

*Section: Innovation and change in local governance and politics*  
*Panel: Innovations of democratic governance: for the better or for the worse?*  
*Title Paper: Strategies of selforganization of citizens with regard to living environment*  
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*Abstract:*

In the current social and governance context, individual responsibility and active citizenship are playing an ever more important role. On the one hand, we see a trend towards 'citizens' participation', with governments and other organizations seeking to involve citizens (Edelenbos, 2005; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). On the other hand, we see 'citizens' initiatives', in which assertive citizens go into action either individually or as communities in a range of fields (Bovaird, 2007; Humphrey, 2001). In this paper, selforganization of citizens is addressed, being groups of citizens organizing and managing their own environment, which can be seen as a form of governance in which the government is distant (Ostrom, 1990; Van Kersbergen en van Waarden, 2004).

Nowadays there are all kinds of problems in anchoring people to society. By analyzing selforganizing communities, which can be seen as citizens actively contributing to society and by analyzing what bonds these citizens and energizes them to take action, we are looking for new clues for governance. This paper focuses on the questions which strategies initiators use, why they use these strategies and why people take action with regard to their living environment.

Qualitative research has been executed in 8 Dutch cases, such as the 'Boermarkte Essen en Aa's' (citizens of three districts who are restoring the cultural historic values of the landscape); 'Natuurlijk grasweggebied' (citizens from Hellevoetsluis initiated and manage an ecological zone); and residents of Ganzedijk, who came into action after governmental plans to pull down the 57 houses resulting in erasing the village. These 8 cases will be systematically analyzed and presented, describing the various sorts of strategies and various relations of citizens to their environment. Luhmanns' systemtheory will be used for representing citizens' initiatives and governmental organizational institutions as various formal and informal systems, which can form together a new system.

*Keywords: Self organization; governance; living environment*