

# The role of information and knowledge in green urban initiatives

Informational Governance



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In this project the role of information, communication, expertise and knowledge is addressed in the realization of citizens' initiatives in a green urban environment.

## Background

In numerous places citizens take up action to work on concrete solutions to societal challenges. This reflects the trend towards an information and network society: a horizontally organized society which is less and less uniformly structured, but rather consists of a range of spontaneous initiatives, parties and connections, and other information and communication flows.

In our current society, also referred to as the WEconomy, it is not just about financial capital. Other forms of capital and values are increasingly important. Citizens' initiatives shape these values and operate using other forms of capital, such as social, human, cultural and information capital. In this context, a study was launched that specifically addresses the role of information, communication, expertise and knowledge in the realization of citizens' initiatives in a green urban environment.

Citizens' initiatives are often characterized by an informal organization, a flexible and pragmatic approach and strong (emotional) involvement of the initiators. Through the establishment of connections they develop and embed themselves in society. These connections have different intensities and vary in time with different actors, both more institutional actors and non-institutional actors.



Green urban environment in the centre of Haarlem.

## Highlights project

This research project aims to contribute to:

- A joint learning pathway for citizens' initiatives and researchers (formation of a learning network)
- Knowledge of the role of information, communication, expertise and knowledge in the realization of citizens' initiatives
- Knowledge of the role and functioning of different forms of capital, such as social, human and information capital for citizens' initiatives
- Knowledge about the interaction with governments and an action perspective for policy
- Theory formation about the significance of bottom-up initiatives in today's information society

## Goal

This research studies how green urban citizens' initiatives realize themselves and how they generate and deploy different forms of capital. Since – so far – little is known about the role that information, communication, expertise and knowledge play in the realization of green urban citizens' initiatives, this is a specific focus in this research. Several aspects of the above mentioned themes are being explored together with a learning network of citizens' initiatives. In interaction with practice the researchers try to develop new knowledge about successful collaboration between citizens' initiatives and (local) governments in the public domain.

In this project we aim to answer several questions about the role of information capital, social capital, and "informational governance" processes in the initiation and realization of green urban citizens' initiatives.

## Method

In this study close cooperation is sought with citizens' initiatives and any other interested parties. It is intended to facilitate a joint learning process.

The first phase of this research consisted of a literature review, interviews with key players, the preparation of an analytical framework, nine in-depth interviews with various citizens' initiatives and a first learning network meeting consisting of several citizens' initiatives. This phase provided insight into the different themes that play a role with regard to informational governance in citizens' initiatives. After this exploratory phase, the research aims



Nature and Environmental Education, Eemsterbelang.



Celebrating the first harvest, city farming initiative *De Kapeltuin*, Breda.

to deepen understanding of a number of research themes or learning questions, namely:

- 1 The role of communication (online and offline);
- 2 Social capital / group processes;
- 3 Relationships with external / institutions;
- 4 Imaging and framing.

For each research theme different citizens' initiatives are approached and interviewed to find out what role the theme plays in the realization of an initiative. For each topic (largely) different citizens' are approached, also with the aim to form a larger learning network. Additionally, within the analysis attention will be paid to the connection between the different themes. The results of the deepening phase will be discussed in the learning network. In this discussion citizens' initiatives are invited to put forward points of attention and to exchange experiences.

## Results 2012/2013

- Theoretical exploration informational governance and citizens' initiatives
- Identification and characterization of green social citizens' initiatives in an urban context
- Drafting an analysis framework
- First comparative analysis of in-depth interviews with nine citizens' initiatives
- Learning Network Meeting with interviewed citizens' initiatives
- Article based on the first results from the literature, the drafted analytical framework, interviews with key figures and in-depth interviews citizen initiatives.

## Contact

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