

Citizens' Initiatives: How Local Governments Fill their Facilitative Role

JUDITH BAKKER, BAS DENTERS, MIRJAN OUDE VRIELINK & PIETER-JAN KLOK

University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT *In the context of drastic cutbacks many Dutch municipalities consider citizens' initiatives (CIs) as an attractive alternative for municipal policies aimed at improving the livability and safety in neighbourhoods, simultaneously building responsible citizenship. In this paper we combine different theoretical perspectives to analyse the institutional settings in which CIs are being realised, and how municipalities try to facilitate such initiatives. Municipalities can do this by either trying to structure the relevant networks or by various forms of process management. This analysis sheds light on how municipalities use a variety of instruments to mobilise citizens to participate in CIs. In using such instruments they can influence various factors (like motivations, personal resources, social capital and expected responsiveness; cf. Lowndes et al.'s CLEAR model) that increase the likelihood of civic engagement.*

KEY WORDS: Citizen's initiatives, local democracy, citizen's engagement, neighbourhood approach, co-governance

Introduction

A group of residents from a middle-sized Dutch town initiate the development of a playground in an under-used park. Four young men, migrants from the Middle East, in another city set up an easily-accessible language training centre in their neighbourhood, as an alternative to the official municipal Dutch language training program. Neighbours in a large city start a neighbourhood watch group in reaction to a multitude of nightly incidents. In all these instances the initiators, with some

Correspondence Address: Dr Judith Bakker, University of Twente, School of Management and Governance, Department of Political Science and Research Methods, PO Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands. Email: j.h.m.bakker@utwente.nl

assistance from their local government, were successful in achieving their goals.

These three projects are examples of what we call citizens' initiatives (CIs). The citizens who are active in such initiatives participate in shaping their neighbourhood, working for the common good. Previous studies have shown that CIs are oftentimes a form of 'blended social action' (Sampson 2005), which involves engagement of both citizens and governmental and non-governmental local agencies such as the municipality and housing corporations. Rather than a 'pure' form of civic activism, CIs are a hybrid in which citizens take the lead but collaborate with public authorities (Hurenkamp *et al.* 2006).

Currently in Dutch national and local government CIs are very much 'en vogue'. First, it is expected that they provide a cheap alternative to costly governmental urban development programs that can effectively contribute to the safety and livability of neighbourhoods and communities. Moreover, CIs are believed to empower and educate citizens and reduce the reliance of individuals and social organisations on state bureaucracies.

This enthusiasm for CIs, however, is by no means typically Dutch. In the UK the new coalition cabinet has made the Big Society programme its main vehicle to reduce the size of the state and to increase the role of 'an organic civil society rather the state' based on the assumption that '[...]people do not need the state but can organise themselves for the public good through a tradition of voluntarism' (Smith 2010, p. 830). Big Society also implies a desire 'to create a climate that empowers local people and communities' and a devolution of powers to provide neighbourhoods with 'far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live...' (Cabinet Office 2011).

In light of such ambitions it should be kept in mind that many CIs are dependent on the support of public authorities. If Big Society is to be successful the cherished CIs require interest, engagement and support by municipalities and other governmental and semi-governmental authorities, rather than abstention. In recent publications active citizenship and CIs are a frequent subject. The research has discussed the nature of CIs, the participants and their background as well as the connection between civic participation and social cohesion (see Edelenbos *et al.* 2005, WRR 2005, Verhoeven 2006, Hurenkamp *et al.* 2006, v.d. Wijdeven and Hendriks 2009, Wagenaar and Specht 2010).

Normative and empirical analyses of the government's role in relation to CIs are, however, strikingly rare. In this paper we examine how local authorities try to stimulate and facilitate the development of CIs. Our research question may be stated as:

What actions do local authorities take to facilitate citizens's initiatives?

Answering this question is a first step in a more comprehensive research program in which we will try to develop empirically grounded hypotheses

about the effects of different facilitation strategies. Under different sets of conditions, various strategies are likely to have different impacts on the success of CIs. Before we can set ourselves to these more complex tasks it is necessary to develop a useful framework for describing the different ways in which local governments deal with CIs.

Our strategy of analysis is the following. First, we will provide a short discussion of CIs as a particular mode of collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash 2007) or self-organised collective action (e.g., Ostrom 1990, Ostrom *et al.* 1994, Ostrom 2005). We then will combine this literature with insights about network management (e.g., Kickert and Koppenjan 1997, De Bruijn and Ten Heuvelhof 2000, Klijn *et al.* 2010, Edelenbos *et al.* 2009). This literature will help in defining the instruments that facilitators may use. We will then link this macro-political, institutional analysis with results from survey-based, micro-political research on civic and political engagement (Verba *et al.* 1995, Lowndes *et al.* 2006a and 2006b). These micro-political analyses will help in thinking systematically about how facilitators may use their instruments to mobilise participants and contribute to successful CIs. All in all our theoretical analysis will provide the sensitising concepts to perform an exploratory, empirical analysis of facilitation in the real world, by looking at a number of selected CIs.

1. Theoretical background

In this paper we define citizens' initiatives (CIs) as:

Collective activities by citizens aimed at providing local 'public goods or services' (e.g. regarding the livability and safety) in their street, neighbourhood or town, in which citizens decide themselves both about the aims and means of their project and in which local authorities have a supporting or facilitating role.

This definition implies several distinguishing features:

- A CI is in principle a *collective* action. Although a single person might come up with the idea, there usually is a group of people involved and the public good is pursued.
- This collective action is essentially self-organised, and both its aims and its ways and means are determined by the citizens themselves.
- The initiative in its core is independent of the government or professional organisations. Rather than citizen participation in public decision-making (e.g., electoral and non-electoral political participation), CIs imply some limited forms of public participation (facilitation) in citizen governance. To the extent that professionals take over the initiative CIs will lose their character as a form of self-governance.

We observe that in practice most CIs can be considered as politics with a small *p* – the politics of civil society that take place in neighbourhood communities and associations of citizens (Van de Wijdeven and Hendriks 2009), relating to safety, livability, social events, community arts and sports. Many CIs imply that citizens act rather than talk. Therefore this mode of participation does not necessarily require participants to possess the civic skills (see Verba *et al.* 1995) that are required for most other political activities. For this reason it is sometimes expected that this mode of participation may recruit new participants, different from the higher educated middle aged ‘usual suspects’ that are typically overrepresented among political activists.

1.1. Developing a conceptual model of facilitation

Our analysis begins with discussing macro-political, institutional settings that facilitate CIs and their self-organised collective action. Ostrom has made significant contributions to an empirically grounded theory of self-organised collective action. In an effort to ‘contribute to an understanding of the factors that can enhance or detract from the capabilities of individuals to organise collective action related to providing local public goods’ (Ostrom 1990, p. 27) the so-called Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework was developed. Based on a systematic analysis of empirical cases, factors that positively or negatively affect attempts at self-governance were identified. In the resulting model self-governance is situated in the context of ‘action arenas’, where the interactions between various participants take place and where particular outcomes are produced (Ostrom 2005, p. 14).

Independent from the work in the Ostrom tradition,¹ Ansell and Gash (2007) have reviewed 137 cases of collaborative governance to identify factors that impact the success of collaboration. Ansell and Gash define collaborative governance as ‘a mode of governance that brings multiple stakeholders [either individuals or organisations] together in common forums to engage in consensus-oriented decision making’ (2007, p. 543). Ansell and Gash identify a set of key factors, including the prior history of conflict or cooperation, the incentives to participate, resources, leadership and institutional design.

The Ansell and Gash model is ‘largely empirically inductive’ (2007, p. 561) and in the process of inferring from the details of the cases the authors admittedly were ‘overwhelmed by the complexity of the collaborative process’ in developing a simplified model (2007, p. 549). Nevertheless, these authors have done an impressive job in developing a concise model. The IAD framework, which builds on rational choice theory, however has the advantage of being more rigorous in its logic than the more inductive Ansell and Gash model. This model has proven its usefulness in a variety of contexts (including various forms of citizen involvement in policy-making and neighbourhood development; see: Denters and Klok 2003, Klok and Denters 2005, Edelenbos *et al.* 2009, Denters and Klok 2010, Boedeltje

2009). For these reasons, we will utilise the IAD framework as a foundation for our findings and analysis. We should not overlook, however, that the two models have a rather similar basic structure (see Figure 1):

- Both models focus on interactions between participants of collective action. Ostrom situates these interactions in 'action arenas' while Ansell and Gash concentrate on the 'collaborative process'. Therefore the action arenas where the collaborative process takes place are placed in the centre of Figure 1. The interactions that take place there can (but do not necessarily) result in collective action and outcomes that – using certain standards – may be evaluated more or less positively.
- Both frameworks stress the importance of exogenous factors that shape action arenas (Ostrom) and provide starting conditions for the collaborative process (Ansell and Gash). In Figure 1, these factors are placed at the left hand side. In this category of factors, Ostrom has pointed to the fact that CIs are always conditioned by the characteristics of the type of good or service to be provided and with the physical conditions of the community (e.g., the size and density of the relevant

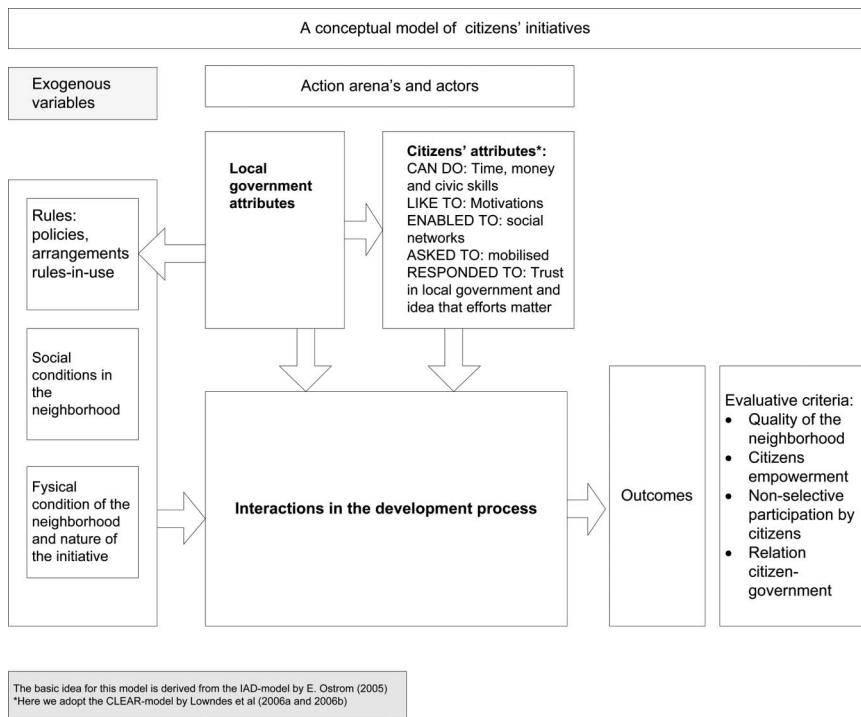


Figure 1. A conceptual model of citizens' initiatives.

public; Ostrom 2005, p. 22–26). Moreover, both frameworks recognise the importance of the **nature of the community** (Ostrom). Relevant community factors are the availability of social capital and the inequality of assets in the community (Ostrom *et al.* 1994, p. 45, Ostrom 2005, p. 26–27). Similarly Ansell and Gash point to the relevance of a ‘prehistory of cooperation and conflict (initial level of trust)’ and ‘power-resource-knowledge asymmetries’ (2007: 551–552, 553–554) for successful collaborative governance. Finally both models emphasise the relevance of **institutions**: Ostrom points at the importance of formal and informal ‘rules’ and Ansell and Gash include ‘institutional design’ in their model.

In the figure, two types of actors are central: citizens (willing to be) involved in such an initiative, and facilitators trying (a) to mobilise citizens to initiate such collective action and (b) enhancing the chances of effective collective action.² By including the facilitator role in our model – in keeping with the approach taken by Ansell and Gash³ – we introduce a more managerial perspective to the analysis. Although Ansell and Gash stress the importance of facilitative leadership, they do not say much about the substance of facilitation.⁴ In light of our central research question, the facilitation role is critical in providing more specifics about the types of activities that facilitators can engage in. This requires a discussion of the types of instruments and the approaches that can be used.

1.2. Different instruments: network structuration and process management

First, we will make a distinction between the various instruments that facilitators can use to promote CIs. In keeping with the literature about network management (e.g., Kickert and Koppenjan 1997, p. 47–53, De Bruijn and Ten Heuvelhof 2000) we distinguish between two main categories of facilitation: facilitation by network structuration and facilitation by process management.

Facilitation by network structuration: Rules are an important condition for structuring the playing field of CIs. From the perspective of local CIs facilitators, many of these rules are given. That is why rules are included among the exogenous conditions. Examples of such exogenous rules include the rules contained in laws and statutes set by national, provincial and local government. However, under the terms of such exogenous legislation, facilitators still have ample room to formulate domain-specific formal and informal rules that structure the arena for CIs. Setting such domain-specific rules is an important instrument for network management. Hence in figure 1 we have inserted an arrow to indicate that facilitators can structure the network by developing domain specific regulation under the terms of exogenous rules. By specifying appropriate rules facilitators can both mobilise citizens or create a fruitful climate for successful collaboration. This can take for example, the form of specifying the rules in an arena.

These rules may pertain to the access of actors, the powers and rights of these actors, the decision rules et cetera.⁵ Local government has both the legislative powers and the democratic legitimation to provide such rules. Municipal policies that pertain to the establishment of neighbourhood budgets and arenas for neighbourhood participation are examples of network structuration.

Facilitation by process management: Within the given conditions and institutional framework, the facilitator may engage in activities that might help the citizens involved in reaching their goals. Process management refers to activities aimed at steering the interactions, within a certain action arena, in such a way as to solve joint problems or achieve particular collective goals. The professionals involved should meet the specific needs of the group involved. Whereas structuration implies regulation, process management takes the form of physical acts (e.g., a transfer of resources) or speech acts (e.g., informing or encouraging). Process management activities involve several of the actions that Ansell and Gash (2007) have considered as important: trust building, developing interpersonal contacts, creating a sense of commitment, creating a shared understanding and agenda control.

1.3. Different approaches to intervention

Now that we have discussed the instruments with which facilitators can work, we now turn to a discussion of how facilitators may best use these instruments in approaching citizens. How can facilitators effectively influence citizen choices? For this aim we have to link the macro-political, institutional approach that we have used so far with a micro-political behavioural analysis of factors that affect citizen behaviour. Theories of political participation provide the required insights. Verba, Brady and Scholzman, in their Civic Voluntarism Model have developed an influential model to answer the question: why do some citizens participate while others do not? They point to the relevance of three clusters of factors: the resources (CAN DO), the motives (LIKE TO) and the mobilisation of citizens (ASKED TO). Building on this work, Lowndes *et al.* have formulated their CLEAR model (Lowndes *et al.* 2006). The CLEAR acronym refers to the three major factors in the Verba model (CAN DO, LIKE TO, ASKED TO), and adds two additional factors, the ENABLED TO factor (which refers to social networks as a form of social capital) and the RESPONDED factor (which pertains to the citizens' perception of the likelihood that the collective action will have an impact). In the CLEAR model we find a basis for systematic thinking about potential interventions by facilitators.

First, facilitators might use the model to think about interventions that will **mobilise potential participants (ASKED TO)**. For example, this might be done by:

- Providing potential participants with resources, or removing barriers (affecting the CAN DO factor; see also Verba *et al.* 1995), such as making available a neighbourhood budget.
- Affecting citizens' evaluations of the potential benefits of taking part (affecting the LIKE TO factor; see also Verba *et al.* 1995). Rewarding active citizenship in general and stressing the positive pay-offs can be used by municipalities to motivate citizens.
- Activating social networks in the neighbourhood (ENABLING TO) in order to stimulate CIs. This may be important because the likelihood of collective action might be affected by the minimum number (threshold) of fellow citizens that are prepared to join an initiative (Granovetter 1978).
- Affecting the degree of confidence that the initiative can make a difference and that politicians and/or officials will respond adequately (affecting the RESPONDED TO factor).

Second, facilitators may also use the models of Verba *et al.* (1995) and Lowndes *et al.* (2006a and 2006b) for considering the impact of possible interventions aimed at **increasing the chances of successful CIs**. For example, knowing the types of motivations of the various participants (LIKE TO) may help in initiative conflict resolution. Likewise providing information or giving advice to a group that lacks adequate knowledge may be a way to resolve problems in a collaborative arena.

For both types of interventions the facilitator might employ either forms of network structuration (changing rules of the game) or various process management instruments. Empirical research will have to establish whether the frequency of using a particular type of tool (network structuration vs. process management) varies with the stage of the problem (the mobilisation phase or the decision and implementation stage).

2. Empirical findings

2.1. *Research strategy*

In the first section we have refined models of facilitation that were developed by Ostrom *c.s.* and Ansell and Gash. Both these models were based on a combination of theoretical reflection and a case-based empirical investigation of concrete examples of citizen governance. In the second half of this paper we will carefully study whether our refined model of facilitation is a useful tool for mapping the ways in which public officials play their facilitative role in the context of CIs. Do they engage in structuration and process management activities? And what is the approach they take (e.g., a more resource-oriented or a more motivational approach)? In answering such questions we will concentrate our attention on the mobilisation phase of CIs. The developed framework is thought to be relevant for both the

mobilisation and the implementation stages, but due to limitations of space, we focus our empirical analysis in this article to the mobilisation stage.

Inspired by Ansell and Gash's (2007) methodological approach of 'successive approximation', we analysed our empirical findings in several rounds. For the first round we selected three Dutch cities with recent experience in the facilitation of CIs. These were selected – on the basis of geographical proximity – from a longer list that was collected by the Dutch Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Association of Dutch Municipalities. In these three municipalities a total of five CIs were analysed. The data were based on personal in depth interviews with two or three municipal officers (facilitators) and a minimum of two citizens who initiated the CIs. Moreover, in these municipalities we also studied official documents, in which the local participation policy was laid out, as well as other relevant local documents and publications. Because the primary aim of this first round was to calibrate our initial tool for analysis the selectivity of our cases and the limited number of interviews conducted was not particularly problematic. In the second round of our analyses we broadened the empirical scope of our study by analysing a wider selection of cases. In this round we conducted a secondary analysis of case descriptions reported in a number of recently published reports (Sluis and van der Land 2010, Wagenaar and Specht 2009, Tonkens 2009, WRR 2005). In total these reports cover 21 additional cases, in 15 different municipalities.⁶ The quotes in the results are used to illustrate more general findings and are not personalized for reasons of privacy.

We started our analysis on the basis of a number of sensitising concepts that were derived from the theory developed in section 1, using Nvivo software. The first round resulted in some refinement and adjustments of our model. While reading and re-reading the interviews we created sub-categories of codes, and variations to the sub-categories. The reader, however, should be aware of the limitations of a secondary analysis of existing case reports. Our data did not in all cases provide information about the exact nature of the interventions, let alone the intentions behind it, since they were collected for other objectives. In future research we will pay closer attention to these aspects, by analysing more cases.

2.2. Results

In this section we will describe what facilitative interventions facilitators carry out during the mobilisation stage of CIs and under what conditions they do so. The exercise is interesting from both a conceptual and a substantive perspective. Conceptually, the analysis will have to demonstrate the merits of the proposed classification scheme for describing various aspects of the facilitation of CIs. Substantively, the results are interesting because they shed light on the nature of facilitative action in relation to CIs in urban practice.

2.3. *Starting conditions*

Before we focus on the various actions of facilitators it is useful to set the scene by discussing the relevant exogenous factors in which the CIs are staged. First, the *social and physical neighbourhood conditions* are an important factor that shape CIs. The available *social capital* in the neighbourhood, for example, can determine the odds that inhabitants will find each other and collaborate. Participants in our cases refer to this as ‘being lucky to have many acquaintances’.⁷ Likewise, both citizens and professionals in the big city cases we studied (in The Hague and Rotterdam) pointed to the lack of social cohesion and the ethnically mixed population as an obstacle for CIs. On the other hand, a lack of social cohesion can trigger the development of CIs with social objectives. In one of our cases the nuisance caused by alcoholics was the main reason to initiate a neighbourhood watch team. *Physical attributes* of a neighbourhood are also important. The availability of localities where people can meet has been crucial. In one instance, access to the public library provided the necessary locality to host meetings and community events. In another instance, the home of the most active citizen served as the locality alternative, but this was not considered a desirable situation. Physical and social conditions also interact: the housing stock (type, price and variety) in a district has an impact on the composition of the population. An old decaying district is likely to have a population with a relatively low level of skills and knowledge. This might very well have a negative effect on the likelihood of CIs development.

Starting conditions may also have an impact on the *nature of CIs*. In our data we found a wide variety of projects. Many of these projects aimed at social objectives such as neighbourhood festivities, holiday’s activities for children, a neighbourhood watch team, a neighbourhood journal, a language training centre for immigrants, a homework class and a walking club. Other activities were aimed at establishing or improving the physical conditions in the neighbourhood, like maintenance of playgrounds and other similar facilities, and activities like cleaning streets. The type of activity is an important factor in determining the dynamics of subsequent interaction, because different initiatives will attract participants who differ in their motivations, skills and resources.

2.4. *Facilitation by network structuration in practice*

As we have argued, local facilitators have the possibility to set domain specific rules that structure the arena for CIs, an important instrument for network management. All 15 municipalities in our research have adopted a form of neighbourhood governance, revitalising (especially the weaker) neighbourhoods. In most cities, officials are employed to coordinate activities at the neighbourhood level. In addition, ‘district teams’ and/or ‘neighbourhood councils’ are installed and provided with competences and powers.

In addition to such general politico-administrative arrangements we encountered a wide variety of more specific rules and formalities that set the stage for CIs, especially during the mobilisation phase. In this context many municipalities have subsidy schemes that provide opportunities for the support of CIs; grants being the major form of municipal support for CIs. Two of our studied cities have set up a system of *neighbourhood budgets*. As a consequence all the neighbourhoods in these places were granted a fixed sum that was available for CIs aimed at neighbourhood improvement. In several cases the availability of a budget in itself seems to have elicited initiatives. The omnipresence of grants for CIs and the virtual absence of financial contributions from citizens, suggest a tacit rule-in-use. This rule implies a division of roles in which citizens (often quite generously) contributed time and made efforts, while municipalities provided funding.⁸ The provision of public budgets for CIs was essentially undisputed – when the common good is at stake, everyone seems to expect the government to pay.

Subsidy schemes undoubtedly provide an important incentive for the mobilisation of CIs. They also imply various limitations. First, such schemes typically involve application procedures, proposal forms and they specify criteria and mechanisms for CIs selection. Sometimes the selection is based on an administrative assessment of criteria specified in the grant scheme. In other cases residents were also given the power to vote over the allocation of the available budget across different CIs (sometimes after an administrative pre-selection).

Second, regulations also pertain to the conditions under which this financial support is provided to the initiators. Here a variety of practices exist. A major issue is who will administer and control the spending. Municipalities understandably hesitate to transfer significant public funds to individual citizens. In the words of one of the surveyed professionals: 'Then a situation can be created in which a citizen has five, six or seven times the amount of their monthly income in his/her bank account, and that definitely involves risks'. Our data show that various solutions are tried out; these include issuing vouchers, administering the funds through a community organisation, and imposing strict controls of the funds on individual recipients. Invariably each of these solutions implies extra formal procedures and red tape.

Third, the type of funding provided in most cases is limited. These limitations however, do not only pertain to understandable limits to the amount of money being made available. An additional limitation is that most of the subsidies are project-based and are not structural and for some types of CIs this is a problem. Establishing a facility (like a community center or a children's playground) is one thing; its management and maintenance is another matter and requires funding over a longer time period. The rent for a community activity center cannot be covered by a one-year project subsidy. Further, playgrounds over time need costly technical maintenance. In at least

one city the playgrounds that have been built using CI stimulation budgets, but officials ignored the maintenance issue.

2.5. Rules in the mobilisation process

All these specific rules may have the (unintended) effect of preventing the initiation of CIs and discouraging potential participants. Of course it is difficult to find hard evidence for such non-events (cf. the debate on non-decisions; Bachrach and Baratz 1962, Crenson 1971, Polsby 1980). Nevertheless it is plausible that the formulation of particular, for example substantive, selection criteria and procedures will lead to a mobilisation bias, by attracting certain groups of citizens, while putting off others. First, these rules are likely to affect the **resources** of groups and participants. Obviously funds are an important incentive for citizens, including the less affluent, to engage in this form of civic action. But rules also have other mobilisation effects that work through the resources factor (CAN). For example, the use of neighbourhood 'best idea' elections may introduce biases in favour of highly educated citizens with good political and organisation skills. Similarly such elections are also likely to favour citizens that have an extensive social network (ENABLE). Moreover, the use of particular rules may stand in the way of **responding** adequately to citizen demands and may reduce rather than enhance the public's trust in government (RESPOND TO). In general, formal and informal rules have the tendency of lessening flexibility and constraining the discretion of professionals to respond to citizens' needs and demands. In many of our cases local officials have emphasised the importance of responsiveness and flexibility. In our 15 municipalities, however, we did not find attempts to structurally enhance local government's responsiveness.

Rules may also indirectly have an impact on the citizens' **motivations**. This might happen when, particular types of initiatives that are attractive for some (LIKE TO), are (not) eligible for financial support under the conditions of the subsidy schemes. This situation occurred in one of our cases where citizens were dissatisfied with the traffic situation, but the municipality had ruled that initiatives in this domain would not be eligible for funding. The effect of this was that a particular type of CI, that citizens considered important, was ruled out.

2.6. Facilitation by process management in practice

Although our previous analysis has demonstrated that network structuration may be an important tool in establishing conditions for the mobilisation of CIs, successful mobilisation also implies that facilitators skillfully operate on the playing field that is outlined by the rules of the game. Many of the facilitators' actions aim at making CIs less demanding (in terms of resources required) and more attractive for citizens to

participate. In the following sections we will discuss the various types of non-rule-based interventions through which facilitators try to mobilise participation in CIs. We will use the CLEAR framework's CAN, LIKE, ENABLE and RESPOND factors to describe how facilitators may invite and stimulate participation in CIs (ASK), or achieve the opposite (Verba *et al.* 1995, Lowndes *et al.* 2006a).

2.6.1. CAN DO: Resources. In the previous section we have discussed how facilitation by structuration can provide participants with monetary resources. Facilitation that aims at solving possible problems regarding the availability of the two other main resources (time and skills) often takes place in the CI arenas through direct interactions (acts and speech acts) with citizens.

First, citizens need **time** to engage in CIs. Although coming up with an idea may only be a minute's work, many CIs never really take off. One reason seems to be a lack of time on the citizens' side. In our CI case studies we only encountered activists, for whom the scarcity of time obviously was not prohibitive; it is hard to find direct evidence for the crucial importance of time as a resource. However, the reports indirectly testify to the crucial importance of time. In several cases participants stated that they either would do more, or would have done things better and earlier, if only they would have had the time. Moreover, the availability of time also determines when and how people participate. One citizen observed: 'Men have less time during the day, so things that need to be done during daytime are done by women, who work less'. It is impossible for facilitators to directly influence the availability of time but facilitators can and do help initiators to find potential new participants who do have time to join in the initiative. Adjusting the agenda to suit the time schedule of (possible) participants can be facilitating as well. For example, in the CI where a neighbourhood language training centre was established, it was proposed not to schedule meetings with officials during the school holidays, where parents with school-going children would be unable to join.

In addition to money and time, **civic skills** are also important. To start up a CI some basic verbal, social and organisational skills are required. Several facilitators have indicated that once people became active in CIs this form of engagement contributes to the further development of such skills, more or less as a by-product of the active citizenship. A community worker of a neighbourhood project in a middle-sized town said: 'People along the way get the idea they are capable of something, which of course is excellent!' This is also recognised on the citizen side. Some citizens attribute their knowledge and skills to their experience in working with the authorities.

Nevertheless, it is also recognised that a lack of civic skills, especially among lower socioeconomic status groups, may prevent people from joining CIs. It is the stated goal of many municipalities to offer extra opportunities to such groups. Statements like 'All citizens should be able to play their role

in the neighbourhood' testify to this. Sometimes, it is also recognised that this might require advice and training. A civil servant in a large town, for example acknowledged: 'People who are capable don't need to be stimulated, those who are *not* capable need to be counseled. This isn't well known within the municipality. If I take someone seriously, I take one's limitations seriously as well. This means: more attention in the so called problem-neighbourhoods'. It was striking however, to find out that in only one of the 15 municipalities – in the context of the neighbourhood watch team – an active attempt was made to improve the social and technical skills of the citizens. This is especially problematic when such skills are in short supply. Many municipalities welcome CIs especially as a tool to reinvigorate deprived neighbourhoods. But because of a lack of social and technical skills among the residents it is precisely in these areas where conditions for CI development are the least favourable. This implies a dilemma: CIs are considered a way to improve the social quality and living conditions in these areas but due to limitations of resources – to include monetary resources, time and civic skills – these initiatives are hindered. Therefore the likelihood of successful CIs and ensuing improvements in the district's livability may be highest in areas where such improvements are least needed.

2.6.2. LIKE TO: Motivations. There is a wide variety of motivations that inspire citizens to engage in CIs (see Verba *et al.* 1995). Many participants expressed civic motivations: they had a desire to contribute to the neighbourhood because they felt this was a civic duty. Others indicated that it was simply fun to work with pleasant neighbours. Finally, citizens became active in order to solve problems in their neighbourhood, such as unsafe situations, pollution or the language difficulties of immigrants. Situations like these can incite strong motivations. In their desire to solve these problems residents started a neighbourhood watch, a street cleanup, and a language training centre.

For a municipality, motivations are essentially an invariable. However, this is not to say that municipal actions can not and do not *demotivate* citizens. Inadequate and slow procedures can easily discourage even the most enthusiastic participant but we have found that in our cases citizens are not easily discouraged; despite reports of negative experiences many of them stayed involved in the project and were not frustrated to the point of stopping their activities.

Facilitators can also stimulate participation by, for example, offering (generous) financial compensation for volunteers or rewards in kind. One particular CI allowed children volunteers to play a Wii-video game for an hour. It is hard, however, to determine how effective such positive incentives may be because citizens may be reluctant to admit being responsive to personal gains as a motive for participation.

Providing information may be another way to stimulate participation. Citizens have reported that they were informed about the possibility of

becoming active in or even setting up a CI through the media. In several cases they just got involved after reading (for example, in free local papers) about the neighbourhood budgets. These announcements are typically not neutral, but try to recruit people. Community workers and civil servants frequently use newspapers, neighbourhood newsletters, local television and the internet to motivate citizens to become active in neighbourhood projects and initiate new CIs. In addition to the use of media, the most effective way of mobilising participants is simply asking people they know.

2.6.3. RESPONDED TO: Responsiveness and flexibility. In the section on network structuration we observed that formal and informal rules in local government may stand in the way of responsiveness and flexibility in the interactions of CIs initiators. This institutional inflexibility can partly be rectified by flexibility in the daily interactions of civil servants and other officials, with citizens. Civil servants talk frequently about the importance of being responsive: 'We always try to react', or 'They [the citizens] know there is room to talk'.

Studying the interviews and cases, among the first things that stood out were the examples in which citizens got frustrated over the slackness of response by civil servants (it took more than six weeks before a lamppost was fixed) or by the inflexibility of procedures (like upholding a deadline for proposals even during a holiday). Still, there is a more structural underlying problem. Agenda control over public affairs is usually in the hands of the administrators. In an orderly bureaucratic system subsidy schemes entail terms, due-dates, and prescriptions to assure financial accountability. For professionals such things are self-evident; it is part of the system-world of city hall. For citizens, the inflexibility, red-tape and delays induced by such procedures are often difficult to understand and discouraging. Two groups of citizens in large town cases explained why they set their own agenda, 'We don't have this meeting-habit with lots of coffee, and written reports. We meet in the street, talk, and make a note or do things immediately'.

When CIs pertain to once-only activities, flexibility and responsiveness on the part of officials may not be too demanding. Blocking some streets for a road-sweeping campaign or issuing a permit for an annual street barbeque is relatively innocuous and officials are often happy to break the rules in such cases. 'We don't require receipts of expenses, but citizens come to an evening and present what they have done', one of the civil servants explained. For long-term plans, physical measures and expensive projects increase the likelihood of interfering with the normal policy agenda, and flexibility and responsiveness will be more difficult to achieve. Even initial openness and flexibility may transform into rigidity during the process. One civil servant admitted: 'It happens that you start by giving lots of freedom (to a CI), and afterwards you come up with restrictions, because there are things you haven't thought about before'. Such a repeal of flexibility will obviously damage the relations with the citizens involved.

Responsiveness and empathy are also important for successful mobilisation in other respects. Citizens appreciate engagement and enthusiasm from the facilitators of their initiative. A small town citizen recommended that facilitators should try to be as 'engaged as possible, not only during the planning, but also during the activities!' The lack of commitment by officials may be an understandable result of the CI rhetoric that emphasises self-help and avoidance of professional interference. One of the main challenges for facilitators is finding a good balance between interference and paternalism on the one hand and negligence and lack of empathy on the other hand.

2.6.4. ENABLED TO: Invoking social networks. In the initiation stages of CIs it may be crucial to link early initiators with other actors. For a successful initiative it may be essential to bring together a group of residents that command a good mix of resources (e.g., participants that have enough time or with adequate social skills). Facilitators, like community workers with a good knowledge of the neighbourhood, may suggest an early initiator to contact other residents who might be interested to strengthen an emerging initiative. Moreover, facilitators may also help in linking the initiators to other relevant neighbourhood organisations. Many initiatives require efforts and cooperation by a variety of local organisations, for example, the police, housing associations, social welfare organisations and various governmental agencies and departments. Linking the initiators with relevant actors in local governance networks, introducing citizens to several organisations and helping them with new deals is a type of facilitation that occurs in practically all cases. A member of a neighbourhood watch team gratefully acknowledged the usefulness of this type of facilitation: 'They made arrangements with the police for us, in those days we couldn't have done that ourselves'.

3. Conclusions and discussion

CIs are a form of collaborative governance in which citizens take the lead, working on the quality of their neighbourhood in the fields of livability, public safety and social cohesion. In this paper we explore how local professionals (in local organisations and local government) can and do facilitate CIs. We have first developed an analytical framework for describing the facilitation of CIs. This framework was based on previous work by Ostrom (1990, 1994, 2005), Ansell and Gash (2005), as well as recent work on network management (Kickert and Koppenjan 1997, De Bruyn Ten Heuvelhof 2000, Edelenbos *et al.* 2009, Klijn *et al.* 2010), the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba *et al.* 1995) and the CLEAR model (Lowndes *et al.* 2006). Based on the integration of elements from these different authors, the model structures the dynamics of the interaction processes in the action arenas where CIs take place. The physical and social conditions of the neighbourhood and the nature of the initiative are the starting conditions that influence the process and thus the outcome, together

with the existing rules (formal and informal) that apply within the community.

On the basis of an exploratory analysis of CI facilitation in 15 Dutch municipalities we have found that local facilitators use both network structuration and process management to (a) stimulate initiatives and recruit participants and to (b) contribute to a successful implementation of CIs. In order for facilitators to be successful they must be aware of the requirements for citizens to participate in CIs. The involvement of citizens in CIs is determined by their command over resources (time, money and civic skills), their social networks, their motivation and the adequate responses of local authorities.

In terms of network structuration, municipalities develop new rules in areas such as making district-approach policy and establishing grant schemes for subsidising CIs. Through such rules local governments may create more or less favourable conditions to stimulate initiatives and recruit participants. The most important rules issued by municipalities pertain to the specification of the conditions under which financial resources are provided. Such rules also impact upon other factors (e.g., other resources and motivations). However for the mobilisation of CIs, network management activities are at least as important. The analyses show that local facilitators make various efforts to compensate for the limited availability of time, skills and social relations (with other citizens and with local organisations). Moreover, facilitators can also contribute to the responsiveness of local government. Our analyses show that communications with officials still face major obstacles such as formal language, bureaucratic procedures and excessive formalism which are discouraging to initiators of CIs. In this domain there is still plenty of room for improvements.

On the basis of our explorative analyses we can conclude that the developed framework helps in systematically analysing the facilitation strategies of local officials. We have used the framework to describe interventions in the mobilisation stage of CIs and found that the relatively parsimonious conceptual apparatus developed was useful for mapping the full variety of facilitative actions we observed.

The tool was also useful for detecting imbalances in strategies. Currently local strategies in network structuration heavily emphasise the provision of financial resources and the conditions for providing support for CIs. Much less attention is paid to the potential use of rules to provide guarantees for responsiveness and flexibility or the provision of other forms of support (e.g., access to expertise, facilities for training in social and administrative skills, information rights). In CI network management the emphasis is on publicising and mobilising participants through grant schemes. Other potential bottlenecks – like the availability of resources and access to relevant local networks and the responsiveness of local government – get far less attention.

Another remarkable conclusion is that notwithstanding rather different initiatives and varying local conditions, there were only limited variations in

municipal mobilisation strategies. This raises the question whether facilitators take the exogenous conditions that our model specifies into consideration when choosing their means of facilitation.

Our work is not yet finished. First, our explorative analyses were limited to the mobilisation stage. Subsequent work will have to establish whether the conceptual framework developed is also appropriate for the decision and implementation stage of CIs. Moreover, the bulk of our empirical data were not collected for the purpose of our research. New data collection based on our model is required for a more rigorous test of its empirical validity. Second, in the course of our long term research project we aim at answering the question of what methods and instruments of facilitation may lead to successful CIs. With this article we made a modest first step in this direction.

Notes

1. This independence is indicated by the absence of any reference to the previous work of Ostrom in the Ansell and Gash (2007) article.
2. For the sake of simplicity we have abstracted from the very real possibility that oftentimes the CI takes place in a context where there may be more than one professional organisation that might play a facilitative role.
3. The Ansell and Gash model – much more than the IAD framework – is oriented to the needs of policy-makers and public managers. This more managerial perspective is reflected in the ‘facilitative leadership’ factor in their model.
4. Actually, Ansell and Gash include many of the things that facilitators could do to achieve their objectives as factors in the collaborative process box of their model (‘building, trust, mutual respect, shared understanding, and commitment to the process’ (2007, p. 558).
5. For a systematic discussion of the relevant rules (see Ostrom et al. 2005).
6. For details on the field work in these studies we refer to the four original research reports.
7. Like all subsequent quotes this comes from one of the interviews conducted in the first round of our data analysis. Since we have promised our respondents confidentiality we have not added references to names and places.
8. The grants only represent part of the costs that municipalities incur when supporting CIs. Additional costs include administration costs and the costs of hiring professional advisors and community workers.

References

- Ansell, C. and Gash, A., 2008. Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18, 543–571.
- Bachrach, P. and Baratz Morton, S., 1962. Two faces of power. *The American Political Science Review*, 56 (4), 947–95.
- Boedeltje, M.M., 2009. Draagvlak door interactief bestuur: fictie of feit?! Enschede, University of Twente (PhD thesis).
- Cabinet Office, 2011. Website of the Cabinet Office of the government of the United Kingdom, as opened in June 2011. Available from: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk> 2011.
- Crenson, M.A., 1971. *The un-politics of air pollution: a study of non-decisionmaking in the cities*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- De Bruijn, H. and Ten Heuvelhof, E., 2000. *Networks and decision making*. Utrecht: Lemma Publishers.

- Denters, B. and Klok, P.J., 2003. Rebuilding Roombeek: an institutional analysis of interactive governance in the context of a representative democracy. In: B. Denters, P.J. Klok, O.V. Heffen and J. Huisman, eds. *The rise of interactive governance and quasi markets*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 91–110.
- Denters, B. and Klok, P.J., 2010. Rebuilding Roombeek: patterns of citizen participation in urban governance. *Urban Affairs Review*, 45 (5), 583–607.
- Edelenbos, J., Klok, P.J. and van Tatenhove, J., 2009. The institutional embedding of interactive policy making insights from a comparative research based on eight interactive projects in the Netherlands. *American Review of Public Administration*, 39 (2), 125–148.
- Edelenbos, J., Klaassen, H.L. and Schaap, L., 2005. *Burgerparticipatie zonder verantwoordelijkheid*. Centre for Local Democracy (CLD) and the Centre for Public Management (CPM), Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam.
- Edelenbos, J., 2001. Interactieve beleidsvorming als inhoudsabsorberend proces. *Bestuurskunde* 10 (8), 349–356.
- Granovetter, M., 1978. Threshold models of collective behavior. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, 1420–1443.
- Hurenkamp, M., Tonkens, E., and Duyvendak, J.W., 2006. *Wat burgers bezielt*. UvA / NICIS Kenniscentrum Grote Steden, 2006.
- Klok, P.-J. and Denters, B. 2005. Urban leadership and community involvement. An institutional analysis. In: M. Haus, H. Heinelt and M. Stewart, eds. *Urban Governance and Democracy. Leadership and Community Involvement*. London: Routledge.
- Klijin, E.-H., et al., 2010. The impact of network management on outcomes in governance networks. *Public Administration*, 88 (4), 1063–1082.
- Kickert, W.J.M. and Koppenjan, J.F.M., 1997. Public management and network management: an overview. In: W.J.M. Kickert, E.H. Klijin and J.F.M. Koppenjan, eds. *Managing complex networks: strategies for the public sector*. London: Sage, 35–61.
- Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L., and Stoker, G., 2006a. *Diagnosing and remedying the fallings of official participation schemes: the CLEAR framework*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lowndes, V. Pratchett, L., and Stoker, G. 2006b. Local political participation: the impact of rules in use. *Public Administration*, 84 (3), 539–556.
- Ostrom, E., 1990. *Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ostrom, E., 2005. *Understanding institutional diversity*. Princeton University Press.
- Ostrom, E., Gardner, R., and Walker, J., 1994. *Rules, games and common-pool resources*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Polsby, N.W., 1980. *Community power and political theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sampson, R.J., et al., 2005. Civil society reconsidered: the durable nature and community structure of collective civic action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 111 (3), 673–714.
- Sluis M., v.d. and Land, M., v.d., 2009. *Inspelen op initiatief; actieve burgers en sociale professionals in de buurt*. Utrecht: Movisie.
- Smith, M.J., 2010. From big government to big society: changing the state–society balance. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 63 (4), 818–833.
- Stoker, G., 2001. Essay: local governance and democracy in the twenty-first century. In: T.D. Sisk, et al., eds. *Democracy at the local level, the international idea handbook on participation, representation, conflict management, and governance*. International IDEA Handbook Series 4, 2001.
- Tonkens, E. and Kroese, G.J., 2009. *Bewonersparticipatie via vouchers: democratisch en activerend? Evaluatie van de eerste fase van de extra budgetten voor bewonersinitiatieven ('voucherregeling')*. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K.L., and Brady, H.E., 1995. *Voice and equality: civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.
- Verhoeven, I., 2006. *Alledaags politiek burgerschap en de overheid*. In: P.L. Meurs, E.K. Schrijvers, and G.H. de Vries, eds. *Leren van de praktijk; Gebruik van lokale kennis en ervaring voor beleid*. Den Haag: Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid.

- Van de Wijdeven, T., and Hendriks, F., 2009. *A little less conversation, a little more action: real-life expressions of vital citizenship in city neighbourhoods*. Tilburg School of Politics and Public Administration.
- Wagenaar, H. and Specht, M., 2009. *Geëngageerd bewonerschap, Bewonersparticipatie in drie Europese steden*. Den Haag: Nicis institute.
- Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 2005. *Vertrouwen in de buurt*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.