doubt whether the construction of a navigation channel in the Natura2000 area can be licensed, because it is quite drastic. Boating recreation through a natural channel to the tidal lake to be constructed will not do nature any good. On the other hand, new nature is also being created in other places. They also point out that the siltation in the tidal lake requires maintenance. This means that the estimated costs of building the project will be 100 million euros, while the maintenance for the upcoming 50 years will be another 100 million euros (LC, 2021a). Furthermore, the supply of fresh water is a problem, adjustment of the arterial system is necessary for this. This costs a lot of money and has not been budgeted in the plan. Digging a trench is technically feasible, but for boats the lake will only be accessible for half of the tidal cycle due to a specific tide 'wantij', when two tidal currents come together. Then there is the problem of the sludge, which flows into the lake via the natural channel. Dredging activities are not covered by any proceeds. According to the research of the firms a number of these points can be minimized. However, it remains a solution that requires many artificial interventions. Although the current design is technically feasible, it does not match the wishes to build a robust system in full collaboration with the natural system, i.e., building with nature, climate-proof, and future-proof.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Goal of citizens' initiatives

The goal of Holwerd aan Zee
Citizens' initiatives most often start with a social goal, such as becoming sustainable or attract tourism (Respondent 1). In rural areas there is more often active participation of citizens

compared to urban regions (Steenbekkers et al., 2006). As respondent 3 stated: 'the citizens' initiative in Holwerd started with necessity'. Citizen's initiatives frequently begin in a sense of urgency, since rural areas have a higher possibility of, for example, depopulation or unemployment as to urban dwellings (Gieling and Haartsen, 2017; Syssner and Meijer, 2017). Citizens' initiatives have a positive impact on the quality of life and the livability of rural communities (Syssner and Meijer, 2017). The Holwerd aan Zee project is an example of the third type of citizens' initiatives proposed by De Haan (2019), it supplies a new service which has not been in the region before. This type of citizens' initiative is seen as essential for providing benefits for the local community (Bock, 2016; Boonstra and Boelens, 2011; Healey, 2015). The initiators of Holwerd aan Zee looked at which type of economy is suitable for Holwerd and its surroundings. Since Holwerd is positioned close to the sea and close to the ferry terminal of the boat to the Wadden island Ameland, the main source to create economy was tourism and recreation. With digging the canal to bring the sea to Holwerd, tourism can be provided. Fitting facilities can be opened, like restaurant, hotels, and cafés. This would then lead to employment in the region. According to Respondent 9, citizens initiatives cannot reverse migratory flows and thus solve depopulation. However, citizens' initiative can make it more pleasant to live in the village when there is a decline of facilities that disappear or are redesigned.

> *'Through a citizens' initiative something is created in the village. It becomes cozy, attracts other people and as a result there might be a need for new homes. This could be a way how a village can start to grow again'*
>   - Respondent 1, 01-04-2022

Increasing the quality of life and attractiveness of a village, does not necessarily have to be done with a dike breach. Sellick (2014), Calderwoord and Davies (2018), Meijer (2018), and the expertise of respondent 1 and respondent 9 show that citizens' initiatives are most often done in smaller scale projects. Examples are the maintenance of public green spaces, preservation of a village shop or development of a multifunctional accommodation (MFA) (Bakker et al., 2012). In small villages citizens are afraid that the facilities are disappearing in combination with population decline. Social cohesion and accessibility of villages are directly affected by losing facilities or amenities (Shokoohi et al., 2019). When a restaurant, café, or school is closing it becomes helpful to set up a citizens' initiative or a village interest association. Fewer facilities means that fewer young people and young families come or stay in the village, and this could result in the village falling into stupor. Young people and families face barriers in the access to suitable education opportunities, slow-moving employment processes, barriers in social inclusion, less participation opportunities and a lack of engagement in community life, while struggling to get access to basic infrastructures and services (European Network for Rural Development, 2018). According to respondent 1 a citizens' association or a local interest organization is important in these times, creating an MFA for example can have a big impact on villages already. In an MFA multiple associations can be brought together in one building. The benefit of an MFA instead of a village house is that it assures guaranteed accommodation for the long term. Associations are important for quality of life and residential attractiveness. Certainly, those village associations are proactive and try

everything to maintain or even increase the attractiveness of the village. A village association is an easy and central way of communicating and organizing things when you only have a few resources to work with. In addition, housing is important for small villages. Village associations and municipalities should go hand in hand in making the village a place where younger people are not forced to leave (European Network for Rural Development 2018). Young people cannot find affordable housing or the elderly who would like to live in a smaller house, which causes congestion on the housing market. As a result, few young families have the possibility to move to these villages, which is negative for the quality of life and attractiveness to live in (European Network for Rural Development, 2018). Preservation instead of expanding attractiveness and livability is what most villages bet on, when there are not a lot of resources available (Respondent 1).

Shift in focus and energy

The perception on alternatives is differing between the respondents. Respondent 7 sees this large-scale project as an opportunity for a transition, 'such a large-scale project is perhaps necessary to achieve something substantial'. According to respondent 7 the size of the HaZ project is crucial to start something meaningful in a depopulating region where no tourism attractions are, smaller plans or alternatives would have probably ended up in the background faster and therefore aiming high in these communities may be crucial.

> *'With thinking big a difference can be made'*
> - Respondent 7, 09-05-2022

However, right now HaZ is a stand-alone project which makes the realization even harder. There is no integral area development of the entire Wadden Sea Region in terms of recreation and tourism. This project misses fellow projects and fellow initiatives, they do not have other projects which they build on or collaborate with. As a result, these types of projects and initiatives simply lack context. There are not that many large-scale crowd pullers in the Wadden region and the coastal zone. The combination of large scale and small-scale projects could increase the success of the region; therefore, a programmed approach should be made to leisure development. This is also something Respondent 6 mentioned since the World Heritage Center will be in Lauwersoog in a few years. Combination between these projects can assure that it stands strong, has a story, and a future perspective. These locations should be the goal of a journey. This can roll out in a vision across the entire area in a long-term perspective.

The debated technical and environmental feasibility, further elaborated on in part 4.2.2, also results in alternative plans for this project. Most respondents argue that the initiative is too big, and the feasibility is too low. Respondent 8 mentions that this project could turn into a growth-project. This area could become a swamp area in which rainwater is collected. The rainwater can be used for agriculture in dry times, but this is also suitable for certain bird species. In terms of leisure activities hiking and canoeing are examples which can be practiced in such a system. Another example is that this area can turn into a test polder, filling it up with silt will benefit nature. This project can turn into a promising area if sediments were seen as an opportunity. Other examples respondents 3, 5 and 6 gave instead of a dike breach was creating an outdoor saltwater lake or an inner dike lake, which is easy to manage and can function as a

recreational facility to attract visitors. Holwerd also has the only pier in the northern area of the Netherlands, with an upgrade this could also have a unique-selling point. Such a viewpoint can be integrated in the landscape like the pier in Scheveningen. Most respondents see the dike breach as the main obstacle of the low feasibility of the project, however they also see great opportunities laying ahead by adjusting the plans. With the above-mentioned alternatives, recreation, housing, and nature development can continue to develop. Alternatives have the same potential to generate enough visitors and ensure enough socio-economic activities; the dike breach is not the only way to achieve that.

> *'We do not need to create dike breaches to be successful'*
>   - Respondent 9, 24-05-2022

Positive impact of Holwerd aan Zee

Even though nothing has been realized yet, the municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân has seen a positive impact already. Respondent 7 states the positive impact of HaZ on Holwerd as: 'if you come from nothing, everything is of added value'. The region has seen, even without realization of the project so far, an increase in the number of facilities and amenities. In terms of depopulation, Holwerd is not a shrinkage area anymore. There are no houses standing empty and the region is also not experiencing depopulation. Furthermore, a camping, a hotel, and several Bed & Breakfasts opened their doors in the region. There are more people willing to invest than ever before according to Respondent 2, 3, 4 and 6. Additionally, the area has also become more popular for walkers and cyclists, more and more walking and cycling routes have been initiated. Respondent 6 highlights the bike-rental shop, which was established in the village, a facility they could not imagine having a few years ago. The stability of the HaZ project is one of the main causes for these results. In order to keep on developing and continuing with a challenging initiative, all the members of the initiator group need to cooperate in order to maintain the initiative (de Haan, 2019). Even though the realization of the project has not started yet, the members of the initiative are still involved and are motivated to continue with the project (Respondent 4). Not only the stability of the initiators is increasing the likeliness of continuity, also the social capital and leadership aspects of the initiative contribute (Brandsen and Helderman, 2012; Jicha et al., 2011; Lambru and Petrescu, 2016; Liu and Besser, 2003). The stability of these aspects is dependent on the work of individual members of the initiative (de Haan, 2019).

Mentally the area has also made a positive turn. The organization, which is represented by respondent 4, indicates that the surrounding villages are attracted to their ambition. The energy the organization spreads is affecting the other citizens, there are more developments and initiatives starting in the whole region. These initiatives are not necessarily on the same scale as the project, but they do try to take advantage of the attention HaZ is getting in the context of recreation and tourism.

> *'There is a shift from a depreciated area to and area with its own identity and a positioning in the Wadden Sea region. This transition highlights the individuality, pride, and self-esteem of the region'*
>   - Respondent 4, 07-04-2022

These impacts can be seen as successes of the project HaZ, in comparison to the initial project where nothing has been realized yet. However, the terms of success and failure are dependent on 'how' and 'by whom' it is recognized (McConnell, 2010). It has been 10 years since the plan was initiated and until now nothing has been realized yet, this can be seen as failure since the obstacles, which the plan is facing, are not becoming less and are in some situations even increasing, think about the low technical feasibility, in the long run a decline in societal support, and funds which are restricted to certain time and criteria aspects. McConnell (2015) describes this as relational failure. The understanding of failure is always in relation to something (ibid.), for example in the HaZ project the acceptance of ideas within the community and local government. At first the local government was hesitant with a large-scale initiative like this, but the more potential the local government saw in the project, the more supportive and facilitative it became. This was from the initiators point of view already a success story. Another aspect McConnell (2015) mentioned is that the perception of failure and success is time dependent. The time of measuring success and failure is all-decisive. When the HaZ project was getting more attention in the first years, multiple other facilities rose in the region. This period in the project time frame can be seen as successful. Right now, the project finds itself in a lock-in situation since it is becoming clear that the dike breach might not be feasible. So, one might state that this project from this perspective can be seen as a failure. However, if the project will be integrated, as an adapted version, in the vision of the Wadden Region, the province and Rijkswaterstaat, or as part of a transition of 40/50 years in tourism and recreation of the Northern coastal area whether it succeeds or not, then it might become a success story after all (McConnell, 2015; Respondent 7). Finally, it requires someone to classify a failure or success as such (McConnel, 2015). Different perspectives will have different outcomes in terms of failures and successes. The citizens and the local government have seen maintenance and even a rise in the facilities and amenities in the region (Respondent 2, 4 and 6). Even without realizing they have seen successful results already. However, from the perspective of the respondents with expertise in the field, the opinion remains that it has been a waste of money and time, and that in the meantime smaller scale initiatives could have been set up with direct results (Respondents 1, 5 and 8). The statement, the success and failure of community initiatives relies on the support of the government to continue community development is thus artificially (de Haan et al., 2017a; Meijer, 2020), is corresponding with the HaZ project where continuation of the project is depended on governmental support in reaching a successful realization of the project.

4.2.2 Realization of citizens' initiatives

Funding
The HaZ initiative started as an anti-shrinkage and employment project. Receiving funds is a basis to see if the initiators can continue developing such a large-scale project. De Haan et al., 2019 states the importance of goal achievement which highlights the initial reason to start initiatives in the first place. Additionally, whether goals can and will be achieved relates to the financial feasibility of initiatives, which is an important indicator of providing funding (ibid.) Looking at the funding of this project, there are a few organizations which are interested in attracting people to the region. Most money comes from nature organizations who want to

improve the flora and fauna and increase biodiversity. Funds can also shape or change the layout and goals of the project. Since the funds come along with interests of organizations; they can see an opportunity to improve their interests with the project (Nederhand et al., 2016). Citizens need to take full responsibility for their own initiative while also matching the requirements of the other stakeholders (ibid.). Over time these interests can change the structure of the project, and this results in a money driven project (Respondent 5). When the organization of HaZ wants to be perceived as more effective by several stakeholders and improve governance practices, it reveals both complexity and the need for stakeholder management in large-scale citizens'-initiated projects (Wellens and Jegers, 2014). Stakeholder engagement is crucial in the development and implementation of projects, it also has an impact on the success of projects (Bahadorestani, et al., 2020). Wellens and Jegers (2014) show that it is impossible to consider the needs and objectives of board members as similar to the needs and objectives of other prominent stakeholders. Different parties have different interests. Municipalities, citizens, and bird protection organizations for example have different tasks, policies, and goals. It's important to streamline the several interests and see if they can go along in one project. This can lead to an essential designing task to fulfill all needs (Respondent 7). Funds come with interests. If those interests cannot be met in the project, there is a high possibility that the funds will disappear (Bahadorestani, et al., 2020). Therefore, in the HaZ project it is important to visualize which interests belong to which funds. This should correspond with the initial goals of the project and with the policies and tasks of governmental institutions.

Another uncertainty of the project is that the social cost-benefit analysis is negative. The experts' expectation that it will generate employment and economic growth is very cautious (Respondent 1, 3, 5 and 7). There is a big risk that it is not possible to cover the costs with the revenues. The cost for management and maintenance are probably much more than the yield (Respondent 7). Money has to be added continuously, which may not be bad if it improves the quality of life. However, this situation can generate tension. If tourism is going well in the region, it will also affect the quality of life. The area will get more employment, and facilities will be easier to keep. On the other hand, dredging work and the management and maintenance of the locks continues. This situation arises another obstacle, who will be the owner and who will therefore be in charge of the management and maintenance? An improved quality of life can be seen through the development of tourism products which can also be used by residents such as restaurants, natural and cultural attractions, and outdoor recreation possibilities (Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011). Job creation and increased tax revenues which in turn will result in services to residents, are also examples of how a higher personal standard of living can be generated (ibid.). However, it remains unlikely that the revenues of this sector will cover the costs of maintaining the dike breach (Respondent 7).

Lack of expertise

A crucial obstacle with large scale citizens' initiatives is that the initiators are most often not experts. When initiating smaller scale projects there is no need to do in-depth background research. Initiating development of a playground in an under-used park or a neighborhood watch group in reaction to multiple nightly incidents are examples of small-scale citizens' initiatives which can be easily set up with some assistance from the local government (Bakker et al., 2012). In these examples there is no need for the initiators to have a certain level of

expertise in the field. That is different with a project like Holwerd aan Zee. It's a large-scale infrastructure project which has an enormous human-made impact on the Wadden Sea and the landscape surrounding Holwerd. Accordingly, it is important to know if the plan is feasible and what kind of consequences come along with the project. The initiators of HaZ would like to implement their own ideas, plans, and receive the power to entail an agenda-setting and awaken issues that are important for communities (Respondent 4; Tonkens and Verhoeven, 2018). This corresponds with the concept introduced by Edelenbos et al. (2017), the self-organizing democracy, which means that the initiators would not fully rely on the government's terms. However, the project is ambitious which potentially exceeds the proportion of the regular citizens' initiatives, where less funds, expertise and support is necessary in making it successful. Holwerd is located on a high former salt marsh wall, which is the reason that Rijkswaterstaat has dredging problems in this area. The fairway to Ameland is the most dredged channel of the entire Wadden Sea (Respondent 8). Creating a dike breach at Holwerd will only increase the dredging work for Rijkswaterstaat. Rijkswaterstaat has drawn up a policy that dredging should be reduced, stated in the spatial agenda for the Wadden Sea (IenW, 2020). Their vision is to reduce dredging due to morphological changes in the Wadden Sea. Because dredging has a negative effect on the ecology because of soil disturbance and turbidity of the water (ibid.). Dredging has a high ecological impact and including the emissions that accompany the work it is not environmentally friendly. Instead of mitigating the environmental impact of navigation channels, there is a transition towards making use of the dynamics of the natural environment and providing opportunities for natural processes (de Vriend et al., 2014). IenW (2020, p.25) states that 'in interventions or actions, we assume sustainable protection and development of the Wadden Sea as natural as possible'. With the dike breach in Holwerd a trench is created in an area that actually wants to become a salt marsh or tidal flat, dredging is the only solution which assures that boats can go through (Respondent 8). This situation does not match with the policy of natural development of the Wadden Sea (IenW, 2020).

> *'The plan is not in line with the policy of the Wadden Sea. The initiators mainly have a story from the perspective of the village and the citizens, not from the Wadden Sea'*
>   - Respondent 8, 13-05-2022

By addressing this issue in the realization of the project it becomes visible that there is a conflict in terms of citizens and experts. It entails a conflict of values when citizens initiate a large-scale infrastructure project: the initiators are then expecting to be, at the same time, a citizen, and an expert on a specific issue (Meriluoto and Kuokkanen, 2021). As a result, citizens' initiatives in large scale projects represents democracy's delicate balancing act between citizen participation and expert assessment (Meriluoto and Kuokkanen, 2021; Collins and Evans, 2002; Strassheim, 2015). The vision of a sustainable democracy is collaborative and co-production oriented, placing citizens' initiatives in the field of 'apolitical' governance where knowledge, not value-judgements or opinions, is what is most relevant (Meriluoto and Kuokkanen, 2021).

4.2.3 Strategies in dealing with citizens' initiatives

Ownership

An important question at the start of any initiative is: who owns it? This largely determines the agreements that the parties involved make about the division of roles, management, responsibility, and demarcation. The model of the municipality of Peel en Maas is a handy tool and distinguishes 4 types of ownership (see table 2).

Self-steering	1. Community Owns
	2. Community is owner and municipality, or other institutional government contributes
Interactive Policy Implementation	3. Municipality or other institutional government owns, and residents contribute
	4. Municipality or other institutional government is the owner

Table 2: 4 Types of ownership (Source: LVKK, 2020)

If the community is the owner, then 'self-management' is paramount. It is important that the governmental organization is in line with this in its way of working and communicating. In practice, this means full equality, i.e., transparent information and knowledge transfer, and little to no rules, a form of consultation based on agreement, i.e., not on an exchange of views, and an open attitude, i.e., where the input of residents is taken seriously and valued (LVKK, 2020). Residents are still too often seen as 'customers'. In such cases, governmental organizations tend to use knowledge as power. They set a framework and guide, instead of supporting the owner of the initiative or the community (LVKK, 2020). The starting point should be that strong communities can organize their living environment according to their own needs. The problem with the HaZ project is that the initiative is owned by the community, but the dike, the landscape, and the policies where the initiative needs to take place are, among others, owned by governmental institutions like Rijkswaterstaat, the municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân and the province of Fryslân. These institutions need to work in a circular manner to adapt the tasks and policies of the Dutch democratic system. In this sense the main question is not, 'who is the owner?' but 'who decides?'. The feasibility of a large-scale citizens initiative needs to be evaluated and analyzed by governmental institutions and from that point proper decisions can be made (Respondent 8). An initiative like HaZ can counteract all the tasks and policies of governmental institutions since it is a non-governmental organization (Respondent 7). However, the project is taking place on public land and therefore there needs to be cooperation and integration between the initiators and governmental institutions.

'The government should start reasoning from the core tasks of the area and incorporate HaZ in them'
        - Respondent 8, 13-05-2022

With the wish of the governmental organization to work in a more core-oriented way, the importance of village and district visions is also increasing. It is important for governmental organizations to realize that these visions are not just 'wish lists', but that they make a concrete contribution to preservation and improvement of the living environment (LVKK, 2020). Clear agreements should be made about feasibility, realization, and implementation. The responsibility for drafting lies with the residents. Ideally, the role of a governmental organization during the process is proactive, inviting and facilitating. Ideally it should be constructively critical but not controlling (Bakker et al., 2012).

Changing playing field

Society is becoming more complex, the playing field of residents' initiatives is changing, also in terms of starting points and needs. This not only requires an open attitude and cooperation, but also a different role and function of village and neighborhood interest organizations. To get more attention for autonomy, ownership, and self-management of residents, there needs to be involvement of a core-oriented and integral way of working, based on the wishes, and needs of neighborhoods and villages This corresponds with the thoughts of Respondent 9, who states that there is still a lot of guidance from municipalities when it comes to citizens initiatives. The current system is not very well designed for citizens' initiatives (Respondent 9). Looser structures would benefit the participation society (LVKK, 2020). Municipalities and other governmental organizations are looking for better support and other ways of working together. Many of the processes have been initiated based on the desire to reduce the gap between residents and policy (ibid.).

Citizens must be empowered to take responsibility and come up with initiatives (Verhoeven and Tonkens, 2011). An important question here is: 'how far will the government go in 'empowering'? On the one hand governments should facilitate citizens and work with them, such as in an activating welfare state (Tonkens, 2009) and on the other hand as little governmental action as possible, since the welfare state has taken a lot from citizens already and as a result their creativity, involvement, and ability to solve problems is lost (Ministerie van BZK, 2011; Verhouven and Tonkens, 2011). Studies show that citizen initiatives are most often a form of blended social action (Sampson et al., 2005), where engagement of citizens and governmental and non-governmental local agencies are involved. Instead of a pure form of civic activism, citizens' initiatives are hybrid in which citizens take the lead but collaborate with public authorities (Hurenkamp et al., 2006; Bakker et al., 2012). In Dutch national and local government citizens initiatives are highly admired. It is expected that these initiatives provide a cheap alternative to costly governmental development plans which can efficiently increase the livability and attractiveness of neighborhoods and communities (Bakker et al., 2012). Additionally, citizens initiatives have a positive impact on the empowerment and education of citizens (ibid.). However, it should be noted that such ambitions can only be reached if initiatives are supported by public authorities. The participation society can be successful if the municipalities and other governmental and semi-governmental authorities provide interest, engagement, and support, rather than abstention (Bakker et al., 2012).

Since the HaZ initiative is challenging and is extremely large-scale it is important that governmental organizations start working together more. There are, for example, governmental tasks laying for the Wadden Sea, flood risk management and agriculture. Based on these tasks

the HaZ plan can be incorporated and adjusted so it's also meeting the tasks and policies of governmental institutions. To smoothen the process and increase the chance of a successful outcome there needs to be guidance and management of the government. This is going against the popular opinion about the straightforward citizens' initiatives, which highlight the different role and function of village and neighborhood interest organizations (LVKK, 2020). According to LVKK (2020, p.8) there is a need for 'looser structures, faster switching and fewer rules'. Due to their informal way of working, groups of initiators often get more done in a short time, while residents' consultation organizations get stuck in formalities (Bakker et al., 2012). This opinion corresponds with the thoughts of respondent 4 and respondent 9, who state 'the less governmental steering the better'. Especially governmental organizations with few resources, like small municipalities, can form obstacles in citizens initiatives since they do not have the expertise to develop or support large-scale citizens' initiatives (LVKK, 2020).

> *'There is a constant dependency that you have as a citizen towards the government. But within that dependence you are expected to take the freedom to start an initiative, to get something done'*
> - Respondent 9, 24-05-2022

However, the plan in Holwerd cannot have the same approach as restoring a village house. HaZ is aiming for a dike breach and will have an enormous spatial impact for the region, this cannot be done without permission and support of the government. In terms of the low feasibility of the project, the morphology, ecology, and physical geography should be much more put at the forefront of decision making (Respondent 8). In order to increase the potential of citizens' initiatives to be successful they should be at the same level of existing governmental policies (Li et al., 2016). The citizens have set a basis for the plan and by cooperation between the initiators and the governmental institutions this plan can have a successful outcome.

Chapter 5 | Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, first the sub-questions and the primary research question are answered. It explains how the results gathered from the qualitative analysis relate to the theoretical framework and academic literature, to what extent the results are generalizable to other contexts and situations, and why these results are valuable for planning practice. Recommendations for institutional arrangements in dealing with challenging citizens' initiatives will be presented in the conclusion.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Research questions

According to the research aims mentioned in the introduction, this study explored the question: *Which institutional arrangements can be taken to support challenging citizens initiatives in depopulating rural areas?* To answer this question, the main research question is divided into four sub-questions.

The first sub-question was: *Can citizens' initiatives serve as the cure for population decline in rural areas?* Based on the qualitative research it becomes visible that citizens initiatives often start with a social goal. In rural areas citizens' initiatives have a sense of urgency since there is a higher possibility, in comparison to urban dwellings, of depopulation which causes closing of facilities. Citizens of Holwerd developed an initiative because the region was not seen as attractive, and facilities were disappearing which affected the quality of life. The HaZ project is an initiative which provides a new type of service, this can lead to higher quality facilities and is crucial for providing benefits for local needs. Citizens' initiatives do not directly affect migratory flows, and thus cannot be seen as the solution to fight depopulation. Nonetheless, since the bottom-up initiatives represent the demands and wishes of citizens, it can be seen as a tool to make it more pleasant to live in the village when facilities are disappearing.

The second sub-question was: *What are the current Dutch planning strategies in dealing with bottom-up initiatives?* According to the literature there is no coherent strategy for dealing with citizens' initiatives (LVKK, 2020; Bakker et al., 2012). Ideally the role of the government is proactive, inviting and facilitating. However, in practice it turns out that there is still a lot of guidance and steering from governmental institutions when it comes to citizens' initiatives. Due to the informal way of working, initiators get more done by themselves while governmental organizations get stuck in formalities and procedures. Most often citizens initiatives are a form of blended social action, where citizens and governmental institutions cooperate to generate a successful outcome. The HaZ project is a large-scale initiative where a lot of stakeholders are involved. It can be stated that the current system is not well designed for such initiatives. Since this project has a high impact on the region, looser structures and fewer rules do not work here. Incorporating the plans in the tasks and policies of governmental

institutions, and thereby suggesting a direct collaboration between the stakeholders will benefit the process.

Answering the third sub-question: *Which factors contribute to the success and failure of citizens' initiatives?* The concepts of success and failure in citizens initiatives are dependent on the context, time, perception, and matter of degree. Therefore, since it depends on someone's perspective, it is hard to classify an initiative as successful or failed. The HaZ project has brought the region a lot in terms of facilities, amenities, and local identity. These are results, which can be scaled under successes, where the plan was also aiming for. However, the plan itself has not been realized yet and it is being questioned if it ever will be realized. From this point of view, it can be stated that the HaZ project is heading towards a failure initiative. To increase the potential of citizens' initiatives to be successful they should integrate in the existing governmental policies, especially a large-scale initiative like HaZ. By an intensive cooperation between the initiators and the governmental organizations there will be a higher possibility of realization.

The fourth and last sub-question was: *What is a good strategy to prevent a lock-in situation in a large citizens-initiated project?* With small scale citizens' initiatives, the governmental institutions can have looser structures and fewer rules to empower the people more. However, challenging initiatives tend to get in a lock-in situation faster and the looser structures do not benefit from such a condition. When a large-scale project has been initiated by citizens, it is important that the government understands that the initiators might not be experts. Since HaZ will have an impact on the landscape and the Wadden Sea, there must be clear communication about the feasibility of the project. The HaZ initiators would like to have as little governmental guidance as possible, however with a project like this there is no way around it. To assure that there will not be endless research on how the project can be realized it is important that the government also creates a vision on the development. The stakeholders should cooperate to ensure the realization of challenging bottom-up initiatives. By combining the expertise and by developing the initial idea it can result in a successful citizens' initiative. In the HaZ initiative all stakeholders go their own way, which results in a clash of visions about the project.

The primary research question was as follows: *Which institutional arrangements can be taken to support challenging citizens initiatives in depopulating rural areas?* Compared to straightforward citizens initiatives, in challenging citizens initiatives the governmental institutions like the municipality and the province should guide the process more. This means that when they integrate the aims of the initiative in their own objectives and tasks a cooperation can develop which results in a higher possibility of a successful outcome for citizens and institutions. Integration of the proposed aim with the tasks and objectives of the governmental organization should be done when the municipality or province has too few resources to support a challenging citizens' initiative and when it becomes clear that the initiative has a large economic and spatial impact. The citizens' initiative will serve as the basis where governmental institutions and the initiators can continue building upon together. These institutional arrangements can be, among others, involving all relevant stakeholders at the beginning, proper feasibility research by firms with the expertise and also a monthly group

appointment with all stakeholders which are involved. By incorporating these arrangements there is a better overview and an integrated strategy with various stakeholders on the same level. Arrangements to such a degree are missing in the HaZ project, this means that there is no circular way of working between the stakeholders which has resulted in a lock-in situation.

5.2 Conclusion

5.2.1 Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, various recommendations for municipalities of Dutch rural areas can be made to support challenging citizens' initiatives and prevent lock-in situations.

Involve relevant expertise
It is important for governmental organizations to understand that citizens are not necessarily experts in redevelopment of the landscape and water management for example. It has been proven that citizens can come up with good ideas in improving sustainability, livability, and attractiveness of their environment. Therefore, governmental organizations should support and facilitate such initiatives. However, when citizens come up with an initiative which has an enormous impact on the landscape and considerable artificial work needs to be done, it is important to notice that citizens may not have all the knowledge necessary for such a project. It has to be investigated if the aforementioned impact can be done in the landscape, what the consequences are for nature and the people, what the certainty is regarding a successful outcome based on reaching the goals which are initiated in the first place, and if the social cost-benefit analysis can turn out positive. Additionally, most subsidies are project-based. Establishing the project is one thing: its management and maintenance is another matter and requires funding and ownership over a longer time period, this final part is commonly underestimated by citizens. Therefore, the first recommendation for the governmental institution would thus be to research and analyze the feasibility of the project. This is something that was lacking in the HaZ project. HaZ has come a long way with lobbying and showing the impressive outcomes for the region. But the process of reaching these outcomes has faded into the background. Experts in the field of citizens initiatives and experts of Rijkswaterstaat state that it is hard to develop the project in its current form. Citizens might have really good ideas since they know what fits in their environment and surroundings, however with large-scale initiatives there needs to be some correspondence with objectives and tasks of governmental institutions. If there is a clash between the policies, for example the policy of building with nature instead of making more artificial work, this needs to be taken into consideration. Governmental organizations should take the lead when a challenging initiative is being presented to them, when they have a good feeling about the plan, and they think it can generate a positive impact on the region. It is important that the first step will be to hire experts, this is a way of showing support for the initiative. These experts, instead of the citizens, have a vision of what is achievable and what is not. From that point, progress can be made to see how a challenging citizens' initiative can take shape to be matured.

Communication is key

The initiators of HaZ do not see the strength of working together with the governmental institutions like the municipality and the province. They are scared that involving these institutions too much, will make sure that they get strangled in formalities and procedures. This is understandable when initiating a small-scale initiative, which is relatively easy to realize. In infrastructure projects there needs to be integration of objectives, tasks, and policies of governmental organizations in order to be able to realize it. The municipality and the province both see the full potential of the HaZ project and want to support the plan in every way. Instead of working against it, it is beneficial to work in collaboration with the municipality and province. Therefore, continuing on the previous part 'Citizens are not experts', after the feasibility has been tested by experts, the second step is establishing a joint association with all relevant stakeholders. This group should meet regularly, i.e., monthly, to see how the development of the plan pursues. This is lacking in the HaZ initiative, the initiators go their own way without involving the institutions. The institutions are important in the realization since they need to give the permits for the land use for example. The value of 'stronger together' is missing with the initiators. The group of stakeholders, which fund the project, will get a clear overview of the development of the plan and the obstacles they face along the way through the monthly meetings. This direct communication setting should be initiated by the municipality since they are the lowest level of authority involved, corresponding with the principle of subsidiarity. There is not a shift in ownership of the plan from the citizens to the government, it is just a tool to help to smoothen the process, to assure that all the interest of stakeholders can be integrated in the plan, and to efficiently fight the obstacles which occur during the realization phase. In short, municipalities should be proactive, they can set up monthly meetings with all of the stakeholders. During these meetings the progress, obstacles and direct actions can be discussed. In this way there is a clear overview, this will benefit the progress of the initiative. The different expertise and interests together will help the project and lead to a lower chance of a lock-in situation.

Stay open for alternatives

After the relevant expertise and stakeholders are gathered it is important to not have a full focus on one plan. Therefore, the final recommendation to prevent lock-in situations is to stay open for alternatives. If the plan has too many obstacles in realizing, i.e., too costly, high maintenance or low feasibility, it is important to also start looking at several adjustments in the plan in order to be able to realize it. Adjustments could be, for example, downscaling the size of the plans to keep the positive side-effects of the initial plan. The initial plan of the citizens serves as the basis, with the help of governmental institutions the potential adaptations can be developed in realizing the plan and uphold the expected outcome. This prevents lock-in situations because there are several ways which can lead to a successful result. If the initiators are continuing to pursue one goal in one way there is a higher chance of a lock-in situation, because the research done to come to this one goal will result in the same outcome over and over since the situation is not changing. The involvement of stakeholders, which is done in the above-mentioned section 'Communication is key', will increase the potential ideas and ways of developing an initiative. The ideas of small adaptations to benefit the progress and

realization of the project will become clear in the monthly meetings initiated by the municipalities or provinces.

Chapter 6 | Reflection

The fundamental reflection is presented in this chapter. Where the implications of the study for planning theory and planning practice are considered and suggestions for follow-up research are formulated. This chapter ends with a critical reflection on the research process highlighting limitations of this research.

6.1 Interpreting the results

Connecting the results to the conceptual model (see section 2.5), the model provides a general overview of the relationship between citizens' initiatives and governmental support. Nevertheless, some nuances to the model could be added, especially in the way of how challenging citizens' initiatives should be coped with. The theory about challenging and large-scale citizens' initiatives is lacking in general. The effects of best-practices and small-scale initiatives is covered by literature (Sellick, 2014; Calderwoord and Davies, 2018; Meijer, 2018), but there seems to be a grey area in challenging and failed initiatives. In order to bridge the research gap, i.e., the gap between the participatory theory and practice (Puskás et al., 2021), the analysis of the results showed that the definition of failure and lock-in is context dependent, in line with what McConnell (2010) and Helmig et al., (2014) stated. What is seen as a lock-in situation or a failed initiative is depending on interpretation (McConnell 2010; Helmig et al., 2014), this makes it hard to research it in this context. The qualitative analysis showed the opportunities large scale initiatives give, when the basis of an initiative does not work there could be possibilities to build on and develop the initiative in a different way. Large scale initiatives can be seen as a long-term development process, part of a transition, of a whole area; however, these positive aspects are hardly elaborated on in academic literature. These aspects are not discussed extensively in the literature but are crucial according to the results.

Furthermore, some conditions were not included in the theoretical framework while being paramount for the support of initiatives by governmental organizations. Local contexts like the size and capacity of the municipality have an impact on the degree of which a municipality can support an initiative. Moreover, the fact that a lock-in situation is happening does not necessarily mean that it is negative. This was indicated in the theory by Seibel (1996) as a successful failure but was further underestimated in the literature. There might be a lot of positive things happening surrounding the initiative even though the initiative itself has not taken shape yet. The results showed the importance of this condition, the governmental institutions and citizens have seen a lot of positive impact even without the realization of the initiative. This is an important drive to continue developing such a challenging project. To conclude, conditions that were derived from the case study should be included in the theoretical framework that can help institutional support of initiatives. Size and capacity of the municipality and the positive side-effects were not included but are paramount for the support of initiatives because municipal capacity influences the compatibility of roles, and the positive side-effects are a drive to continue even though there are a lot of obstacles in the citizens' initiatives.

6.2 Implications

Following the previous section, relating the results to the conceptual model showed that the theory on coping with challenging citizens' initiatives is lacking. This also leads to implications translating this from theory to practice. Challenging citizens initiatives as well as preventing lock-in situations are both complex phenomena that need theoretical based guidance to be translated to practice.

Looking at the scientific contribution and implication for challenging citizens' initiatives (see section 1.3), a research gap between connecting theory and practice concerning preventing lock-in situations was stressed. This thesis is a step in this direction by empirically looking at institutional arrangements as a way of preventing lock-in situations in challenging citizens' initiatives and the findings are an attempt to fill this research gap. The case study shed light on how policy is translated to practice and shows that the framework used provides a solid foundation to do so. However, providing one-size-fit-all solutions for preventing lock-in situations in citizens initiatives is difficult as the potential institutional arrangements are context-specific and thus challenging. Nevertheless, this study provides insights in possible ways of preventing lock-in situations in an institutional way. Additionally, the study presents clear starting points for follow-up research.

Looking at the societal contribution and implication for planning practice, also a gap between participatory theory and practice is still present (Puskás et al., 2021). Findings of this thesis relate to practical insights about the way institutional arrangements can contribute to preventing lock-in situations in challenging citizens' initiatives in the Dutch rural landscape. Based on the findings, three recommendations are provided on how rural municipalities of the Netherlands can enhance the development of challenging citizens' initiatives. Given the size of the research and the fact that the findings are still highly context-specific, it is hard to fully generalize the findings of the case study to Dutch rural municipalities. Nevertheless, the case study approach provides indications to potential institutional arrangements for citizens' initiatives. For that reason, this study is a step forward in understanding the practice of challenging citizens' initiatives in a participatory way.

6.3 Suggestions for follow-up research

Reflecting on the implication for planning practice and theory calls for future research. Hence, based on limitations and findings of this research, suggestions for follow-up research will be made. Firstly, further research could investigate to what extent the HaZ project has brought an increase in the livability, sense of place and attractiveness of Holwerd so far. It is interesting to see what the HaZ project has brought the region at this moment even without realization, and with keeping in mind that there is a low perspective of realization in the near future. When the plan was initiated, there were big problems with depopulation and a lot of houses were for sale in the area. This is not the case anymore right now, so the housing market has increased significantly in Holwerd. Since there are barely any houses left for sale in the whole country, relating to the previous aspect, the research to what extent this has to do with HaZ might be

appealing to discover. Additionally, follow-up research could also be to develop better tools to grasp the positive effects and trace them to the initiative. In this was success can be understood in a broader sense.

Further research might also investigate what other regions or initiatives could do to support the HaZ project. Since it is a stand-alone project right now, it is hard to collaborate and pursue goals because there is no other project to lean on. There are countless possibilities in the Wadden region to develop tourism and increase the attractiveness, but except for the Lauwersoog world heritage center there is not much being pursued. There is a possibility of a transition in the whole Wadden Region in terms of recreation and tourism, but there are too few initiatives taking place to launch this. Therefore, the collaboration between small scale and large scall projects in one region is something which should be researched in terms of more successful outcomes.

Finally, further research could also research the relationship between institutional arrangement and preventing lock-in situations in citizens' initiatives more closely by examining more cases. These could be citizens' initiatives in the Netherlands, but also cross-country by looking at initiatives outside the Netherlands. The regions in the Northwest Germany or at the German Wadden sea are experiencing similar challenges for example and lessons can be learned both ways. More extensive research with multiple challenging citizens' initiatives could contribute to new findings and could also add to the generalization of the results. Not only could more cases contribute to better findings, but also more extensive literature research and interviewing can broaden potential insights into the topic.

6.4 Critical reflection

Rounding off the research, a critical reflection on the process is provided. Reflecting back, overall, the process went smoothly, but still some remarks remain. Concerning the methodology there are some remarks which can be named. The choice for a single-case study with multiple sources of evidence resulted in a satisfactory level of detail about the case. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the 'follow-up research' section, more cases could benefit the findings of the research. With a single-case study it is hard to generalize the results. Including more challenging citizens' initiatives would provide results which can be seen as more robust, powerful, and generalizable.

Finding suitable interviewees was not a big obstacle. There is a large variety of expertise in the respondents. However, since the thesis aims for finding suitable institutional arrangements to prevent lock-in situations in citizens initiatives, interviewing multiple governmental institutions could improve the representativeness of the case-study. The interview with the municipality as the only direct government institution can be seen as sufficient. But the province, as the other directly involved governmental institutions, could give meaningful insights in the project as well. The province was, however, hard to reach and did not respond to the interview invitations.

Altogether, this study led to new, striking insights into the relation between institutional arrangements and citizens in the process of challenging citizens' initiatives. Findings provide an attempt to fill the research gap by bringing together theory and practice on challenging citizens' initiatives. Nevertheless, the relation stays complex and challenging to grasp where translating theory to practice remains context-specific and thus providing one-size-fit-all solutions is hard to do. By doing this research new questions arose, and the results provided indications for follow-up research. This thesis highlights that challenging citizens' initiatives are interesting and can provide a lot for rural communities, and it also shows promising developments in practice which ask for further research in order to advance institutional arrangements to support citizens' initiatives.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Example contact email interviews (Dutch)

Beste …,

Ik ben Marit Minkes en ik studeer aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Ik doe de master Environmental and Infrastructure Planning en ben op dit moment bezig aan mijn scriptie. In mijn scriptie wil ik onderzoeken hoe het vastlopen van door burgers geïnitieerde infrastructuurprojecten voorkomen kan worden. Ik focus hierbij op het identificeren van kansen en belemmeringen van burgerinitiatieven in krimp gebieden, maar ook op planning strategieën en steun van overheidsinstanties.
Als casestudie heb ik het burgerinitiatief Holwerd aan Zee gekozen, dit is een groot en relatief complex project wat de leefbaarheid en aantrekkelijkheid van het dorp zou moeten vergroten. Dit project is passend en (vind ik persoonlijk) erg interessant om te bestuderen.

Ik zou graag in contact met u komen om door middel van een interview informatie voor mijn scriptie te krijgen. Ik ben benieuwd naar de informatie die u verstrekken kunt als … vanuit de … bij het initiatief Holwerd aan Zee.

Het interview kan telefonisch, via videobellen of op een (nader te bepalen) locatie plaats vinden. De dag en het tijdstip zal in overleg vastgesteld worden. Het interview zal gemiddeld 30 minuten duren en kan t/m één uur lopen.

Er wordt uiteraard discreet met de verzamelde informatie omgegaan. Bij het interview zal ik u vragen of ik het gesprek op mag nemen met een recorder om het later op papier op te schrijven. De interviews worden achteraf geanonimiseerd. Als er behoefte aan is kunt u het uitgetypte interview eerst inzien voordat ik de informatie ga verwerken in mijn scriptie.

Ik ben te bereiken via
Email: m.minkes.1@student.rug.nl
Telefoon: 0611996919

Ik hoor graag van u!

Met vriendelijke groet,
Marit Minkes

Appendix B – General interview guide

- Could you shortly introduce yourself and highlight your relation with Holwerd aan Zee?
- Can residents' initiatives counteract the population decline in shrinking areas?
    - Are there successful examples?
    - Are there also issues that municipalities often encounter in residents' initiatives? (Feasibility for example)
- Do you think that a large-scale project, such as Holwerd aan Zee, is necessary to increase the quality of life and attractiveness of the village?
    - Are there simpler alternatives that have slightly less economic and ecological impact?
    - In your opinion, are there other/better initiatives to combat depopulation and increase the quality of life and attractiveness in small rural villages?
    - Can you tell us something about the impression such a large-scale project makes on the village and the inhabitants?
- How is an initiative of this size dealt with in general (by the municipality/province/residents)?
    - What do you think is the best approach to deal with such a huge project?
    - Should an a/b/c plan also be drawn up in relation to feasibility?
- Last year an advisory report was published by Arcadis, Deltares and Waterproof about the Holwerd aan Zee project, are you aware of this?
    - What was your reaction to that outcome?
    - Did you expect it or was it a shock?
- Could the municipality and the organization have done something different to get a better result?
- Will the strategy of the municipality/province change as a result of the outcome of this advisory report?
- How do you see a way forward with this project?
    - Will it still be realized? In what way?
    - What can they do in terms of organization?
    - What needs to be done in terms of support/resources/methods from the municipality, province and perhaps nationally?
    - Or change the whole plan?

Appendix C – Codebook (codebook interview analysis)

Codes	Definition	Sub-theme	Statement focus
Rural depopulation	Statements that describe if citizens' initiatives can serve as a tool to solve rural depopulation	N/A	N/A
Large scale projects	Statements that describe the impact of large-scale projects on depopulation in comparison with regular-sized citizens' initiatives	Impact and impressions	The impact of large-scale projects on depopulation
		Alternatives	The available alternatives are stated which produce a similar outcome
		Similar projects	Comparison of HaZ and other similar projects
Governmental regulations	Statements that describe the governmental regulations to cope with challenging citizens' initiatives	Neutral	The statements given about governmental regulations of bottom-up initiatives
		Support	The support of governmental institutions of bottom-up initiatives
		Hindering	The hindering regulations of governmental institutions of bottom-up initiatives
		Capacity	The available resources of governmental institutions to cope

			with challenging bottom-up initiatives
Results HaZ	Statements that describe the uncertain results of HaZ, considering the feasibility and what kind of positive impact HaZ has on the region so far	Feasibility	The feasibility of HaZ
		Uncertain outcomes	The uncertain results of HaZ
		Current positive effects	What HaZ has brought the region so far
Research rapport	Statements that describe the impact of a research rapport on the HaZ project	Impact	The impact of the research rapport on HaZ
		Reactions of citizens and governmental organizations	The visible reactions and actions on the research rapport
		Feedback to citizens and governmental organizations	The way the research rapport is fed back to the citizens
Obstacles	Statements that describe the biggest obstacles developing the HaZ project	N/A	N/A
Future	Statements that give an insight into the thoughts about the future of HaZ	N/A	N/A
Prevention of lock-in	Statements that describe how this lock-in situation could be prevented	N/A	N/A

Codebook used for the interview analysis.