

# Social Impact Assessment and the perception of the Nedersaksenlijn to its stakeholders

David Mosselaar – S4542789

Bachelor's Thesis

Date: June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Supervisor: Bernadette Boumans

Special thanks to Phillipe Hanna and Gunnar Mallon

## Abstract

The Nedersaksenlijn is a Dutch train connection from Groningen to Enschede, of which the link between Veendam and Emmen is currently missing. The area in consideration, the Veenkoloniën, faces poverty, multi-generational deprivation, aging and lacks access to public transport. The Nedersaksenlijn tries to combat these issues.

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) focuses on the social impact that an infrastructural project has on communities. This research focuses on the discussion of SIA impacts the development of the Nedersaksenlijn and how the different stakeholders involved perceive the line. The stakeholders and their connections are visualised in the conceptual model (figure 6) and the code tree (figure 7).

The conclusion is that the stakeholders view the Nedersaksenlijn as a project for which the positives greatly outweigh the negatives. Positives include greater access to amenities, creating civic wealth, economic welfare and new opportunities in terms of new construction, tourism and employment. Negatives of the project include NIMBY-ism, noise pollution, vibrations and uncertainty. This is visible in table 2.

## Background

The eastern part of the province Groningen in the Netherlands, the Veenkoloniën, has seen a social-economic decline in the last 30 years (RTV Noord, 2023).

The population nowadays is relatively poor, facing multi-generational deprivation, aging due to the youth leaving and there is little opportunity to grow (NOS, 2018; Volkskrant, 2020; Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2020:1 and 2). Another problem is the availability of public transport. The multiple villages dotted around the province are barely accessible except by car. Numerous projects in the past decade have been trying to revitalise the area, such as Blauwestad (figure 1) and the arterial road N366 (figure 2). The area still remains plagued by its problems (NOS, 2023).



Figure 1: Blauwestad. Taken from: <https://www.blauwestad.nl/>

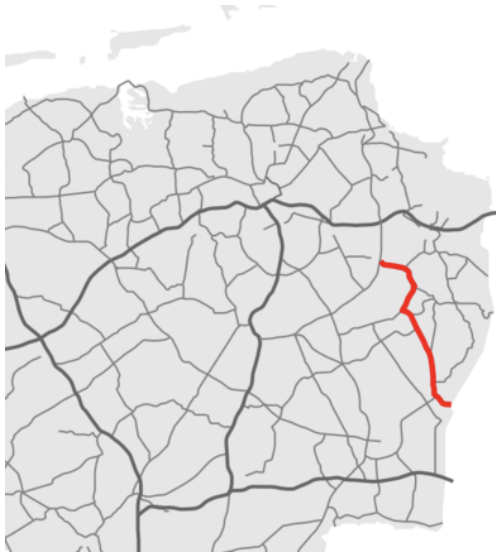


Figure 2: The N366. Taken from: <https://www.wegenwiki.nl/N366> (Nederland)

With the new train connection running from Veendam to Emmen this is supposed to change. The line will be part of the Nedersaksenlijn, that runs from Groningen to Enschede (as is visible in figures 3 and 4). In the best scenario, this will be one single line.

While the project has been on the table as early as in 2016, it has been unanimously approved by the Dutch government in early December of 2022 for final investigative research, also known as a MIRT-report. It has been included in the Deltaplan voor het Noorden (Rijksoverheid, 2023). Once the connection is finalised, which will likely happen within the next ten years, Veendam and Emmen will have a new train connection.

The project aims to create a gateway between Stadskanaal and Ter Apel, a town and a village in the east of the province and cities such as Emmen, Groningen, Almelo, Enschede and Zwolle (see figures 3 and 4), to enlarge the accessibility of the towns and villages of the Veenkoloniën and to address its aforementioned problems through a new connection by creating social and economic development. A new rail connection is a key driver in battling an area in decline (Esteves et al., 2012; Hanna et al., 2022). The demand for the line comes from within the area.

“De vraag komt uit de regio, niet vanuit een aantal bestuurders die eens wat vinden.”  
– Member of the Stichting<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The demand is coming from the area, not from some managers that have an opinion.

- ★ **UNIVERSITEITEN** - Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Universiteit Twente (Enschede)
- ☆ **HOGESCHOLEN** - Hanzehogeschool (Groningen, Assen), NHL Stenden (Groningen, Zwolle, Meppel, Assen, Emmen, Meppel), Windesheim (Zwolle), Saxion (Enschede), Ar1EZ (Enschede, Zwolle)
- ★ **ZIEKENHUIZEN** - Universitair Medisch Centrum (Groningen), Wilhelmina ziekenhuis (Assen), Treant Zorggroep (Hoogeveen, Stadskanaal, Emmen), Saxenburgh Medisch Centrum (Hardenberg), Martini Ziekenhuis (Groningen), Ziekenhuis Groep Twente (Almelo, Hengelo), Medisch Spectrum Twente (Enschede), Isala (Zwolle, Meppel)
- **KENNISCENTRA** - Zernike Campus (Groningen), Kennispark Twente (Enschede), Technology Base (Enschede), High Tech Systems Park (Hengelo), Greenwise campus (Emmen), IQ Blvd (Hardenberg), Makeport Mercurius (Stadskanaal), IT-Hub (Hoogeveen)
- **TOPATTRACTIES** - Avonturenpark Helliendoorn, Drents Museum (Assen), Wildlands Adventure Zoo (Emmen), Museumdorp Orvelte, Plopsa Indoor (Coevorden), Groninger Museum (Groningen), Veenkoloniaal museum (Veendam), Hunebedcentrum (Borger), Attractiepark Slagharen

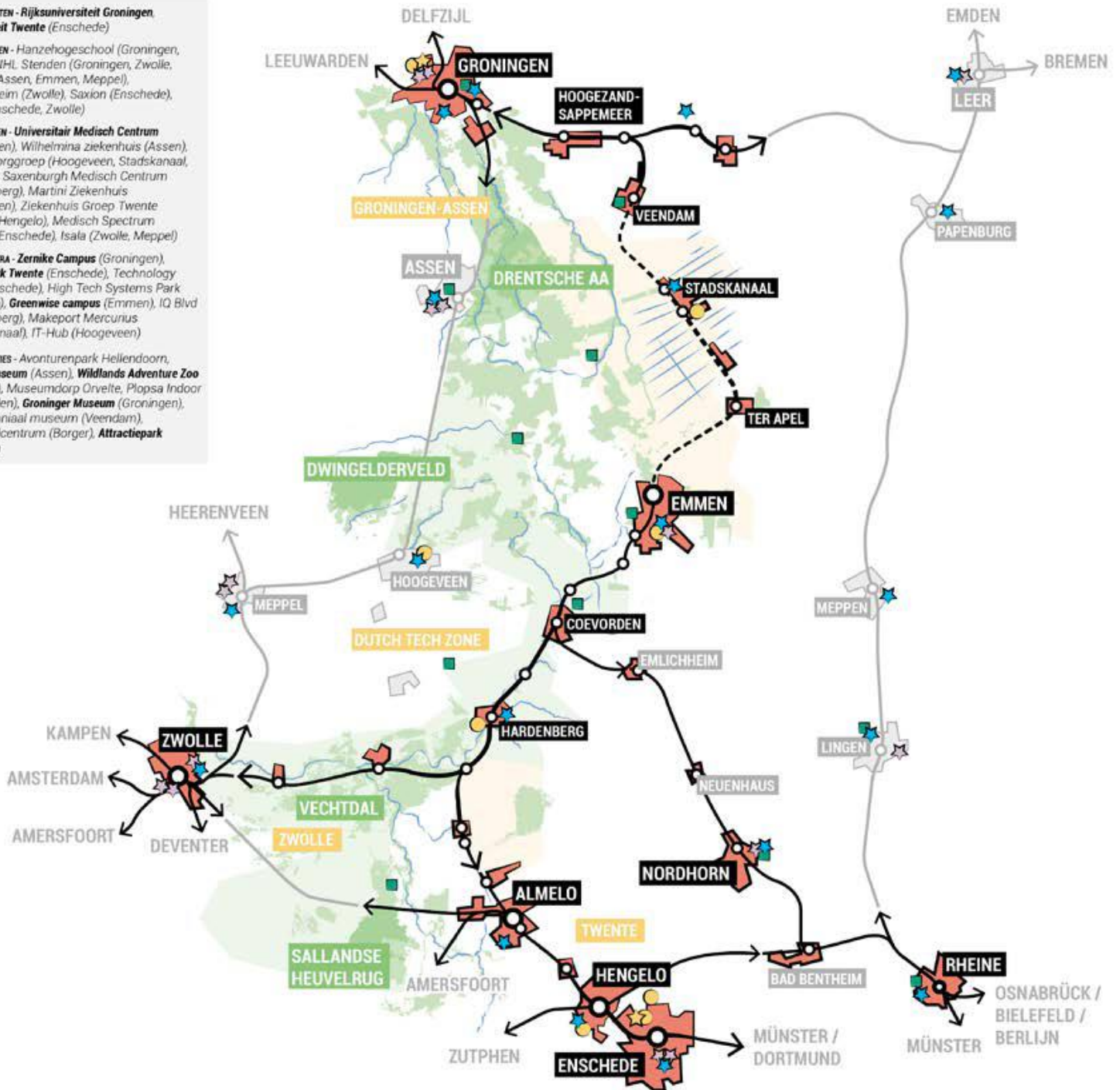


Figure 3: The complete Nedersaksenlijn, running from Groningen to Enschede. The interrupted line is to be finished. Taken from the Bidbook (2023), page 3.



Figure 4: A close-up of the regions connected by the Nedersaksenlijn (Veendam – Emmen). Part of a stylised map of all rail connections in the Netherlands in 2021. Made by Klaas Hofstra (2020) on behalf of ProRail. Close-up made by the author (2023).

With various researches already done, the Nedersaksenlijn has been ready for its approval to be built since more than half a decade. It even has its own foundation, aptly titled “Stichting Nedersaksenlijn”. In 2016, an investigation on its feasibility had been carried out by a student collaborating with Witteveen+Bos (2016). Their conclusion was that there were many positives as well as negatives. The return on investment would be negative. In 2019, Movares created an in-depth report for the route that the train connection should follow, creating three different routes (see figure 5). While Witteveen+Bos (2016) estimated the costs around 250 million Euro, Movares (2019) estimated around 555 million Euro for the cheapest option. Since 2019, there has been little but silence on the progression of the project, until December 2022. When the Dutch government announced in November 2022 that 4 billion Euro was made available for investment in public transport (Rijksoverheid, 2022), the discussion for the Nedersaksenlijn was sparked once again. In March of 2023, the foundation published a Bidbook, a plea for the national government to provide the grant to complete the first connection between Veendam and Stadskanaal. This has been approved and financed as of April 2023, which means that the project can move into its next phase, the MIRT-report.

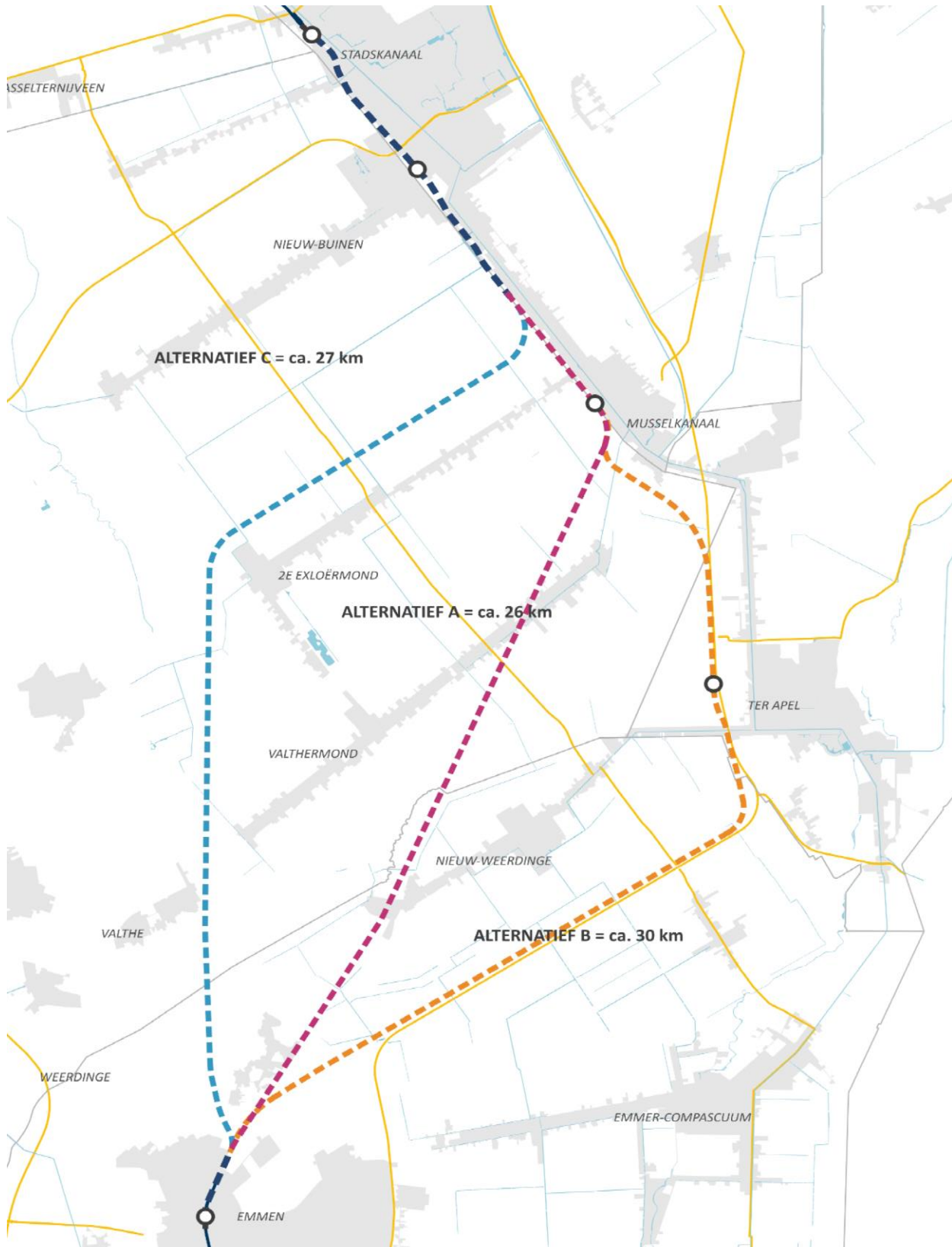


Figure 5: The three routes (alternative A, B and C) that Movares proposes. The favoured alternative is B. The small circles visualise the (new) train stations. Taken from Movares (2019), page 33.

## Research Problem

This research focuses on the discussion of how Social Impact Assessment (SIA) impacts the development of the Nedersaksenlijn and how the different stakeholders involved perceive the line. What are the interests of the stakeholders? How are they connected to one another? What role does SIA play?

The answers to those questions are summarised in the main research question:

### **What is the perception of each of the individual stakeholders on the Nedersaksenlijn, mainly positive or negative?**

The main question is substantiated by the following sub questions:

1. What are the reasons for the positive or negative perception?
2. What is the SIA of the Nedersaksenlijn?
3. What is the necessity of the Nedersaksenlijn?

By identifying SIA in its different forms, this theory will be linked to the case study of the Nedersaksenlijn. With the help of the conceptual model (figure 6), relevant literature and interviews, the SIA of the Nedersaksenlijn will be revealed and connected to the stakeholders. With a code tree that processes the key elements of the interviews, a connection will be made to the conceptual model, exploring their similarities and differences.

## Expectations

The reasoning behind the Nedersaksenlijn is crystal clear, to combat the issues of the Veenkoloniën. Therefore, the SIA is expected to be mainly positive. What the negative aspects of the line are is not clear, yet expected to be related to NIMBY-ism and environmental issues, such as (noise) pollution.



# Theoretical Framework

## Impact Assessment

Large spatial planning projects require in-depth calculating, negotiating and planning before they can be realised (Van Dijk et al., 2019). One of the many factors that planners have to face is the impact that the new project has while it is being built and once it is finished, on the social, the environmental and the functional level. Another hurdle that Dutch planners have to cross are the zoning plans. Once finished, an infrastructural project of this size can greatly influence the economic welfare of the affected area (Snieska & Simkunaite, 2009).

Impact Assessment, or IA, is a key component in decision-making in infrastructural planning (Banhalimi-Zakar et al., 2018; Esteves et al., 2012). While it is a relatively new field in spatial planning, its relevance in the developmental process cannot be overlooked. Many aspects of its process are regarded as successful (Glasson et al., 2019).

IA is split into two categories: Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This research will focus on the social category.

The concept of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the predecessor of SIA, was to focus on the environmental impact of a project, with the social aspect implemented as well. SIA diverged from EIA because of the growing realisation that social issues fundamentally differ from biological and physical issues (Vanclay et al., 2015). The main difference between SIA and EIA is the focus on impacted communities. These communities all have different stakeholders, each with their own personal or collective interests (Vanclay et al., 2015). For a successful outcome, multiple stakeholders involved is vital (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019).

SIA is the process of identifying and managing the social process of project development and includes the effective engagement of affected communities in participatory processes of identification, assessment and management of social impacts (Vanclay et al., 2015 & Esteves et al., 2012). It is used both in the process itself, as a prediction mechanism for considering social impacts and a management tool throughout the whole development cycle (Vanclay et al., 2015). The next sections will explain the concept of SIA and its different forms.

## Including Social Impact Assessment

There are solutions for stakeholders to include SIA in the planning process, as Kashfi & Hanna (2022) have researched. Participation and communication are key in the involvement of the people. Examples of this are interviews, group sessions and questionnaires. Maintaining transparency and appropriate roles and responsibilities are used to create trust between the parties involved (Kashfi & Hanna 2022). Innes & Booher (2016) discuss that if all participants are equal, if mutual understanding exists, consensus can be reached. With the stakeholders agreeing, civic wealth can be created (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019), which is exactly what the Veenkoloniën need.

In practice, reaching consensus is difficult. Every stakeholder involved has their own interests (Innes & Booher, 2016). When these interests are all laid out on the table, the actual negotiations towards consensus can start.

This process is visualised in figure 6, a conceptual model that includes the stakeholders and their roles in the planning process. All four of them have their own interest, that they actively try to pursue while also trying to reach consensus. Because this cannot be done for all, stakeholders have to compromise. That is when consensus is reached and the project commences. In the case of the Nedersaksenlijn, one can suspect that the interests are relatively similar. The project is focused on the completion of one goal: improving the social and economic development of the Veenkoloniën, or in other words, creating more civic wealth.

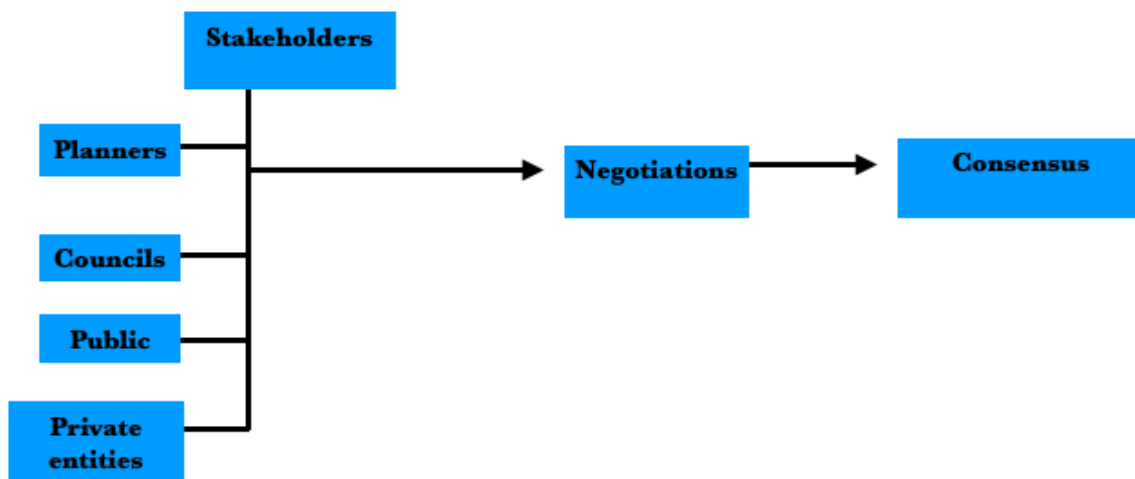


Figure 6: The conceptual model. Made by the author (2023).

## The stakeholders

- **Planners.** They are involved in the process of preparing, adopting, implementing, monitoring, adjusting and evaluating spatial policies (Van Dijk et al., 2019). Planners take on many roles, with the most prominent being the administrative role in the case of the Nedersaksenlijn.
- **Councils.** The provinces, the municipalities and all of their administrators, who work in close collaboration with the planners. They are the drivers of the Nedersaksenlijn.
- **Public.** The inhabitants of the area, who are affected by the project. It is the role of the planners and the councils to listen to concerns and to find solutions for them.
- **Private entities.** Private entities that have a stake in the completion of the line. In the case of the Nedersaksenlijn, these are the foundation and the entities that support them and companies such as Arriva and ProRail.

## Differences in Social Impact

According to Vanclay et al. (2015), social impacts differ from person to person. It can consist of one or more of the following aspects:

- **The way of life:** liveability, work, interaction on a daily basis. In the case of the Nedersaksenlijn, this is set to improve for inhabitants that tend to use public transport on a regular basis (Stichting Nedersaksenlijn, 2023). The increased access to amenities is of great importance for the development of a rural area (Green et al., 2005). The area is heavily dependent on car usage, which is costly (Weitz, 2008). Improved public transport can decrease this usage (Goodspeed et al., 2019; Van Dijk et al., 2019).
- **Community:** cohesion, stability, character. A community is based on the theory of sense of place, which ascribes meaning to the place of residency (Van Der Kammen et al., 2012). With the Nedersaksenlijn, this can be altered negatively if the line cuts through the agricultural landscape.

Also, the concept of NIMBY-ism plays a large role, as inhabitants tend to protest against new infrastructure (Devine-Wright, 2011; Hanna et al., 2016), especially if freight transport is

implemented. It can even lead to protests, in the worst case (Hanna et al., 2016; Vanclay & Hanna, 2019).

- **Political systems:** ability to participate in democratic decisions. The public can address their concerns after the MIRT-report. The Member of Stichting Nedersaksenlijn added that he organised multiple information events, where locals could ask questions and voice their concerns.
- **Environment:** quality of air, water and food; safety hazards, noise pollution. Preserving nature and its ecosystems is of importance to rural areas (Van Dijk et al., 2019). Noise pollution and vibrations will be the main concerns of the Nedersaksenlijn, especially since there is little expectations on the speed of the trains. With freight transport, these issues increase. Another question that is unanswered is whether the trains will run on diesel or on electricity. Electricity is more environmental friendly, but more costly, according to the Traffic and Transport Manager.
- **Health and well-being.** Neatly tied in with the previous impact, noise pollution and vibrations will be the main concerns for the health and well-being of the inhabitants. According to Fehr et al. (2014), planners have a great influence in the built and natural environment, which are two of many factors that influence health. Economic well-being will be improved as well.
- **Personal and property rights:** economically affected, violation of the civil rights. The economic circumstances of the inhabitants are expected to increase, individually and as a community (Snieska & Simkunaite, 2009). Depending on the route that the railway will take, some properties will be decreased in size.
- **Fears and aspirations:** own perception of safety, fears about the future of their community and themselves. As Mottee (2022) discusses, some of the affected communities were ignored in the management of social impacts for the Noord-Zuidlijn in Amsterdam, which justifies the fears in the case of the Nedersaksenlijn. Only if the stakeholders agree with one another, civic wealth can be created (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019). The communication with the inhabitants has been mostly one-way, but that will change during the development of the line. It is standard practice to include public participation in such a project in the Netherlands after the MIRT-report.

## Critiques on SIA

While Glasson et al. (2019) state that SIA is generally successful, this does not mean that SIA has no weaknesses. Firstly, it is costly and time-consuming.

Secondly, Esteves et al. (2012) claim that SIAs often do not meet public expectations to providing information on determining whether the project is useful or not. The public should be seen as an active stakeholder, to ensure that local communities are included, instead of only being able to comment or provide information (Esteves et al. 2012). With the MIRT-procedure, the public is most definitely seen as a stakeholder in the case of the Nedersaksenlijn.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is another aspect that Hanna & Vanclay (2013) view as lacking. They use the following summarisation, as made by Vanclay and Esteves (2011): the community is not intimidated or manipulated (Free); full consent is necessary prior to development (Prior); full disclosure of all plans (Informed) and that the community has the choice to say 'no' (Consent).

## Methodology

The research will be carried out through a thorough literature review and interviews with the different stakeholders. The focus of this research is thus in qualitative methods, due to the nature and the complexity of the project and its stakeholders. Via interviews, the subject at hand can be discussed in length, which is more difficult to do in surveys. Framing opinions of interviewees is easier, as well.

Interviewing some of these groups brings difficulties. The route runs through multiple different municipalities, which means that different parties from different municipalities have to be contacted.

The same can be said for locals, since the definitive route has not been decided on. That is why this research will exclude inhabitants as a source. Instead, this research relies on the expertise that the planners and council members have of their municipalities and the processes that they use in such a project.

All of the interviews will be recorded. Since all of the participants are Dutch, the interviews will be held in Dutch. The quotes are all put in Dutch, with an English translation as a footnote. The motivation for this is that some terms are difficult to translate, losing the essence of the message during that process.

The interviews are semi-structured, which means that the researcher prepared questions beforehand in an academic fashion. Since the stakeholders are different, the questions per interview are changed. For example, the interview with the member of Ondernemend Emmen was more focussed on economic development than the interview with the Manager of Information of ProRail. For a complete breakdown of all the different templates, see Appendix C. The questions are structured as follows:

1. General, introductory questions; meant to break the ice and to make the participant feel at ease. Used to establish a background.
2. Key questions; the core of the interview.
3. Closing questions; the end of the interview.

The outcome of the interviews will be put together to create a full picture of the necessity and the perception of the Nedersaksenlijn. The theories mentioned in the Theoretical Framework will be linked to the interviews as well, especially the different forms of SIA.

This will be done through the analysis of the interviews with coding in Atlas.ti. The codes will be linked together in a code tree and further explored in the discussion. The code tree will be made after the interviews are held.

## Ethical considerations

With interviewing comes responsibility. All of the participants' names will be anonymised, especially when tied to a certain function that easily can be tracked (i.e. a mayor of a village). That is why their exact function is deliberately made vague (see table 1). This is done to prevent the interviewee from receiving backlash for their statements.

The participants will have a full explanation of their rights prior to the interview (Appendix D). This document will be presented to them in Dutch and is directly taken from previous research done in *Methods in Academic Research*.

Another consideration is the positionality bias. The researcher does not live in the area and has no personal ties to any of the inhabitants or council members. This could influence the research since the researcher is an outsider. On the other hand, this allows the researcher to stay objective and be critical if necessary.

Another consideration is the privacy of the interviewees. Before the interview, the researcher will present the interviewee with his or her rights. If they agree, their information will be used in the research, without any personal information present. When they want to withdraw, at any given time after the interview, this can be done as well. The transcript is sent to the interviewee

afterwards, if necessary. This is done in order to let them agree with the statements that they made or to propose any changes, if necessary.

## Results: Interviews

Table 1: The interviewees.

| <b>Interviewee</b> | <b>Occupation</b>                         | <b>Date</b> | <b>Online or in person</b> | <b>Length of the interview</b> |
|--------------------|---|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>1</b>           | Municipality Official - Westerwolde       | 23-03       | Online                     | 1 hour                         |
| <b>2</b>           | Member - Stichting Nedersaksenlijn        | 23-03       | Online                     | 1 hour                         |
| <b>3</b>           | Traffic Manager - Arriva                  | 03-04       | Online                     | 1,5 hour                       |
| <b>4</b>           | Manager of Information - ProRail          | 13-04       | Online                     | 1 hour                         |
| <b>5</b>           | Member - Ondernemend Emmen                | 09-05       | In person                  | 45 mins                        |
| <b>6</b>           | Traffic & Transport – Province of Drenthe | 09-05       | Online                     | 1 hour                         |

Made by the author (2023). The transcripts of the interviews are available in Appendix A.

Table 2: A summary of the SIA of the Nedersaksenlijn.

|                                     | <b>Positive</b>  | <b>Negative</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Way of life</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased access to public transport</li> <li>• Increased access to amenities</li> <li>• With the new construction, the youth is more enticed to live in the area</li> <li>• Less focus on car usage</li> </ul> |   |
| <b>Community</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the line is on the inhabitants first and foremost</li> <li>• Rejuvenate the population with the new construction</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New influx of inhabitants with the new construction</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Political systems</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No issues in the coordination</li> </ul>  |   |
| <b>Environment</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little impact on the environment</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased noise pollution and vibrations. Even more so with freight transport</li> <li>• Unsure whether the trains run on electricity or diesel</li> </ul> |
| <b>Health and well-being</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little impact on health and well-being</li> <li>• Noise pollution is easily solved</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased noise pollution and vibrations. Even more so with freight transport</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Personal and property rights</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic circumstances change</li> <li>• Creates civic wealth</li> <li>• Decreasing chances of inherited poverty</li> <li>• Zoning plans hardly interfere with residential areas</li> </ul>                     |   |
| <b>Fears and aspirations</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inhabitants are allowed to voice concerns</li> <li>• FPIC is used correctly</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NIMBY-ism</li> <li>• Unsure if freight transport is conducted</li> </ul>   |

Made by the author (2023), based on the aspects of SIA, taken from Vanclay et al. (2015).

## Results: Code Tree

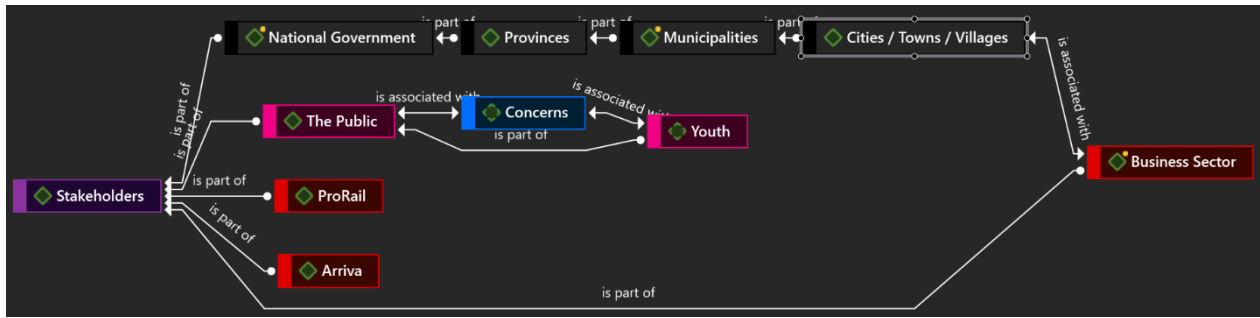


Figure 7: Code Tree. Made by the author (2023). The full code tree is available as Appendix B.

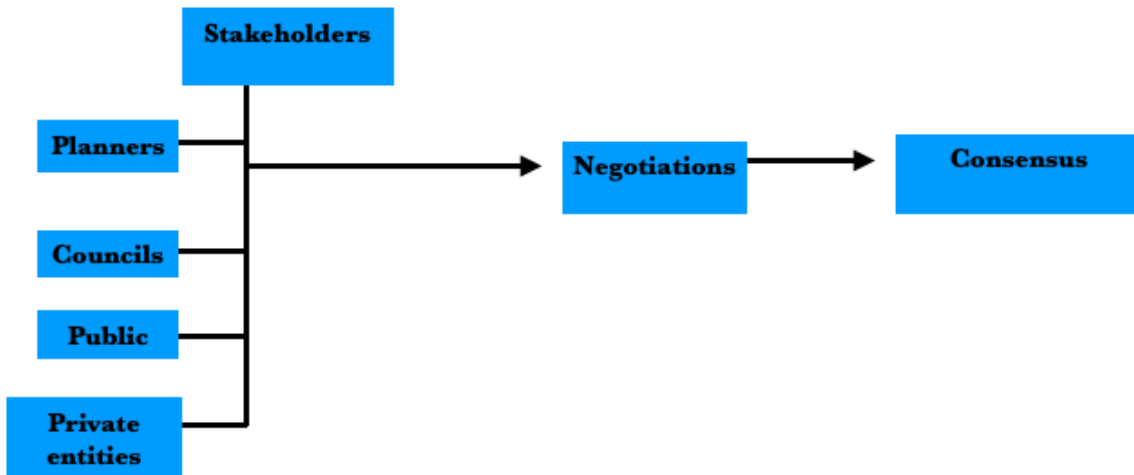


Figure 8: The conceptual model. Made by the author (2023).



## Discussion

The main view is that the positives of the Nedersaksenlijn greatly outweigh the negatives, to all of the stakeholders. The stakeholders' views are linked to their respective SIA aspect of Vanclay et al. (2015), as summarised in table 2.

As is visible in the code tree (figure 7), the structure of the hierarchy of the stakeholders is similar to that of the conceptual model (figure 8, a repetition of figure 6 for easy reference). There have been little to no issues in the coordination, according to multiple interviewees. This advances the phase of negotiations, towards a successful consensus (Innes & Booher, 2016). With the stakeholders agreeing, civic wealth can be created (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019).

“Qua beleid zitten de neuzen wel dezelfde kant op.” - Traffic Manager Arriva<sup>2</sup>

*After asking if interests clash:*

“Hooguit persoonlijke belangen. Heel eerlijk, nog niet.” – Member of the Stichting<sup>3</sup>

The four categories of stakeholders are linked to their real life counterparts:

- The planners are the governmental planners.
- The councils are the provinces, the municipalities and the cities, towns and villages.
- The public shows a new category: the youth. As is prominent in quotes #4, 5, 8 and 9, the youth is a large driver for realising the Nedersaksenlijn, for two reasons. The first being that students need a connection with their schools, the second being the youth moving out of the area. More is discussed below.
- The private entities are ProRail, Arriva, the foundation and the business sector.

### What is the necessity of the line?

The necessity of the line is evident. The Veenkoloniën has relatively poor inhabitants, facing multi-generational deprivation, an aging population and few opportunities in terms of economic development and employment (NOS, 2018; Volkskrant, 2020; Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2020:1 and 2). A new rail connection is a key driver in battling an area in decline (Esteves et al., 2012; Hanna et al., 2022). The last problem is the lack of public transport. The Nedersaksenlijn will battle all four problems. The Project Manager Westerwolde describes the problem as a snowball effect:

“Er is hier een groot woningtekort. De praktijk is dat de jeugd gewoon geen huis kan kopen, dus trekt die weg, terwijl er juist groeiende vraag is vanuit het bedrijfsleven naar personeel. [...] Dan vul je het in. Er zijn geen files, er wonen geen mensen, dus hoeft er geen trein. [...] Een sneeuwbaaleffect.” – Member of the Stichting<sup>4</sup>

### A new connection

The new connection that the rail provides is beneficial for both the city, towns and the villages, but mainly for the area in decline. The reason for the building of the line is not to connect Groningen with Emmen through a different means, but to provide for the lack of public

---

<sup>2</sup> In terms of policy, we are all on the same page.

<sup>3</sup> Maybe personal interests. If I'm honest, not really.

<sup>4</sup> There is a large housing problem. In practice, young people are not able to buy a home, which means that they move out, even though there is demand for young workers. [...] Then you fill in the blanks. No traffic jams, no people, so there is no train connection necessary. A snowball effect.

transport in the Veenkoloniën. According to the member of the Stichting, the line will focus on the inhabitants, the businessmen, the students, the healthcare and tourism, in that order of priority. This way, the focus is really put on the potential users of the line.

“Regionaal spoor is de ader van de regio, zeker dunbevolkte regio’s, om naar de stad te kunnen. Zeker zo’n regio als Stadskanaal en de Veenkoloniën, voor veel zaken ben je op Groningen aangewezen. Voor onderwijs en dat soort zaken.” – Traffic Manager Arriva<sup>5</sup>

“Je genereert nieuwe kansen. Onze slogan is: ‘van krimpgebied naar kansgebied.’” – Traffic Manager Arriva<sup>6</sup>

“En dat was uiteindelijk het doel, de sociaaleconomische situatie verbeteren van de mensen in de regio.” – Member Ondernemend Emmen<sup>7</sup>

With a new and affordable connection to the larger cities, people have more access to amenities that they do not have access to currently. This is of great importance for the development of an area such as the Veenkoloniën (Green et al., 2005). It decreases the necessity of the car (Goodspeed et al., 2019; Van Dijk et al., 2019). Also, their economic circumstances will increase (Snieska & Simkunaite, 2009). This increases the likelihood that people will stay in the area for longer, instead of moving out, which is especially the case for the younger generations, since they are dependent on the location of their educational facilities. That is why they move out, further aging the population. The employers in the area face this problem as well, since they crave for young workers that are not available, forcing them to move their business elsewhere, crippling the area even more.

“We hebben mensen gesproken in het gebied die kinderen hebben en naar mbo [gaan] - is nog redelijk te vinden, maar als ze naar hbo of wo-onderwijs [gaan] moeten ze naar Groningen. [...] Als je daar woont moet je wel weg om te kunnen studeren. Niet meer terug. Het is een mini *brain drain*.” – Traffic & Transport Drenthe<sup>8</sup>

“Andersom klagen bedrijven ook dat ze afhankelijk van deze [onderwijs]instellingen zijn. De lijntjes zijn te ver weg. Het gebied ligt achteraan.” - Traffic & Transport Drenthe<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Regional train lines are the veins of the area, especially sparsely populated ones, to be able to go to the cities. An area such as Stadskanaal and the Veenkoloniën is dependent on Groningen for a lot of aspects. Education and other amenities.

<sup>6</sup> You generate new chances. Our slogan is: ‘from a shrinking area to a growing area.’

<sup>7</sup> And that was the goal, to improve the social-economic situation of the people in the area.

<sup>8</sup> We have spoken to people with kids that live in the area. *Mbo* is reasonably easy to find, but *hbo* and *wo* education is only available in Groningen. [...] If you live there, you’ll have to leave in order to study. You won’t come back. It’s a minor brain drain.

<sup>9</sup> Businesses complain that they are dependent on these [educational] facilities. The public transport lines are too far apart. The area is a dead end.

## **Aging population**

The aging population can be dealt with by connecting the youth, mainly the students, to their schools. Another added positive is the new construction that is planned around the stations of Stadskanaal and Ter Apel.

“We willen best meedenken en meebetalen, maar dan moet je ervoor zorgen dat er woningen komen.” – Member of the Stichting<sup>10</sup>

Since the homes will be made for starters, this entails that younger people will be drawn into the area more, especially with the new amenity of the train connection. These are all new opportunities for the area (Green et al., 2005; Van Der Kammen et al., 2012).

## **Opportunities**

Other opportunities are the new employment that the project brings, in the form of research and development, construction (of the railway, its infrastructure, stations, the new neighbourhoods), maintenance and logistics.

“Je moet ook kijken naar de werkgelegenheid die het met zich meebrengt. Met alles erop en eraan een hele sociale impact.” – Member Ondernemend Emmen<sup>11</sup>

“Het ontwikkelen is werk, het bouwen is werk en het vervoer is werk. Het zuigt ook woningbouw en werkgelegenheid aan. Ook opleidingen.” – Traffic Manager Arriva<sup>12</sup>

Some interviewees even mentioned tourism as an opportunity:

“In feite is dat een meekoppelkans. Je legt die spoorlijn niet aan voor het toerisme, maar omgekeerd profiteert iedereen er wel van. [...] Het wordt leuker om via Emmen naar Groningen te reizen.” - Traffic Manager Arriva<sup>13</sup>

“Je hebt de STAR, Wildlands, Plopsaland, Tierpark Nordhorn, Slot Bentheim, Slot Dankern. Ja, het verbindt. Punt.” – Member of the Stichting<sup>14</sup>

Even though the main focus of the line is not on the tourists, tourism will definitely benefit from the extra connection. Accessibility to tourist attractions is increased, not only in the area, but also in Germany.

## **Public transport improvement**

The last problem, the lack of public transport, is addressed as well. The current bus system will be replaced by a train, which will be ‘significantly faster’, according to the Project Manager for

---

<sup>10</sup> We want to help with thinking and the funding, on the condition that new houses are built around the stations.

<sup>11</sup> You also have to think of the new employment that the line brings. With everything that is a lot of social impact.

<sup>12</sup> The development is employment, the construction is employment and the transportation is employment. It also attracts new housing and education. As well as education.

<sup>13</sup> [Tourism] is in fact a chance for linkages. The line is not constructed for the tourism, but everybody does benefit from it. [...] It becomes fun to travel from Emmen to Groningen.

<sup>14</sup> You have the STAR, Wildlands, Plopsaland, Tierpark Nordhorn, Schloss Bentheim, Schloss Dankern. Yes, it connects. Period.

Westerwolde. The current bus route from Groningen to Emmen (300) takes 54 minutes, while the train will take 35 minutes, give or take. This is based on the provisional express train, similar to the one running from Groningen to Leeuwarden.

Movares (2019) expects more stations than that will be realised, Stadskanaal, Stadskanaal Diedeldom and Musselkanaal. Instead, the favoured route will follow the line in figure 9, with the only new stations being Stadskanaal and Ter Apel. If the Member of the Stichting is correct has to be determined, since the calculations for the time are based on a speed of 130 kilometres per hour. That will not be feasible for the whole route, due to the stations and the bends in the track. It is unsure whether the train will be slower than the bus, for both the commuter and the express train. The member of the Stichting claimed that the travel time will be close to 35 minutes, while the Traffic and Transport Manager for Province Drenthe claimed that the train will take closer to an hour. The bus takes a more direct route compared to the train. Fact is that the current travel time from Groningen to Veendam is 29 minutes, which is not half of its journey to Emmen.

Another incentive is the so called 'rail bonus', that the Municipality Official Westerwolde mentions. People often hesitate to take the bus, but are open to take the train. In the past, the reanimation of the connection between Groningen and Veendam showed similar results. This connection is a train route nowadays, but used to be a bus route. The result was, because of the rail bonus, that the train route served a lot more passengers than when it was a bus route.

“Toen Veendam werd aangesloten kon je met de bus sneller naar Groningen. De bus is er ook uitgehaald en toch is de lijn naar Veendam een succesverhaal, met alleen maar groei van passagiers. Dat is een mogelijk scenario. Maar ook een mogelijk scenario is ook dat mensen zo gewend zijn aan de Q-liner, het is een hele goede Q-liner, [...] dat als die blijft doorrijden dat de Nedersaksenlijn minder is om mensen van Emmen naar Groningen te krijgen. Het gaat meer om van Emmen naar Stadskanaal, of van Ter Apel naar Hoogezand.”<sup>15</sup>

The interesting aspect of bus route 300 is that there is no rail bonus according to the Traffic and Transport Manager, because that route is of such high quality, due to its availability, double decker buses and high speed.

To summarise, as the Member of Ondernemend Emmen articulates,

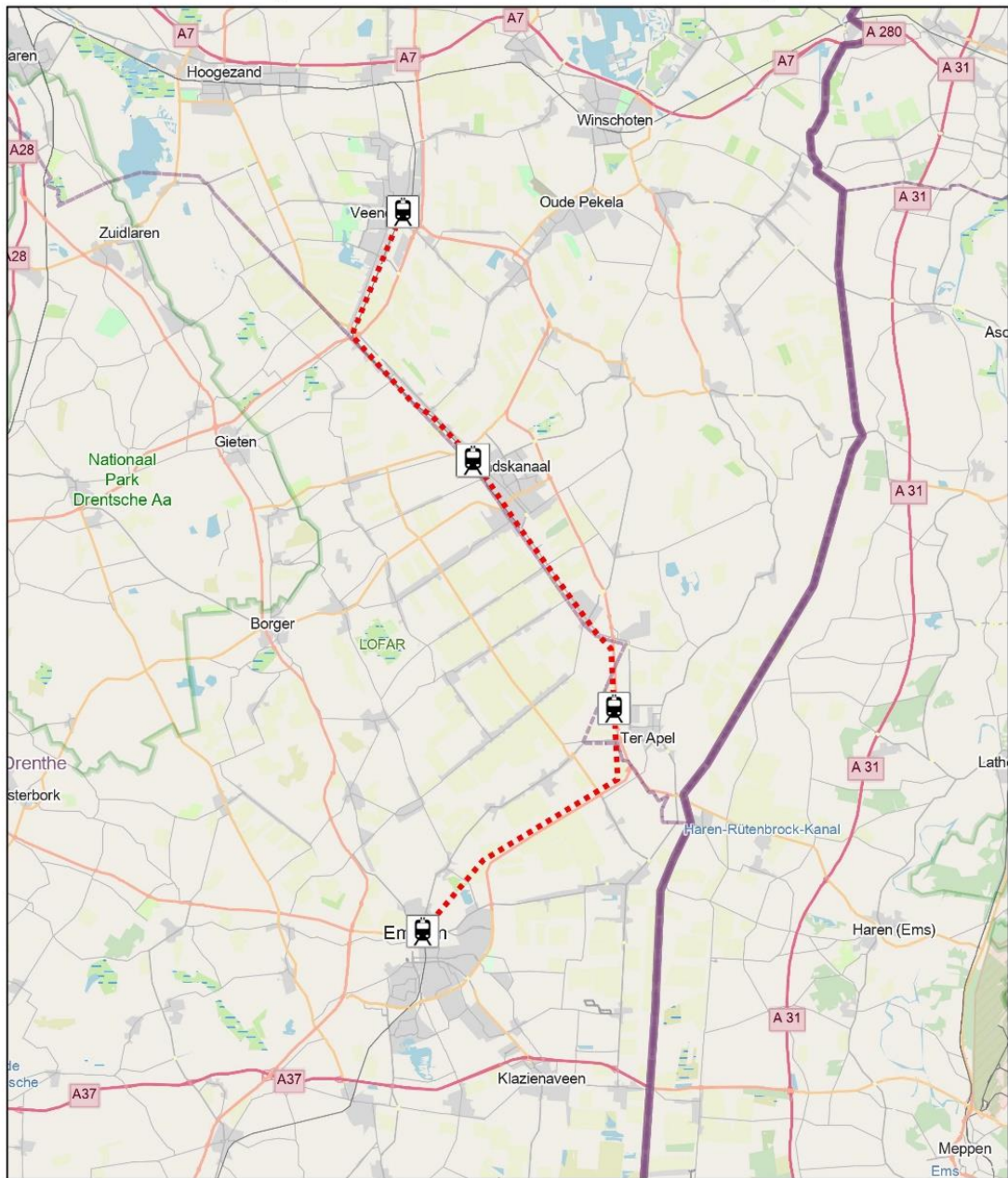
“De trein moet sexy worden.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> When Veendam was connected, you travelled faster to Groningen by bus. The bus was removed later and even then the line to Veendam is successful, only showing a growth in the amount of passengers. That is a possible scenario. Another scenario is that people are so used to the Q-liner, which is a great Q-liner, [...] that if that stays people are more inclined to take that instead of the Nedersaksenlijn to get from Emmen to Groningen.

<sup>16</sup> The train has to become more sexy.

## Proposed route of the Nedersaksenlijn



5/24/2023

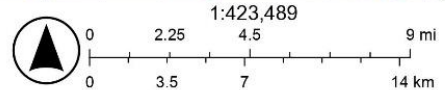


Figure 9: The favoured route of the Nedersaksenlijn. Made by the author (2023) in ArcGIS, using OpenStreetMap.

### Negative aspects of the line

One possible problem, that multiple interviewees mentioned, is that people tend to struggle with having a train line running through their backyard (Devine-Wright, 2011; Hanna et al., 2016), otherwise defined as NIMBY-ism. This is the case for the inhabitants of Musselkanaal and Stadskanaal, due to the straight structure of these towns and that the line will directly run aside them (see figure 9). It is possible that the inhabitants will show resistance. They are able to voice their concerns after the MIRT-report and are informed on multiple occasions along its development, as the Member of Stitching addressed. That concludes that FPIC (Hanna & Vanclay 2013) is used to its full extent as well. If the NIMBY-ism is not controlled, the project can be severely delayed.

Another cause of delays is the zoning plans (bestemmingsplannen) that are forced to be changed in order for the construction to begin. Luckily, the current route mainly runs alongside existing infrastructure, such as the N391 and the N366. This means that the line hardly interferes with residential plots of land.

There have been other concerns, such as the noise and vibrations that the trains will produce, especially if freight transport will be conducted. This can impact the health of the inhabitants (Fehr et al., 2014). It is unsure whether the trains will run on electricity, which is more environmentally friendly, but costly, or on diesel, which is more economically viable, but more polluting.

“Je gaat een nieuwe treinverbinding introduceren op plekken waar-ie nu nog niet is, dat brengt een bepaalde geluidsbelasting met zich mee. [...] Ik denk dat geluid en trillingen het belangrijkste zijn hier. Er is een discussie over of er wel of geen goederentrein gaat rijden, wat dat betekent voor gevaarlijke stoffen, geen idee. Persoonlijk denk ik niet dat die impact niet heel groot is, voornamelijk geluid.” - Manager of Information ProRail<sup>17</sup>

The speed of the train increases the amount of noise pollution. Since the definite route has not been decided, the exact speed is difficult to say. Other factors influence the speed as well, such as the curvature of the route and the length between stations.

Since the line will travel for a large part alongside the villages of Stadskanaal and Musselkanaal, due to their straight structure, it will pass a large residential area. This increases the concern for noise pollution. It is, however, a sound that inhabitants grow accustomed to and can easily be solved, with sound barriers. Still, it is too early to assess the impact of the noise pollution, because there is no definitive route yet. There is also no concluding thought on whether there will be a demand for freight transport.

Another concern is the financing. The national government has to subsidise the project almost entirely. The provinces simply do not have that large of a budget. Realising the financing for the first part was not without difficulties. The national government seems to view the Nedersaksenlijn as a regional project.

“Ik vind het geen regionaal maar een landelijk project.” - Member Ondernemend Emmen<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> You are introducing a new train connection on places where it wasn't before, that will bring noise pollution. [...] I think that noise and vibrations are the most important here. There is a discussion about whether there should be freight transport, what that means for dangerous substances, no clue. Personally, I do not think that that impact will be that great. Mainly noise pollution.

<sup>18</sup> It is no regional, but a national project.

The future of the line is therefore bright, but with some smaller hurdles to overcome. That the first part of the line is approved and financed is a good sign. The fact that all stakeholders have their eyes on the main goal, is hopeful.

“We hebben maar één doel: dat die lijn hier gaat komen.” – Member of the Stichting<sup>19</sup>

“Ik heb maar een doel: die lijn moet er komen, linksom of rechtsom, en het liefst zo snel mogelijk.” – Member Ondernemend Emmen<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> We only have one goal, that the line will come.

<sup>20</sup> I only have one goal, that the line will be there. One way or another, and as soon as possible.

## Conclusion

The stakeholders view the Nedersaksenlijn as a project for which the positives greatly outweigh the negatives, which includes SIA. They have a clear target in mind, that the line is built for the inhabitants first and foremost.

The line combats the four problems of the Veenkoloniën, by creating civic wealth, economic welfare and new opportunities in terms of employment and tourism. With a new train connection to cities, the smaller towns have greater access to amenities, especially for students living in the area. That retains the youth for longer, especially with the new construction around the planned train stations. At the same time, the line decreases the necessity of the car.

There are negatives to the project as well. There is a possibility for NIMBY-ism to throw a spanner in the works, as well as the concerns for noise pollution and vibrations, especially if freight transport is conducted. Lastly, the national government is hesitant to finance the project. To conclude, the opportunities that the Veenkoloniën get with this project are far greater than the smaller adversities that the area faces during and after the development.

Future research can improve upon the conceptual model and the code tree, once the development is finished. It can critically assess the SIA that was done during the following phases of the line: the MIRT-report and its construction.

## Reflection

To reflect on the process of this research, the expectations were quite similar to the results. The SIA was indeed positive. There were some unexpected results, such as the new category of stakeholders, the youth, and the conflicting scheduling times of the train connection. The research itself did not go as smoothly as planned, with multiple interviewees never responding. By excluding the public, an important stakeholder was left out. Another aspect that was difficult was linking the results to the theory and the code tree, since it was the first time that the researcher made a code tree, which was challenging and time-consuming to learn.

In conclusion, the research was engaging to participate in, since the project is developing in real time. With some smaller and larger hiccups along the way, the final product is something that the researcher is content with.



## References

- Banhalimi-Zakar, Z., Gronow, C., Wilkinson, L., Jenkins B. & Pope J. (2018) Evolution or revolution: Where next for impact assessment? *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 36(6), 506-515.
- Devine-Wright, P. (2011). *Renewable Energy and the Public*. First Edition. Abingdon: Earthscan.
- Dijk, van T., Kann, van F. M. G., Woltjer, J. (2019). *Explaining Dutch Spatial Planning*. 2019 Edition. Groningen: Coöperatie in Planning.
- Esteves, A.M., Franks, D. & Vanclay, F. (2012). Social impact assessment: The state of the art. *Impact Assessment & Project Appraisal*, 30 (1), 35-44.
- Fehr, R., Viliani, F., Nowacki, J. & Martuzzi, M. (2014). Health in Impact Assessments: Opportunities not to be missed. *Copenhagen: World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe*.
- Gemeente Vlagtwedde (drafted in 2009, adapted in 2015). *Buitengebied 2009*. Retrieved on 12-03-2023 from: [https://www.ruimtelijkeplannen.nl/documents/NL.IMRO.0048.BP1401-vs04/r\\_NL.IMRO.0048.BP1401-vs04.html](https://www.ruimtelijkeplannen.nl/documents/NL.IMRO.0048.BP1401-vs04/r_NL.IMRO.0048.BP1401-vs04.html)
- Gardenier, J. D. (2020). *Waarom je in Oost-Groningen zo moeilijk een kwartje wordt*. Dagblad van het Noorden, 16-10-2020.
- Glasson, J. & Therivel, R. (2019). *Introduction to Environmental Impact Assessment*. Fifth Edition. London: Routledge.
- Goodspeed, R., Xie, T., Dillahunt, T. R. & Lustig, J. (2018). An alternative to slow transit, drunk driving, and walking in bad weather: An exploratory study of ridesourcing mode choice and demand. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 79 (2019), 1-12.
- Green, G. P., Steven, C., Marcouiller, D. W. (2005). *Amenities and rural development: theory, methods and public policy*. First edition. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Hanna P., Inglez de Souza C. & Fa'au T. (2022). Indigenous Peoples and Impact Assessment. In: Fonseca, A. (Ed.), *Handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment*. Edward Elgar: London
- Hanna P., Vanclay F., Langdon J. & Arts J. (2016). Conceptualising social protest and the significance of protest action to large projects. *Extractive Industries & Society* 3(1), 217-239.
- Helen Lam et al. (2018). and CBS. *Kansenkaart*. Retrieved on 27-02-2023 from: <https://www.kansenkaart.nl/persoonlijkinkomen#6.45/52.291/5.285>
- Hofstra, K. (2020). Spoorkaart Nederland 2021. Retrieved on 05-03-2023 from: <https://www.treinreiziger.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Spoorkaart-2021-v2.pdf>
- Innes, J. E., & Booher, D. E. (2016). Collaborative rationality as a strategy for working with wicked problems. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 154, 8–10.

Kammen, van der, H., Klerk, de, L., Dekker, G., & Witsen, P. P. (2012). *The Selfmade Land*. First Edition. Houten: Spectrum.

Kashfi M. & Hanna, P. (2022). How Could Local Communities Regulate Companies to Assess the Overlooked Environmental and Social Impacts of Industrial Projects? In: Wood, G., Górski, J., Mete, G. *The Palgrave Handbook of Social License to Operate and Energy Transitions*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

Lumpkin, G. T. & Bacq, S. (2019). Civic wealth creation: a new view of stakeholder engagement and societal impact. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 33 (4), 383-404.

Mottee, L. K. et al. (2020). Metro infrastructure planning in Amsterdam: how are social issues managed in the absence of environmental and social impact assessment? *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 38 (4), 320-335.

Movares (2019). *Nedersaksenlijn; Spoorverbinding Twente - Drenthe - Groningen*. Available at: [https://web.archive.org/web/20200223090332/https://nedersaksenlijn.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/EDOP-5622483-v1-BIJLAGE\\_3\\_Rapportage\\_Quickscan\\_Nedersaksenlijn-DEF.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20200223090332/https://nedersaksenlijn.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/EDOP-5622483-v1-BIJLAGE_3_Rapportage_Quickscan_Nedersaksenlijn-DEF.pdf). Accessed on February the 16th, 2023.

NOS (2018). *In de veenkolonien krijg je het niet snel beter dan je ouders*. Retrieved on 10-05 from: <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2259377-in-de-veenkolonien-krijg-je-het-niet-snel-beter-dan-je-ouders>

NOS (2023). *Beleid werkt niet in de Veenkoloniën, komen alleen maar arme mensen bij*. Retrieved on 11-05-2023 from: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2474546-beleid-werkt-niet-in-de-veenkolonien-komen-er-alleen-maar-arme-mensen-bij>

Project Blauwestad (2023). *Blauwestad*. Retrieved on 04-03-2023 from: <https://www.blauwestad.nl/>

ProRail (2023). *Over ons*. Retrieved on 25-02-2023 from: <https://www.prorail.nl/over-ons/organisatie>

Provincie Groningen (2022). *Dit is Groningen: Koersdocument Omgevingsvisie*.

Rijksoverheid (2023). *Gezamenlijke analyse Deltaplan voor Noordelijk Nederland*.

Rijksoverheid (2022). *Miljardeninvesteringen voor bereikbaarheid woonwijken in heel Nederland*. Retrieved on 27-02-2023 on: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/11/14/miljardeninvesteringen-voor-bereikbaarheid-woonwijken-in-heel-nederland>

Rijkswaterstaat (2023). *Uitleg bestemmingsplannen*. Retrieved on 12-05-2023 from: <https://www.infomil.nl/onderwerpen/ruimte/ruimtelijke/wet-ruimtelijke/bestemmingsplan/uitleg/#Vormenvanbestemmingsplannen>

RTV Noord (2023). *Aanpak overerfbare armoede in de Veenkoloniën: nog een lange weg te gaan*. Retrieved on 12-06 from: <https://www.rtvnoord.nl/nieuws/1021167/aanpak-overerfbare-armoede-in-de-veenkolonien-nog-een-lange-weg-te-gaan>

Ruimtelijke Plannen (2023). Rijksoverheid. Retrieved on 09-03-2023 from: <https://www.ruimtelijkeplannen.nl/viewer/view>

Snieska, V. & Simkunaite, I. (2009). Socio-Economic Impact of Infrastructure Investments, *Inzinerine Ekonomika-Engineering Economics*, 2009 (3), 16-25.

Sociaal Planbureau Groningen (2020). *Ontwikkelingen in (langdurig) laag inkomen*. Retrieved on 23-02-2023 from: <https://sociaalplanbureau groningen.nl/armoede/lage-inkomens/>

Sociaal Planbureau Groningen (2020). *Armoede in de Veenkoloniën*. Retrieved on 10-05 from: <https://sociaalplanbureau groningen.nl/armoede/armoede-generatie-op-generatie/armoede-in-de-veenkolonien/>

Stichting Nedersaksenlijn (2023). *Waarom Nedersaksenlijn*. Retrieved on 17-02-2023 from: <https://nedersaksenlijn.nl/waarom-nedersaksenlijn/>

Studio Bereikbaar & Rebel Group (2022). *Bidbook Nedersaksenlijn*. Available at: <https://nedersaksenlijn.nl/bidbook/>. Accessed on March 23rd, 2023.

Vanclay F, & Hanna P. (2019). Conceptualising company response to community protest: Principles to achieve a social license to operate. *Land*, 8 (6), 101.

Vanclay F, Esteves A. M. (2011). Current issues and trends in Social Impact Assessment. *New directions in social impact assessment: conceptual and methodological advances*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 3–19.

Vanclay, F., Esteves, A. M., Aucamp, I., & Franks, D. (2015). Social Impact Assessment: Guidance for assessing and managing the social impacts of projects. *Fargo ND: International Association for Impact Assessment*. Accessed on: [https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/148304223.pdf.1-23 and 34-63](https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/148304223.pdf.1-23%20and%2034-63).

Wegenwiki (2023). *N366 (Nederland)*. Retrieved on 04-03-2023 from: [https://www.wegenwiki.nl/N366\\_\(Nederland\)](https://www.wegenwiki.nl/N366_(Nederland))

Weitz, 2008. Who's afraid of the big bad bus? NIMBYism and popular images of public transit. *Journal of Urbanism*, 1 (2), 157-172.

Wijngaarden, van A. (2023). *Vader en dochter trekken de Nedersaksenlijn*. Dagblad van het Noorden, 04-03-2023.

Witteveen+Bos (2016). Haalbaarheidsonderzoek spoorlijn Musselkanaal - Emmen. *Universiteit Twente*. Available at: <https://nedersaksenlijn.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Onderzoeksrapport1.pdf>. Accessed on March the 1st, 2023.

Woltjer, J, Alexander, E, Hull, A & Ruth, M (2015), *Place-Based Evaluation for Integrated Land-Use Management*. First Edition. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.