



Learning in Local Collaboration

A reflexive case study in Groningen, Northern Netherlands



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Abstract

This thesis describes the development of a neighborhood initiative and its connection to a broader collaboration project as a process, focusing on the workings of social capital and social learning in the interactions between actors. It is conducted as a reflexive case study of multiparty collaboration, using research methods of participant observation including the organization of an event, and five in-depth interviews. The iterative character of the chosen methodology allowed for including developments that emerged during the research period of one year. By selecting accounts from an extensive research journal a rich context was added to this paper, making both the experiences of the researcher explicit as well as giving insight in the social environment of the participants. In response to the research question regarding the role of social capital and social learning in the collaboration, six attributes were identified to explain the workings of the concepts. The main issues that arose within the collaboration had to do with factors of continuity, coordination, and conflict avoidance.

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Preface

In October 2013 I received an email from my study advisor with the topic for an internship or thesis in the neighborhoods Helpman and De Wijert in Groningen. I was immediately intrigued because I have been living in Helpman for the past six years and grew up in Corpus den Hoorn, which is the neighborhood adjacent to De Wijert on the other side. My high school was also in Helpman, and I cycled through De Wijert every day to get there. The project itself was a citizen initiative to secure a green zone in the neighborhoods in the form of an ecological edible green walking path. The path was called 'Pad de twee wijken' (Path the two neighborhoods) - or in short Pad2Wijken.

When I received the email about this project I did not immediately make the decision to write my thesis about it. At the time I was doing an internship with the Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) in Wageningen and I was looking for a thesis topic that would enable me to keep working with some of my colleagues on projects that I was particularly interested in. For a research methodologies course I endeavored to further explore these ideas for my thesis, and I found out that my chair group's standards made the whole research proposal a lot less interesting to me. When I came to that conclusion I remembered a certain email about a project in Groningen that my study advisor sent me several months earlier, and I decided to go back home to support this beautiful idea of improving the living environment in my own neighborhood.

During my studies I had already written a few essays on topics like socio-ecological systems theory and permaculture, and the project "Eetbare Stad" (edible city) that Pad2Wijken was part of included gardens that were developed according to these principles. Furthermore, my personal minor that was approved as part of my master program is called Ethics and Social Learning, and the Pad2Wijken project includes participatory planning which is a major aspect within the theory of social learning. As part of my research I envisioned facilitating a social learning group including members from the Pad2Wijken working group, other inhabitants of the neighborhoods and representatives from the municipality and the schools that cooperated within the project.

In May 2014 I joined a meeting of the Pad2Wijken working group and soon after that my thesis supervisor dr. Ina Horlings and I co-wrote a proposal for an Academic Consultancy Training (ACT) team. ACT is a mandatory course for Wageningen social science masters so I liked the idea of combining it with my thesis research. As I was still working for CDI at the time I could only be an external advisor for the group, but they wrote a report especially to inform future ACT groups so I could easily write a proposal for a sequence. I was chosen as the manager of this follow-up team and I wrote the main part of my research journal during this period. Our commissioner was setting up a neighborhood cooperative, and our project included connecting Pad2Wijken as a partner to this process.

1. Introduction

The process described in this paper was enabled by a context of governmental deregulation. By reflexively exploring theoretical claims in practice, my research represents a unique view on the effects of present-day societal developments and national policies translated by the municipality of Groningen and taken up by citizens. The integration of the higher political goal of the “participatiesamenleving” (participation society) - which was introduced (in its current annotation) in the King’s speech of 2013 - includes the municipality of Groningen calling citizens to come with ideas, which are then explored by civil servants for their potential to succeed. There is currently a transformation afoot in the municipality replacing the structure of ‘stadsdeelcoördinatie’ (municipal borough coordination) with neighborhood teams- and aldermen, and this was already going on when the neighborhood committee of Helpman knocked at the door of the municipality three years ago with the idea for the neighborhood initiative Pad2Wijken. The initiators aimed to secure a green zone through the neighborhoods Helpman and De Wijert, and extent it with all sorts of ecological edible green along the zone that was designated as a 10 kilometer long walking path. The aspect of edible green is currently a hot topic in cities and is coordinated in Groningen by the Nature and Environment Federation with the program “Eetbare Stad” (edible city). The path was signed with stickers and the route printed in a folder. Since the opening in May 2014 groups of residents, schools and organizations in the neighborhoods can adopt plots of green along the path. On their plot they can create a flower meadow, orchard, vegetable garden, insect hotel, or anything else green and sustainable.¹

The significance of my research resides for a large part in the description of a process of change within this context of societal transformation. As the coordinator green participation of the municipality pointed out when I interviewed him, nowadays the media are filled with stories about collaboration, social cohesion and “noaberhulp” (Groninger dialect for neighbors helping each other). Virtually every village in the “Ommelanden” (countryside of Groningen province) is setting up collaboration projects, and this is indeed what participation society basically aspires: the receding government leaves empty space that needs to be filled by citizens working together. According to De Moor (2013) however, with the call for ‘more affective citizenship, more responsible active citizens, more *Big Society*’, the government seems to tap into an already well-developed phenomenon to cover up the real cause of the new policy direction, which she claims is the failure of the privatization and “overprofessionalization” of the healthcare sector, as well as the lack of real commitment to sustainability from the main energy suppliers (p. 24). Rotmans (2014) goes even further and argues that participation society is actually a top-down term disguising the government’s unease with a bottom-up movement, and aiming to deploy this trend for policy goals of efficiency and cost reduction as a covered construction for getting civilians to do more themselves (p. 29). However, despite the criticism on the government’s motives for participation society, the new policies are being implemented and this research focuses on the development of a neighborhood initiative within this context, regardless of the underlying reasons on the national level.

As the structure of the municipal coordination is transforming, civil servants from different departments of the municipality are actually attuning their activities in person for the first time ever. Within this period of transition, the neighborhood collaboration Helpman-De Wijert is a pilot

¹ <http://pad2wijken.nl/>

designed to pave the way for a city- and even province-wide establishment of cooperatives following its lead, to be referred to as 'Kracht van Groningen' (power of Groningen). The parties involved see this as a very exciting ambition with many lessons to be learned. This paper presents the account of one citizen initiative reaching out to a school and thereby becoming part of the preparations for a neighborhood cooperative, enabled by a municipality in transition and finally leading to an ambitious collaboration project embraced by many actors. An important factor that led to the project obtaining its pilot status is timing, which is no coincidence as the initiators used the coalition agreement "Voor de Verandering" (for the transition) of the municipality for the coming years (2014 - 2018) to draft the proposal. The municipality subsequently approved and keeps supporting the project because it wants to test and further develop "area focused working" by neighborhood teams- and aldermen. Instead of defining what area focused working comprises beforehand, the aim is to find this out through the pilot in Helpman-De Wijert. This paper presents a study of this particular collaboration process from the beginning, focusing on the mechanisms of self-organization. It does not so much focus on the formal structures as these have hardly been developed yet, but it looks mostly at connections between people and how these serve learning processes about establishing neighborhood initiatives, using the concepts of social capital and social learning. The degree to which social capital is present in a network is assessed by the value of connections and interactions, by estimating in how far they generate a basis of trust and enable capacity building for the purpose of achieving a system transition through collaboration. Capacity building then involves learning, and the concept of social learning includes utilizing diversity and dissonance in order to find new and innovative solutions, as is the goal of creating the new kind of neighborhood collaboration that is the subject of this research. As collaboration is the pivot of this new kind of working and the pilot is still in the exploration phase, social learning could be the way to model it. With this research I aim to test if the presence of social capital is a condition for social learning to occur, how the concepts relate to each other, and how they can be helpful for the narrative on new collaboration projects that are being established to better deal with present-day societal issues. Therefore the question that my research intends to answer is: "What is the role of social capital and social learning in the context of a neighborhood initiative in Groningen?", presenting a synthesis of the two concepts in the context of a city in political transition.

This research report consists of several parts. The second chapter will frame and operationalize the main theoretical concepts and present relevant literature related to the research topics. After that the methods employed in this research will be presented. The fourth chapter consists of an elaborate description of the case, including the location and the research participants. In the subsequent chapter the findings of the research are presented in seven main themes that are divided between different kinds of factors. The discussion in chapter six elaborates on the theoretical contributions and limitations of this research. Chapter seven comprises the conclusions of this study, after which some recommendations for further research are provided.

2. Theoretical Framework

My work began by taking a social constructionist perspective that was concerned to unite the social context and theoretical frameworks that have informed and guided this study, which are rooted in several different areas of research that I have encountered during my studies in relation to collective processes of change.

To illuminate my framework I share the story here that Sarbin and Kitsuse (1994) open their collection of essays on social constructionism with:

Three baseball umpires are reflecting on their professional practice of calling balls and strikes. The first, a self-confident realist, says, 'I call 'em the way they are,' to which the second who leans toward phenomenological analysis says, 'I call 'em as I see 'em,' and the third closes the discussion with 'They ain't nothin' until I call 'em'" (p. 1). The third umpire illustrates that "central to constructionism is the premise that human beings are agents rather than passive organisms that process information" (p. 2). Social constructionism moves the interpretive act of reality construction away from individual's interior constructions to a social endeavor heavily reliant on language, customs, culture and other contextual factors. Social constructionism, then adds a layer to the radical constructivist's formulation by including the social nature of reality construction.

(Constructivist theory, online)

Later on in this chapter the influence of social constructionism on my theoretical framework will become more clear, but first the section below explains how important developments in the field of urban neighborhood planning led to the rise of neighborhood social capital as a topic for scientific inquiry. It describes the different forms of social capital that have been identified by three main theorists in the study of the concept, leading to the operationalization as informed by the focus of this research. I have chosen to explore the concept of social capital instead of social cohesion, following the distinction of Forrest and Kearns:

The re-emergence of concerns with "neighbourhood" and "community" and the links to social cohesion are enmeshed in a partial reconceptualisation of these issues within more general debates around the concept of social capital. [...] Social cohesion at the societal level may be derived from the forms and quality of social interaction at the local level. In this model of society, social cohesion is viewed as a bottom-up process founded upon local social capital, rather than as a top-down process.

(Forrest and Kearns 2008: 2137)

Social cohesion can thus be understood as a possible result of enhancing social capital, but - as the context of this research is one particular neighborhood initiative - specific workings of social capital are more relevant than the possible outcome of increased social cohesion in a certain geographical area. Furthermore, by focusing on social capital a dynamic perspective is maintained in which people's regular encounters and interactions can lead to a different disposition towards each other, which is less emphasized in theories of social cohesion or social exclusion (Shortall 2008).

The second section of this chapter provides a review of literature on the application of social capital for sustainability purposes, and the third section provides an exploration of the meaning of social learning for sustainability. Social learning was not intentionally applied for the establishment of Pad2Wijken or the neighborhood cooperative pilot, and it is treated in this paper as a theoretical concept that refers to a type of process that occurs continuously in everyday life. The discussion of literature on social learning for sustainability links this general type of process to the aim of sustainable change through participatory planning, which is at the heart of the neighborhood initiative that will be analyzed in the paper at hand. The last section of this chapter will elaborate on

the main attributes of the concepts, linking them to the forms that my research explores in the context of an emergent neighborhood collaboration project in Groningen.

2.1 Neighborhood social capital

When it comes to neighborhood planning, the concept of Garden Cities that Ebenezer Howard originated at the start of the 20th century is still very influential. His ideas were a reaction against the overcrowded, unhealthy industrial cities that he loathed. Especially the French designer Le Corbusier was much influenced by Howard in splitting the different functions of a city spatially with areas for work, transport, leisure and living, and many green spaces in between (Scott 1999). A strong voice opposing these "orthodox urbanist" ideas was Jane Jacobs, who introduced the sociological concept of social capital to the field of urban planning (Jacobs 1961). In her view diversity is crucial in a neighborhood, in every possible way. According to her all of the functions that Le Corbusier wanted to divide should actually be situated alongside each other so there will be "eyes on the street" at every moment of the day (Jacobs 1961). In residential areas such as suburbs that follow the style of Le Corbusier this is not the case because the people that remain at home during the day are not stimulated to keep their eyes on the streets, as there is nothing interesting to see. If residential housing is alternated however with businesses, schools and spaces for recreation there will be activity during all times of the day, resulting in more safety. An important distinction is made by Jacobs between the kind of social capital in small villages and that in cities, reasoning that borders are more fluid in cities. It is common that people living in cities are not even acquainted with their neighbors as the majority of their social life takes place in other areas, like their workplace and associations that are formed on other grounds than geographical proximity. According to Fisscher (1995) people in cities are more invested in their sub-cultures and therefore have a more homogenous network. Other researchers (Forrest and Kearns 2001, Letki 2008) noticed that this also applies to socio-economic status, as people with a low status bond with people in the same position from other areas, thus making their social capital less diverse (Ilan 2012). As Forrest and Kearns (2008) note, 'social networks are city-wide, national, international and increasingly virtual' (p. 2129). They do believe however that 'urban neighbourhoods continue to perform important but more specialist roles in people's lives in parallel with increased extraneighbourhood association' (p. 2130). In the light of many societal developments of the last decades it can be argued that the division of Jacobs and Fisscher between the network composition of people in villages and cities has largely ceased to exist as social networks have generally become much more individualized and fluid.

The concept of social capital has been developed in different ways, depending on the context and sociological field that was being studied. One of the main and older concepts was developed by Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s and early 1980s. He distinguished other forms of capital as well, including economic, cultural, and natural capital. In some ways the 'capital' metaphor seems to commodify the social, the human and the natural. Sometimes this is indeed the case, for instance in Lin's interpretation of the premise behind social capital as 'investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace' (Lin 1999: 19). Here the market chosen for analysis may be economic, political, labor-, or community-based, but in any case this definition links the notion of capital inextricably with profit, and the theory is built on a traditional Marxist view of economic capital. Bourdieu however does not premise the need to invest with expected returns but just refers to the resources that are present through relationships between people, regardless of how they are used. In his work, the capital metaphor does not refer to economic capital but to positions of people in a field, as honor codes about which types of capital are needed to fit in (Duineveld 2015, personal comment). The emphasis of Bourdieu's social capital work is on power relations arising from class

divisions, linked to resources that come from a network of more or less institutionalized relationships. These networks need to be durable and the acquaintance or recognition mutual (Dale and Newman 2008).

After Bourdieu the second main theorist that has been highly influential on the topic of social capital is James Coleman. He defines social capital 'by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure' (Coleman 1994: 302). Whereas Bourdieu is particularly concerned with contributing to social theory from the perspective of 'the more subtle and at times apparently superficial associations which facilitate and sustain social advantage' (Forrest and Kearns 2008: 2138), Coleman based his theory on the social context of education – which is why his work is less relevant to the context of the paper at hand. A clear comparison between Bourdieu and Coleman is made by John Field:

Bourdieu's treatment of social capital is somewhat circular; in summary it boils down to the thesis that privileged individuals maintain their position by using their connections with other privileged people. Coleman's view is more nuanced in that he discerns the value of connections for all actors, individual and collective, privileged and disadvantaged. But Coleman's view is also naively optimistic; as a public good, social capital is almost entirely benign in its functions, providing for a set of norms and sanctions that allow individuals to cooperate for mutual advantage and with little or no 'dark side'. Bourdieu's usage of the concept, by contrast, virtually allows only for a dark side for the oppressed, and a bright side for the privileged.

(Field 2003: 28)

The third main thinker on social capital that informed this research is Robert D. Putnam. His central idea is that networks and the associated norms of reciprocity have value (Putnam 1995). He focuses largely on the public returns of social capital, contrary to the private returns that are central for Bourdieu. Putnam accepts that there is no single form of social capital, and that dimensions vary between more or less formal and informal. Criticism on Putnam's theory is provided by Shortall (2008) in her article exploring the differences between social inclusion, civic engagement, participation, and social capital:

Putnam confuses civic engagement and social capital, at times seeing social capital as the same thing as civic engagement and at times as its cause. [...] [He] argues that civic engagement and social capital make for better government, yet he fails to examine how governmental action can foster participation and social capital.

(Shortall 2008: 451)

On a smaller scale Putnam does acknowledge one form of social capital that is relevant for the neighborhood focus of this section, namely the almost invisible form of networks that arise from things as shallow as nodding to someone in the hall that you do not otherwise know, but still generating visible and measurable forms of reciprocity (Putnam 2000). This is also the kind of social capital that Jacobs refers to in city neighborhoods, in contrast to the kind of social capital in (generalized traditional) villages where neighbors meet for coffee every week to check on each other and gossip about other neighbors. The minor and shallow connections are the networks that according to Jacobs generate trust in the neighborhood, which is enhanced by diversity (Jacobs 1961).

2.2 Social capital for sustainability

According to Pretty and Ward (2001) the term social capital 'captures the idea that social bonds and social norms are an important part of the basis for sustainable livelihoods' (p. 210). Indeed, there is a general intuitive sense that social capital strengthens communities and specifically that it is a

necessary ingredient for sustainable community development (Dale and Newman 2008: 7). Within social capital theory a distinction is made between different kinds of ties: bonding, bridging and linking. Michael Woolcock, social scientist with the World Bank and Harvard, defines these ties as:

1. Bonding social capital, which denotes ties between people in similar situations, such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours;
2. Bridging social capital, which encompasses more distant ties of like persons, such as loose friendships and workmates;
3. Linking social capital, which reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside the community, thus enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available within the community.

(Woolcock 2001: 13-14)

Dale and Newman (2008) argue that 'the network structure that is necessary for sustainable community development is one that is open, diverse, and involves social capital ties at the bridging and vertical levels' (p. 9). However, they argue that social capital is not a sufficient condition for sustainable community development, because external support and other favorable conditions are also necessary. Partnerships have to be formed on all levels, not to speak about the spatial feature of the issues that requires simultaneous local and global cooperation. All the collaborative networks that are required, on every level, need social capital to make them resilient and adaptable to changes. In this respect, Pretty and Ward (2001) distinguish five dimensions of connectedness:

1. Local connections: between individuals and within local groups and communities.
2. Local-local connections: horizontal connections between groups within communities or between communities, which sometimes become platforms and new higher-level institutional structures.
3. Local-external connections: vertical connections between local groups and external agencies or organizations, being one-way (usually top-down) or two-way.
4. External-external connections: horizontal connections between external agencies, leading to integrated approaches for collaborative partnerships.
5. External connections: strong connections between individuals within external agencies.

(Pretty and Ward 2001: 212)

Investments in public social goods can lead to improvements in natural capital. Pretty and Ward (2001) state however that group-based approaches are not enough and policy reform is needed to shape the wider context to make it more favorable to the emergence and sustenance of local groups (p. 210). An important feature of groups concerned with sustainable development is that 'advances in social capital creation have been centered on participatory and deliberative learning processes', contrary to the forms of social capital embodied in groups like sports clubs, parent-school associations or bowling leagues (Pretty and Ward 2001: 215). Comparably, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) stress the importance of 'learning by doing' by all those involved with the advancement of social capital, as a response to the tendency of practitioners and policymakers 'to wait for researchers to know all there is to know before acting' (p. 243).

2.3 Social learning for sustainability

Social learning theory usually refers to a process that includes and utilizes social capital, often for some form of collective action. In a social learning process people from different backgrounds come together to embark on a creative quest for answers to questions for which no ready-made solutions are available, using the ensemble of perspectives, knowledge and experiences that is brought about in this way (Wals et al. 2009: 5). It is a system where people not only learn *from* each other but also *with* each other. When social capital is high in such a group, it usually becomes more resilient and

able to deal with insecurity, complexity and risks. This requires not only accepting one another's differences but also putting them to use. As Pretty and Ward (2001) point out, sustainable development at a local level usually requires more than just reviving old institutions and traditions. It means new forms of organization, association and platforms for common action, and the past decade has seen a growing recognition of the effectiveness of such local groups and associations for sustainable environmental and economic outcomes (p. 210). However, according to Van Assche et al. (2013) 'social learning is easily and quickly instrumentalized for a greater good, usually sustainability, and this can easily lead to a silent reversal from environmental governance back to environmental management' (p. 234). Social learning is in their view not a process that can be managed, or manipulated to reach a certain desired outcome. Therefore they argue for more awareness of the complexity of social embeddings, as well as the need to rethink the concept of social learning reflexively. Wals et al. (2009) do argue that social learning processes are essential to sustainable development and that the probability of a sustainable outcome can be influenced, but they agree that social learning is not a guarantee for sustainable development as it strongly depends on the social context, the manner in which the learning process is organized, as well as on the conditions that apply and those who are to assess whether the outcome is considered sustainable (p. 12).

According to Medema et al. 'learning processes in particular have increasingly become the focus of much social-ecological systems literature with emphasis on social learning and self-organized learning processes through collaboration, joint decision-making and multi-stakeholder arrangements' (2014:2). On the other hand, they note that:

Not much is known about how to effectively facilitate social learning processes, about whom to involve and to what extent. In addition, the required horizontal links (between local actors) and vertical links (navigating the larger environment) between relevant organizations, institutions and knowledge systems have received relatively little attention.

(Medema et al. 2014:2)

The learning system that we are talking about is aimed at the more 'soft' results which are not directly measurable like mutual understanding, respect and cooperation. This is why social capital is so important for this kind of learning, especially for the energy and creativity that can arise in a diverse group where trust is present, leading to a kind of chemistry that facilitates finding new, different or even radical solutions. To introduce this learning to society, often a kind of systems thinking is used that is rooted in the idea of mimicking an ecological system in nature (Wals et al. 2009). The defining quality of such a system is the vibrancy and sensation of aliveness that characterizes social learning. As Widhalm (2011) puts it, this pulsates with energy creating something new and exciting that no single participant could have foreseen or created on his or her own (p. 2). She describes this ecological systems background referring to Fritjof Capra, the famous physicist and systems theorist. He articulated the fundamental living systems principles, including networks, feedback mechanisms, resource cycles and energy flows. In a social learning process, each members' own network is also part of the process and the project members involve their constituencies through frequent communication (Sol et al. 2012). Like in a natural ecosystem, all members are interconnected through networks of relationships, so throughout all phases of the social learning process feedback loops are a crucial component.

Relational dynamics are present in all social systems as well as natural ecosystems. As Widhalm (2011) notes, 'social systems of any kind (families, organizations, learning communities) unfold and develop through dynamic interactions in continuous feedback with each other' (p. 4). So unlike most traditional decision-making processes, with social learning the feedback occurs continuously, at

least after every phase. As Dale and Newman (2008) note, collaborative networks are capable of bridging political boundaries and traditional power and conflict dynamics (p. 17). Furthermore, the dynamics, energy and creativity that social capital generates can assist in making a group self-sustaining, for transaction costs are reduced dramatically. These soft results are inherent to the resolution of broad horizontal, cross-cutting issues such as sustainable development, and the complexity of such issues makes it necessary that collaborative networks reconnect the local conditions to central governments. In practice this generally comes down to a close relationship with the formal, legal decision-making process on the local or regional level (Wals et al. 2009: 13).

2.4 Attributes

The operationalization of social capital and social learning in this paper is rooted in a social constructionist framework, presuming the 'social, interactive nature of learning in general' (Sol et al. 2012). In order to study the role of social capital and social learning in a real-life situation, the concepts need to be operationalized as concrete attributes that can be observed. With regard to creating research instruments such as (semi-)structured questionnaires, Forrest and Kearns (2008) note that 'just as in references to social cohesion, it is essential to transcend vague prescription and normative statements if we are to engage critically with the exploration of social capital and neighbourhoods' (p. 2139). Some of the explorations regarding social capital earlier in this chapter might indeed border the vague and normative, which makes it all the more important to reach a definite operationalization. However, as Adger (2003) notes, 'the measurement and observation of social capital remain problematic' (p. 401).

When looking at social capital, it soon becomes clear that an important premise is the formation of networks. As value and reciprocity are at the foundation of the concept of social capital, to assess its role in a certain context it is necessary to study what has value in a network. Conditions for generating value from social capital that have been identified in literature are the presence of trust and diversity in a group (e.g. World Bank 2011, Adger 2003). Furthermore, these same attributes have been identified as conditions for social learning to occur, in addition to capacity building (e.g. Sol et al. 2012, Wals et al. 2009). Some individual capacities are already present when a stakeholder group is formed and others are built through learning.

In my interview guide I operationalized the concepts of social capital and social learning by the main attributes that are discerned in literature:

- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Trust
- Capacity building
- Learning

By thematically coding the interviews I added "Continuity" as an extra attribute in my analysis because all of my interviewees emphasized this as an important factor in the process of building social capital.

2.4.1 Continuity

A mix of bonding and linking ties has been identified as a condition to create safety and adaptability in a group or network (Dale and Newman 2008). The type of network that is being referred to here does not include relatives or schoolmates, but is deliberately formed around a certain topic or goal. Especially for bonding to occur a stable basis of committed people is required, as long as it does not

become a 'circle of old friends', for social learning requires a positive deployment of dissonance (Brouwer et al., 2010: 20) .

Multiparty interactions in actor networks are typically the core of formal or informal participatory processes in resource management. [...] Relational practices may take different forms, such as joint field visits or common training sessions. The quality of the interaction, the shared ownership of a task or project, openness to mutual testing and contradiction, and the opportunity for reflexive moments are all important components of such a practice.

(Pahl-Wostl et al. 2007: online)

The ecological purposes of Pad2Wijken can be seen as a type of resource management, but also in other contexts it can be observed how networks are formed, in which situations people meet each other and why they decide to form a network or an alliance together. However, as social learning is about creating 'shared ownership' of the learning process and the solutions that are found (Wals et al. 2009: 11) it is important not just to look at why and how groups are formed, but also to identify conditions for people to stay with the process or leave again. The aspect of continuity is about these basic conditions for building social capital and creating ownership by members of the process. Wals et al. (2009) also refer to social capital as the "chemistry" that is considered 'a precondition in creating a robust system that is capable of dealing with setbacks' (p. 12). They further explain that a healthy network is resilient, which means that:

Opposites and differences, which will undoubtedly manifest themselves in a process of change, do not result in a group falling apart or in the stagnation of the learning process. More than that, in a healthy learning system they will trigger reflection as opposed to impulsive (re)actions.

(Wals et al. 2009: 12)

2.4.2 Diversity

Diversity can be of great value in learning networks, as long as it is deployed constructively - which largely depends on the available solidarity between people (Wals et al. 2009: 12). Differences between people are always present and can also cause problems, especially when participants have different interests and expectations from the learning process. Therefore, diversity is really an advantage when people are willing to learn from and with each other in order to create something new that cannot be foreseen by any participant on his or her own. This does not mean that shared stakes or perspectives are necessary, but some mutual interdependence and a shared goal do seem to be required for diversity to be constructive (Brouwer et al. 2010: 20). When considering to utilize social learning, it is advised to employ people of various backgrounds who are by nature already oriented towards uncertainty and not likely to avoid risks (Wals et al. 2009: 12). When social learning is not deliberately deployed as an instrument however, it will often not be possible to select participants on these characteristics, especially when it concerns a citizen initiative of volunteers. Opportunities for expanding the influence of an initiative beyond a small and homogenous local group lie according to Sol et al. (2012) on the regional level, as this 'holds a specific capacity for the generation of new knowledge created in multi-actor innovation networks' (p. 1). They further explain that in these networks 'for instance farmers, scientists, students, NGO's and policy makers together can find new answers to existing social, economic and ecological problems' (p. 1).

2.4.3 Collaboration

Although social learning overlaps a lot with interactive and participatory processes, it is not the same because social learning is usually aimed at the softer results and other participatory approaches more at the harder, measurable results (Wals et al. 2009: 12). In this respect, Van Assche et al. (2013) note that 'the lack of integration with other governance processes and the lack of perceived connections with daily life often reduces the impact of what is learned in participatory

governance' (p. 238). A common problem with participatory governance is thus that it is not sufficiently embedded in community networks.

Pahl-Wostl et al. (2007) note that the meaning of social learning has become quite vague:

Because it focuses on the cognitive processes of individuals, the original concept does not consider group processes such as the development of shared meanings and values that provide a basis for joint action. [...] A broad understanding of social learning [...] is rooted in the more interpretative strands of the social sciences. The framework for this type of learning is provided by multiparty collaboration embedded in a specific context and leading to specific outcomes.

(Pahl-Wostl et al. 2007: online)

Often the goal of such multiparty collaboration is sustainable resource management, and in literature the term 'has been used to refer to all kinds of processes of learning and change (Pahl-Wostl et al. 2007: online)'. In most processes at least a transformation of governance structures seems to be required. This is also one of the intentions of the neighborhood cooperative pilot in Groningen, although the initiators of Pad2Wijken did find a way to implement their ideas within the existing structures. This was mostly due to the existing network of the initiator, which will be elaborated in the fifth chapter of this paper.

According to Medema et al. (2014) 'a vertical and horizontal integration of ideas and practices (linking personal and local behaviors to outcomes at broader scales) may help to gain a deeper understanding of different knowledge domains and traditions' (p. 4). They argue in their article that in order to reach the necessary conditions for sustainable and equitable solutions, external agencies have to work with individuals and communities to comprise a mix of external incentives, regulations and new local associations. From the literature that was discussed in the previous sections on social capital and social learning for sustainability, it can be further derived that between networks more linkages are usually better, two-way rather than one-way and preferably actively maintained through regular updates. Thus, it can be concluded that traditional hierarchical decision-making models are inadequate to deal with the highly interdependent nature of community development in an increasingly global economy (Dale and Newman 2008: 10).

2.4.4 Trust

In a multiparty collaboration network the participants have a shared goal and they invest and share their resources. Relationships in these networks are therefore more than just contact; they are based on mutual trust and commitment. A common result of a lack of trust between participants in a multidisciplinary group process is described by Beers et al. (2006):

There were some cases where participants were conscious of misunderstanding and did not repair it. [...] Participants may have been more interested in conveying the message of understanding the others, of being on common ground, than to convey a message of mutual difference, as would be clear when misunderstandings would have been made explicit. They would face trade-off between their presentation of self and repairing a misunderstanding, where making a misunderstanding explicit is not in the best interests of presenting an "optimal" self.

(Beers et al. 2006: 552)

Creating a basis of trust between participants might be the key to a safe environment in which - instead of being mainly concerned with presenting an optimal self - people can freely explore and learn together. According to Wals et al. (2009), when a certain degree of trust and safety is generated 'people will more easily open up to one another and are less frightened of being held accountable for "errors" or alternative views' (p. 12).

On a larger scale, social institutions based on trust and reciprocity, and agreed norms and rules for behavior, can furthermore mediate unfettered private action for short term profit (Pretty and Ward 2001: 210).

2.4.5 Capacity building

According to Horlings (2014) the term capacity building refers to the process where 'social interactions at individual level create benefits and collective action' (lecture slide). When people come together and form an alliance, each individual brings certain capacities which they can subsequently make available to the network and deploy for reaching its goals. For a social learning process to be successful, a combination of capacities is required that can be partially already present among the participants and also to some extent be acquired and/or mobilized during the process.

Wals et al. (2009) grant a crucial role to the process facilitator as someone who:

- keeps the process open (ensures access to the process, openness regarding the agenda, transparency of the process);
- guarantees security (protection against risks resulting from participation);
- knows how to deal with conflicts that arise;
- has no interests with respect to the outcome
- monitors progress;
- ensures sufficient stimuli, challenges and a '*sense of urgency*';
- can articulate and show how progress has been made;
- can keep the focus on the choices that have been made and the path that has been chosen.

(Wals et al. 2009: 17)

They do acknowledge however that 'it would be exceptional to find someone who has all of these qualities and so a team of which the members offer complimentary (facilitation) skills will generally be required' (Wals et al. 2009: 17).

2.4.6 Learning

Medema et al. (2014) make a distinction between single-loop learning and multi-loop social learning. With single-loop learning they refer to 'learning new skills and capabilities through incremental improvement, doing something better without examining or challenging underlying beliefs and assumptions' (p. 5). Double-loop social learning in their definition 'occurs by fundamentally revisiting and reshaping underlying assumptions and patterns of thinking and behavior (reframing)', while 'triple-loop learning involves reflexivity about the "rules" (not only on whether the rules should be changed), or meta-learning on single- and double-loop learning processes', which ultimately may lead to 'a redesigning of existing governance norms, protocols and structures (Transformational Learning)' (p. 5).

The kind of learning that leads to a more sustainable world is the type that leads to a new way of thinking. For this learning to exceed the individual level it is important to apply systems thinking - seeing connections, making use of diversity and creating synergy and also to understand systems of communities and to think in terms of relations and connections (Wals et al. 2009: 7). It can be argued that social learning is a necessary condition to create something new and different and make a system more adaptable to insecurity, risk and complexity. This is not a given result of any learning process however, and as Medema et al. (2014) note, 'clearly articulated learning goals are fundamental to effective monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes' (p. 2). When learning goals are not defined beforehand, it can be difficult to assess whether or not learning actually occurred. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that 'although there is evidence that participatory processes may stimulate and facilitate social learning, it cannot be automatically assumed that collaboration implies that social learning takes place' (Medema et al. 2014:2). Finally,

when learning processes are not facilitated carefully they can fail and existing power differences can be confirmed or even strengthened (Brouwer et al. 2010).

The methods I chose for assessing the extent to which social learning occurred in the neighborhood collaboration are elaborated in the next chapter.

3. Methods

This paper presents a reflexive case study, combining the methods of participant observation described in a research journal and in-depth interviewing. As my research choices are largely informed by my personal biography, I have chosen to include experiences and stories from my own life. As these experiences were formed and interpreted in and through my social environment, I used the framework of social constructionism to achieve a 'constructive and positive approach to reflexivity, in which research is enhanced by acknowledgement that the social world, the academic world, and the personal world of the researcher are intermingled and co-created through the ongoing process of social life' (O'Reilly 2012: 521). Luckily it is increasingly accepted that in fact social science, and even science in general, cannot be objective because every researcher is informed by his or her personal, economic or academic background and perspective. For this reason I have chosen to make my subjectivity very explicit and use it to dig deeper into the issues that arise when academic theory is used to frame a real-life social process.

The capital that is accumulated through social connections was in the context of my research deliberately applied to establish the neighborhood initiative Pad2Wijken, and in a later stage the neighborhood collaboration with the purpose of forming of a cooperative. Pad2Wijken and the cooperative pilot make up two different networks, but the members of the Pad2Wijken working group agree that currently the only opportunity to take the initiative further is to become a partner of the neighborhood cooperative. This has been the intention since the announcement of the plans for the cooperative in October 2014, and the formalization has been in the pipeline ever since. Currently the neighborhood cooperative pilot is operating under the working title *Kracht van Zuid* (power of south). The main goal for the coming year (2015) is to set an agenda for five years whilst supporting neighborhood initiatives to attain visibility, including Pad2Wijken. As I was a volunteer with the Pad2Wijken working group for the entire duration of the study, I was in a good position to observe from the inside. My research journal describes the process starting with the opening of Pad2Wijken in May 2014, following its connection to the establishment of the neighborhood cooperative in October and the realization of the broader neighborhood collaboration since December.

Participant observation involves striving to make the strange familiar, and the familiar strange, and one must constantly question, immerse and distance oneself in the ongoing process of producing ethnographic insights. This is in fact a very distinctive and creative way of being in and learning about the world and the task of participant observation is not to resolve its inherent tensions, but to embrace the reflexivity inherent in the balancing act, because participation and observation have a dialectical relationship to each other in the practice of ethnography.

(O'Reilly 2012: 523)

Participant observation has occurred in three locations in Groningen, namely the meetings of the Pad2Wijken working group at the Multifunctional Centre (MFC); the meetings concerning the startup of the neighborhood cooperative at the intermediate vocational education school Terra; and the project meetings of the neighborhood collaboration at the office of Radar (bureau for social issues) which is now turned into the headquarters of the project. These three places are all located in the neighborhoods Helpman and De Wijert.

My involvement in Academic Consultancy Training (ACT) student projects during the period of my research has contributed to several aspects of this paper. The report that was written by the first ACT group, called 'Social Cohesion through Edible Green', informed the project of the second group

by presenting an elaborate problem analysis. This basis enabled the second group, of which I was the manager, to focus a large part of its time to the organization of an event: the 'Pad2Wijken Inspiratiedag' (inspiration day). I have chosen to include an account of the organization of this event in the paper at hand because it was a period in which I worked closely together with the different stakeholders involved. The event also accelerated the process of establishing a neighborhood cooperative, which until then was being prepared mostly behind the scenes. The issues that arose with the organization of the event contributed to setting the initiative for the neighborhood cooperative more firmly on the agenda of the municipality, as well as making the objective of our ACT team - to connect Pad2Wijken to the emerging cooperative - visible to the stakeholders.

For the observation part of this study my participants included the Pad2Wijken volunteers, all of the actors actively involved with the establishment of the neighborhood collaboration, and the students and coach of ACT team 1448. I have not asked all of them for detailed personal information, but I will make some conclusions based on my observations in the participants section of the next chapter.

3.1 Interviews

During the process of observation I focused specifically on the interaction between actors, trying also to keep a reflexive view on my own contributions. I made sure to build up a trusting relationship with the main actors in the process, and based on that selected, in the style of purposive sampling (Palys 2008), five participants that I had most interaction with for in-depth interviews. The names of my interviewees- as well as the other participants of the Pad2Wijken and neighborhood collaboration processes- are altered in this report for confidentiality purposes. The following table presents the demographics of my interviewees.

Name	Richard	Liza	Michiel	Frits	Lars
Role	Pad2Wijken initiator / core volunteer	Pad2Wijken core volunteer, commissioner 1st ACT group	Initiator neighborhood cooperative / commissioner 2nd ACT group	Link Pad2Wijken to Terra & WUR, Facilitator meetings	Link municipality
Age	51	56	50	62	54
Job	None	Freelance consultancy green & wellbeing	Teacher Garden & Landscape at Terra	Manager Kenniswerkplaats, area cooperative Westerkwartier	Senior policymaker / coordinator green participation
Education	MTS (technical), NIMA (marketing)	University of Groningen (psychology)	Fontis teacher training	Wageningen University Zootechnics	Agricultural college

The interviews all took thirty minutes to one hour, and were conducted either in my house or the house or workplace of the respondent. All interviews were recorded with permission of the participants. Before starting the interviews, participants were requested to read and sign an informed consent form (in Dutch, see appendix A) that ensured their confidentiality and anonymity. The initial interview guide went through several adaptations following each of the interviews; a final version in English can be found in appendix B. All interviews were conducted in Dutch. To participants who were interested I promised to send my thesis after completion.

As I already operationalized most of the aspects for my analysis in the interview guide, I simply coded the interviews by transcribing the recordings and marking recurring themes and descriptive quotes.

3.2 Making sense of the data

During the whole research period I was very meticulous about recording everything that happened in my research journal. The reason for this was that I did not confine the kinds of outcomes that I was looking for in advance, so I wanted to have a complete picture for myself to be able to trace back anything that happened in the process, in case it would become important at a later stage. Furthermore, as Medema et al. (2014) note, 'reflection as an integral part of learning and change processes reveals in more depth the ways in which both the external and internal context as well as individual attributes of those involved affect learning and change processes, actions and values' (p. 8). They further describe the levels on which reflexive processes take place. In my research I have started on 'the individual level through setting of goals and monitoring of process and outcomes' (Medema et al. 2014: 9). In the neighborhood collaboration process there is an intention to incorporate reflexivity 'on the interpersonal level through e.g. briefing and debriefing within groups' and eventually 'the community level through creation of a common vision and identifying priorities and performance indicators; and [...] the social level through evaluating and auditing impacts of laws, regulations and markets' (Medema et al. 2014:9).

My research process started with the theory of social capital and social learning that I obtained through courses that I chose for my personal minor. These choices were completely informed by personal interest and an intuitive sense of the importance of socio-ecological systems thinking for sustainable development. I first revisited the material that was used in these courses, and from there expanded my literature review by following references from books and articles that seemed relevant.

A constant to and fro between academic life, personal life, fieldwork and analysis, helps one avoid spontaneous interpretations informed by academic fashions, on the one hand, and relying entirely and uncritically on the reports of 'informants', on the other (Bourdieu, 2003).

(O'Reilly 2012: 528)

Indeed, my research was a constant to and fro during a period of one year. I combined my academic work with a social life in Groningen, playing the fiddle in a band with regular gigs, and taking extra classes from several courses in Wageningen for inspiration. I believe that the different ways of data collection, including interviews and the organization of an event, have partly secured the validity of my research. However, I did not ask feedback on my interpretations of the data from the participants because most of them are very busy and it was already quite difficult to make the appointments for the interviews. Because of their limited availability the interviews were spread over more than two months and I did not want to delay my graduation even more by making another round of appointments. I cannot deny however that it would have strengthened the validity of my research to ask my interviewees for feedback on my analysis.

Following Medema et al. (2014), I have divided the different attributes of social capital and social learning among four types of factors:

- a. Content factors refer to what is being changed or the type of changes implemented; [...]
- b. [Context:] external context factors may be defined as those factors and forces over which organizations or a governance system has little control. Instead changes are often made in response to such demands. Conditions of the internal context can explain the general attitude or readiness towards change; [...]
- c. Process factors provide an indication of how change is organized and refer to actions and directions taken during the planning and implementation of a proposed change; [...]
- d. Individual attributes refer to micro-level factors relating to the reactions to change efforts by stakeholders and individuals involved.

(Medema et al. 2014: 3-4)

The content factors are not specifically distinguished in the analysis section of this paper, because they are elaborated in the description of the case. Furthermore, the different types of factors are not mutually exclusive. Some context factors are operationalized in the analysis chapter, but others are inexplicitly described throughout this paper. Especially the external context factors are illustrated in the introduction, and the internal context is clarified in the case description.

4. Case description

4.1 Location

Just like any other city, Groningen has many different neighborhoods that all have their own identity. As a teenager I lived in the “bad part” of Corpus den Hoorn, which was at the time one of the most notorious neighborhoods of the city, known for poverty, criminal and anti-social behavior, deteriorated housing and public space - all in all a very depressing place. My family moved there from a small village in the province when I was 11 years old, and at first I mainly experienced relief at being released from what I perceived as the strangulating narrowness of the village. Slowly however, the neighborhood troubles started to bother me more. The part where we lived was all social housing; very old, run-down row houses inhabited mostly by a very specific kind of people whom I never learned to communicate with. It seemed like the municipality had just forgotten about this part of the city, until finally, almost ten years later than planned, they started with the renovation work.

Nowadays, Corpus den Hoorn has transformed into a completely different neighborhood. At some point my mother had to move as the old row houses were being demolished. One of the houses in the new rows a few streets down was allocated to her, and next to the social housing rows more luxurious condominiums were built - attracting people with a higher socioeconomic status. When I visit my mother now I see very diverse groups of children in the playground behind her house, literally varying from blond ponytails with pink Oilily clothes to sober headscarves to gangster-style caps with baggy pants. The new planning and other measures as part of the reform program “Heel de Buurt” (heal the neighborhood) has reduced nuisance by loitering youth and gave the neighborhood a more socially desirable face. This process came about in consultation with the neighborhood council that represents citizens and social organizations. In 2007 the municipality and housing corporations came to the understanding “Nieuw Lokaal Akkoord 2.0” (NLA: new local agreement) for improvement of five city districts, which formed the basis for further physical and social renewal of Corpus den Hoorn.

The NLA agreement also included the improvement of the northern part of the neighborhood De Wijert, which was dealing with similar problems as Corpus den Hoorn. The money for Pad2Wijken came from this fund, causing resistance among inhabitants of De Wijert North as the path also included De Wijert South and Helpman; richer areas that were not included in the NLA agreement. The project Pad2Wijken is politically interesting for the municipality because of the contrast in the composition of the population between the north and the south part.

The neighborhood demographics that students from vocational university Van Hall Larenstein found in 2011 showed that Helpman had 10,910 inhabitants, of which approximately half was male and half female. Most of them were aged between 25 and 64 and most households had no children, with single households occurring most. About half of the households earned around the national average income; the other half considerably more. De Wijert had 7,255 inhabitants, including slightly more females than males. Age and household distribution were similar as in Helpman, but in De Wijert the amount of households with and without children was almost equal (while single households still occurred most). Regarding income there was a big difference between the two parts of De Wijert: the national average at the time was €29,300, the average of De Wijert North €22.800 and that of De Wijert South €39.500. Also the population of De Wijert North was considerably younger with 35 % aged between 25 and 44, against 17 % in De Wijert South.

Since 2015 NLA has been disbanded as housing corporations are requested to diminish their efforts in the social sector and focus more on the physical part. Furthermore, the role of the municipality has changed since the replacement of the old borough coordination with the new system of district teams- and aldermen. As Pad2Wijken is not subsidized by the NLA fund anymore it will continue as a member of the new neighborhood collaboration project.

4.2 Participants

Apart from me there were during my research period three Pad2Wijken core volunteers, of which I interviewed Richard and Liza. The third core volunteer is officially the chair of the working group but she chose not to be involved with the ACT projects and the startup of the neighborhood cooperative so she only cooperated in a small part of the process that I describe in this thesis, namely the meetings of the Pad2Wijken working group. She lives in De Wijert and has been active in several neighborhood associations for many years.

For Richard his motivation for initiating Pad2Wijken was purely idealistic. He is an energy technician by education and has worked as a commercial agent, so there is no link with green in the neighborhood. His motivation was purely the wish for a livable environment, to live pleasantly not just for himself but also his neighbors. As he put it:

I could try to improve the world, but well, as they say; start with yourself. Well I make it a bit bigger- I say I start with my environment.

Liza got involved about two years ago, after she read about Pad2Wijken a few times in the local periodical. She was looking for something to do voluntarily in the neighborhood that would not take too much time and bordered her own work. Through Pad2Wijken she hoped to get into a network and start something in the courtyard beside her house as it was being neglected since the municipality stopped maintaining it.

The project team of the neighborhood collaboration with whom I participated in meetings from January 2015 onwards consists of six main actors representing Bureau Radar, Terra MBO, the municipality and policies - including funding - on national and European level. Just like my interviewees, all of them are white and middle-aged. None of the members of the project team live in the neighborhoods but the representatives of Terra and Radar are connected through their work. Two representatives of Radar and one teacher of Terra are female and the other three members are male. The representative of the municipality, Lex, is also Terra's contact for the maintenance of the square where we organized the Pad2Wijken Inspiratiedag (inspiration day) with the second ACT group. The representative of the national and European authorities and funding, Wim, is furthermore linked to Terra as lector Regional Transition, as well as Hanze University of Applied Sciences as lector Sustainable Cooperative Entrepreneurship. The sixth member is Michiel, representing Terra. He is officially still a teacher but in reality he only spends two days a week with students, working on projects. He works one day for the neighborhood collaboration and spends the rest of his time on other projects throughout the city.

4.3 Development Pad2Wijken

The Pad2Wijken working group finished their proposal in July 2012, including their reasons for securing a green zone through the neighborhoods Helpman and De Wijert. The idea was not entirely new as the initiator Richard, who was at the time a member of the neighborhood committee, had already completed another path in Helpman: the Ecological Historical Walking Path. One of the main arguments behind these projects was that the green space in cities is in danger of disappearing because of new buildings, so the absence of a vision could lead to the shredding of the green

structure. The historical path managed to get an official allocation plan to prevent it from being developed in other ways. This was also the goal for Pad2Wijken but unfortunately it has not been granted (yet). As the maintenance of the various green spaces is also under pressure as a result of budget cuts, participation of citizens would be necessary to retain the value of these spaces. Furthermore, the aspect of inhabitants taking up tasks to maintain green spaces together was viewed by the neighborhood committee as a way to improve social cohesion within and between the neighborhoods. The vision of the committee was that the neighborhoods could grow into a tight community surrounded by lots of nature. To realize this vision the members embraced the idea of an ecological edible walking path and made it their mission to set up the path with help from inhabitants. The path would also be one of the places to support the program "Eetbare Stad" (edible town) of the Nature- and Environment Federation Groningen. During later phases of the creation of the path the working group remained in flux as more volunteers joined, contributed, and most of them left again until three core volunteers remained. Pad2Wijken was opened to citizens on May 17th 2014, however still only a few inhabitants have responded to the call to participate by adopting a plot along the path for developing their own green project.

The opinions of my interview respondents seem to differ on the degree of knowledge about the path among neighborhood residents. Richard thinks that a lot of people in the neighborhoods are walking the route or at least know that something is happening. However, he acknowledges that the idea needs to settle first because people are used to the municipality maintaining the green in front of their houses. He identifies two shocks in this regard; the first when people realize that the municipality has cut back its maintenance work, and the second when realizing that they can actually do something themselves. Richard thinks that it just takes some time before people are ready for this, but as the path is established now he trusts that it will be picked up. According to him people do not yet know that the municipality stopped maintaining the public green spaces, but the responsibility for this, according to him, lies not just with the municipality:

Yes, they should inform citizens more, but it is a change in mentality. The municipality facilitates, it does not pull the whole process. The population has to do it and the awareness is not there yet.

Richard does see a trend however towards people taking more responsibility and awareness that they make their own living environment. He expects that it might take another 25 years before this change of mentality has reached everyone, but he tries to carry the first group with him and to allow for the realization that people who desire to take it up themselves can start working. At least that is what he hoped for, but it turns out they are less than he expected...

The coordinator green participation from the municipality, Lars, has a quite different attitude. While Richard kept repeating that he is an idealist, Lars kept repeating that he is not an idealist. His outlook is the same for every project that he facilitates: although the municipality is eventually always responsible as it concerns public space, the higher goal of every project is to get people to collaborate, work together again, and when the project is a success they will meet each other there. He does not expect however that any of the projects will actually become a success and reach this point where residents really meet each other when working on the project - whether it is a vegetable garden, a beehive or an orchard. He stresses that his pessimism does not have anything to do with Pad2Wijken, although it is a bit harder here than with most projects because this project is spatially more dispersed. An important aspect of the vision behind Pad2Wijken is to stimulate people living on welfare to take up volunteering in their neighborhood. Lars does not believe this will work however, based on his two and a half years' experience as mentor of a working- and learning trajectory for long-term unemployed people. He learned that you cannot simply say: we will start a neighborhood cooperative, involve as many people on welfare as possible and therewith improve

their employment opportunities in the labor market. Though the opportunity should be there for people on welfare to get involved, he does not think additional efforts should be made to attract them. He shared the following arithmetical explanation to demonstrate his conviction:

When you conveniently round up the number of Groningen residents living on welfare to 10.000, and 1 percent would be put to work on, say, a Monday morning, that will be 20 people per borough. Of these 20 people at least 10 just won't show up, and others will come up with excuses, so you will maybe end up with 2 or 3 people. So as an organization you have a lot of work and the return is very low. For instance amongst the volunteers of the food bank garden there are only 1 or 2 that actually receive from the food bank because they just don't come, they don't have the energy for it. De Wijert has the same problem: these people are so busy with their own problems of how to pay off their debts that they sit back on their couch and don't get up anymore.

He compared the current policy direction to the 1980's when a lot of money was pumped into the reintegration of the long-term unemployed in the labor market: 'In retrospect the return was minimal so nobody talks about it anymore'. But, he added unconvincingly, 'maybe it will be different now...'

The seed of more involvement of Terra to the project was planted when Michiel accidentally walked into one of the meetings of the first ACT group and got the idea of incorporating work along the path in the curriculum of his classes. Later I found out that this idea was enabled by ambition plans that were made (semi-)internally with the lector regional transition Wim, who introduced the connection of some educational programs to the neighborhood in which collaboration between different parties was the pivot. Wim was then already a year in the process of trying to connect Terra and the municipality in a partnership. Before that he was lector at vocational university Van Hall Larenstein, which also carried out a few student projects for Pad2Wijken. Since September 2014 Michiel got actively involved in this process, which led to him becoming the commissioner of the second ACT team in the role of initiator of the neighborhood cooperative. According to Frits, since then Terra has been the epoch maker of the process towards the neighborhood collaboration. In his words, Terra has literally done groundbreaking work to prepare things in the neighborhood and to get the municipality ready to the extent that they have now reached a board-wide decision to support the development and gave Terra a role in it. Frits went on telling that this is quite special, as it could not be dreamed of a year ago, and even in mid-October 2014 - three months before I interviewed him - there were still only a few people within the municipality aware of the developments. Furthermore, he stated that Pad2Wijken was a very important catalyst to do something substantive with the residents of the neighborhood that could grow into a wider collaboration.

Frits got involved with Pad2Wijken about 4 years ago when Terra was in the process of applying for the KIGO grant. KIGO stands for "Kennisverspreiding en Innovatie Groen Onderwijs" (knowledge distribution and innovation green education). Minister Bussemaker of education granted subsidies for projects fitting in one of the programs. The regulation ended in the summer of 2014, but it provided for the necessary resources to start collaborations between knowledge institutions like Wageningen University and Terra with local projects, which are still ongoing. The then city ecologist told Frits about an initiative getting under way in the neighborhoods Helpman and De Wijert for an ecological walking route, and this was the first time he heard about it. After that he waited for half a year if the project would continue or not and then contact was made between Terra and the Pad2Wijken working group. They subsequently had a meeting which revealed that the first questions fitted in certain modules of Van Hall Larenstein, leading to a project carried out by students in the neighborhood. In the meantime Frits was already in touch with my thesis supervisor

dr. Ina Horlings, and the connection between Pad2Wijken and Wageningen University resulted from this acquaintance. After that the first effort of Terra was at the opening of the path, and then with the ACT groups and the establishment of the neighborhood cooperative. Of my interviewees, Michiel played the biggest part in this development. Pad2Wijken was however first the project of Frits, who asked Michiel to introduce himself when he walked into an ACT meeting where Liza and Richard were also present.

Richard acknowledges that not all the goals of Pad2Wijken have been reached. Although the path is laid out not enough people have been involved yet. In the sense of creating more social cohesion he fears that he has not been realistic. He always succeeded in mobilizing one, two or three streets but trying to do this with two neighborhoods he noted that 'you just drown, that's not manageable on your own.' Furthermore, Liza shared that the idea for the path was actually not received with open arms in the beginning because of the NLA money that was marked for De Wijert North. She also noted that the Helpman neighborhood committee was very enthusiastic in the beginning but later not anymore, which made the process very misty to her.

4.4 Academic Consultancy Training

The first ACT project for which I co-wrote the proposal was conducted by a team of five Wageningen University students in May and June 2014. The team comprised one English male student and four female students including three Dutch nationals and one American, all living in Wageningen throughout their studies. During the first meeting of the group in Groningen at Terra, Pad2Wijken core volunteer Liza was appointed as their commissioner. The idea was that I would collaborate with them intensively as an external expert, but eventually I only had occasional contact with them. As their manager is a friend of mine, she was the one who mainly kept me updated. The second ACT group of which I was the manager started in September 2014. Our team consisted of six female master students aged 23, 26, 27 (two) and 29 (two). Besides me one of them was Dutch, and the others were from Spain, Romania, the Czech Republic and Zimbabwe. Two of them studied Organic Agriculture, another two International Development Studies and one Forest and Nature Conservation.

During the ACT period from September to November 2014 I sub-rented a room in Wageningen because it was a full time course during which we mostly worked in our team office at the university campus. An important part of the course was reflection, both individual and as a team. For this we had feedback sessions on most of the days that we worked at the office, of which many were facilitated by our team coach. I recorded the whole process in my research journal, using the ACT course framework to reflect on my experience and performance working with the team in my role as manager.

The connection of schools and universities to Pad2Wijken and the neighborhood collaboration started within the KIGO regulation on national policy level. The KIGO project with green schools in the Northern Netherlands was aimed at what people value, what gives them energy (appreciative inquiry) in their neighborhood and what meaning they give to it ('Sense of Place'). Based on this it was hoped that it would become clear which keystones (places) are present in the neighborhood itself and which activities people want to take up. The trajectory would be carried out in several steps by students from different schools, with the risk being that people from the neighborhood could lose interest if they were approached in a wrong manner. (Horlings 2013)

4.5 Pad2Wijken Events

The opening of the path, on the sunny Saturday morning of May 17th 2014, was the first Pad2Wijken gathering that was attended by a fair amount (100-150) of neighborhood residents. Furthermore, though a bit late, an alderman dropped by to see how the opening came along. This was also the first Pad2Wijken event to which Terra contributed, in the form of posters designed by students of the programs Design & Styling and Flower & Design. At the time of the opening of the path, the first ACT team of Wageningen students had just started their project. Terra's role in this process was mostly facilitating, putting rooms and facilities at the disposal of the group and their commissioner, Pad2Wijken volunteer Liza. For Liza it was a surprise that the opening of the path was a success, as she was skeptical about the extent to which the path actually existed as something different than before it was designated as a route.

The first ACT team organized an activity on the playground of a primary school in the neighborhood:

[...] which gave residents and supporters a space to meet and discuss their interest in and ideas with the path, with the printed map serving as the main "symbol." Here, while the path was the symbolic focus, it is likely that the event gave room for other community concerns to be addressed.

(GroenGoud, 2014:15)

As I was away on holiday at the time, I did not attend the activity. I heard however that the team presented their plan at a neighborhood event the night before, which was organized well in advance with help from the municipality, and that the visitors to this events were subsequently the same ones that came to the activity the next day.

One of the outputs of the second ACT team, of which I was the manager, was the organization of the Pad2Wijken Inspiratiedag (inspiration day). I will start with my own account of the day from my research journal, and then add the assessment of my interview respondents.

16-10

Crazy day. It started when I called Lars this morning to ask him about his opening speech, but he didn't even let me finish my question and shouted what the hell I was thinking, if I didn't read my email and if I had any idea what troubles I was causing him. I was completely shocked and didn't have any idea what he was talking about, and as he was raging on there was no chance to find out. Eventually I understood it was about the event permit, and that he had angry people from the event department in his office as we spoke. He said we didn't get the permit and thus had to cancel the whole thing. I immediately responded that this was just not acceptable, as Michiel had assured us that we got all the necessary permissions already when we first came up with the idea! The problem was that Lars told me last week to apply for an event license, even though the deadline had already passed, reasoning that we could at least show that we applied for it in case they would try to cause trouble. They replied that they couldn't give us the permit, as Lars already expected, and as I had the guarantee from Michiel that there was permission, I didn't follow up with the event office. I did call Michiel again just to be sure, upon which he called his contact Lex from the municipality, who reassured him that it was indeed all taken care of.

Eventually Lars turned around and said that I was 'his' victim so it wasn't my fault after all. I don't know what he meant with 'his' victim; if he felt that he wronged me personally or if it was just a way of saying the whole situation was not my fault.

Until the afternoon I was busy calling and e-mailing with the Vrijwilligerstuin ('volunteer garden') and potential workshop leaders, as we still needed someone to facilitate the gardening workshop (even though I had been trying to find someone for weeks). I didn't take a break and just had a snack behind

my laptop for lunch. Then I received a call from Feestverhuur (party rental) that they were putting our order on hold because there was no permit. Turned out they called Lars about the billing and he told them there was no permit and it would thus probably be canceled. Tragically, Feestverhuur was our provider for almost all of the materials: booths, chairs, tables, gas heaters, jumping castle... It had already been very hard to get this order through as we had only decided on what to order very late in the process, but now the whole thing really was in danger of going to pieces. And everybody acted like it was all just my responsibility, as I had arranged everything... On top of this I got another cancellation from the guerilla gardening workshop leader: he had also contacted Lars with a question about payment, upon which Lars told him about the missing permit. In the meantime I constantly tried to reach Michiel and finally he called me back and again reassured me that there was permission and it would be alright. I was completely stressed out, mostly about Feestverhuur because I still trusted Michiel about the rest, but without the materials there would be nothing and I just couldn't imagine how to deliver this news to everyone who agreed to man a stand, and had probably already prepared a lot. Lars said he'd be available until 6 PM and then the next day again. When Michiel called me back he had called Frits, who was as we spoke making calls trying to solve it. The problem was that Lex, Michiel's contact at the municipality who organized Terra's management of the square, was on holiday and unreachable, and apparently there was no one standing in or authorized to speak for him.

Frits called me in the evening with an idea to get around the permit, namely to call it a festivity instead of an event. He had spoken to one of his contacts at the municipality who has a lot of knowledge about these things, and who agreed that the Inspiratiedag does not meet the requirements for an event. The only possible problem was the amplified live music, but this rule was really just meant for loud stuff like house and rock so our acoustic folk would probably not be a problem. Frits couldn't reach Lars, but he assured me he'd convince Lars in the morning to let us proceed. This was a big relief for me because - as I told Michiel before - I needed a guarantee from them to continue with the organization as I was working with volunteers who trusted me on my word.

17-10

This morning I got an email from Michiel at 8 AM that he sent to the Pad2Wijken volunteers with me in the cc, saying that they probably already heard from me that the Inspiratiedag might have to be cancelled if the municipality would keep blocking it, and that 'we' have to make a decision today. I immediately tried to call him when I read it at 8.30, but he didn't pick up his phone again so I called Frits to ask for the meaning of this. Why should the Pad2Wijken volunteers be included in this decision, when they had nothing to do with the organization and just helped a bit with the promotion? Frits reassured me that it was going to be alright, and I was immediately put at ease by his confidence and soothing voice. He agreed to immediately call Lars, ask him to fix it with Feestverhuur and try to convince him to do the opening speech. He also agreed to do the opening speech himself if Lars would still refuse to attend. In the meantime I continued updating and coordinating Leentje from the Vrijwilligerstuin, the workshop leaders and of course the girls in the team office who were also relying on me to tell them what to do. We discussed everything that still had to be done and divided the final tasks for that afternoon. When Frits called me back he had convinced Lars - not just to let us proceed, but also to be there and give the opening speech in his capacity of coordinator green participation of the municipality. He said I could tell Feestverhuur it was settled, and if they needed confirmation from Lars they could contact him.

But, unbelievably, it turned out that Feestverhuur did not hold the order and now they didn't have time anymore to deliver and set up in the morning. The only possibility was to have someone pick up the furniture this afternoon, so I arranged for someone from the Vrijwilligerstuin to get the van early from the rental business and pick up the materials from Feestverhuur. I told them to put it on the square, because I was in Wageningen and couldn't reach anyone to arrange another place. Michiel still didn't answer his phone but I assumed he would have the key of the shop-premises on the square because he told me earlier that it was appointed to him/Terra for the neighborhood cooperative.

When he finally called me back it turned out he didn't have a key, and didn't know any other place to store the furniture.

Eventually the boys from my band and two guys from Social Centre Groningen helped me with a trailer and a carrier cycle to move everything to the social centre. We had to go back and forth a few times and finished around 10 PM. It was horrible.

18-10

When I arrived at the square at 8.45 AM Leentje and Michel from de Vrijwilligerstuin were already there. Soon Martin arrived and then the van with four volunteers who unloaded their tents, stage, bar, popcorn machine, food and drinks. Then a few of the guys took the van to get the Feestverhuur furniture from Social Centre Groningen, and market stands that I arranged as a rush order at 8 AM this morning from another rental business, as Feestverhuur couldn't get any yesterday. It took a few hours to set everything up because one of the generators that Michiel arranged didn't work and the volunteers had to get another one at a village 30 minutes away.

● All pictures were made by ACT team member Eva Ardao Rivera



Setting up the first partytent



Me talking to Leentje and Michel



ACT team members tinkering



My band members and Erik setting up

When they came back Erik got the sound working so Lars could do his opening speech. He actually already had to leave as it was 12.30 PM, but agreed to do the speech anyway. In the meantime two officers from city patrol had visited, but finally allowed the event to continue unofficially after Frits, Lars and Michiel talked to them for a long time. Apart from the volunteers and a few of my family members there were no visitors yet even though we started with a 1.5 hour delay. I felt really bad for Lars and everyone who pitched their initiative afterwards, as they were talking to a handful of people who didn't even live in the neighborhood... There were six booths, including a professional cooking studio and the bar, crepes maker and popcorn machine from the Vrijwilligerstuin. We played a few

more tunes and songs with the band, during which the girls from my ACT group were somewhere behind the square where they couldn't even see the stage... Lynn announced the pitches - eight in total including Michiel on the neighborhood cooperative and Richard on PadzWijken - and then the workshops started.



My band Stout 'n Herring



Empty square

I'd had Lars get a piece of ground cleared behind the square for the gardening workshop but Monique decided to give her permaculture workshop on the square because it was actually more about sharing, connection, and some theory. There were eventually 8 participants, among which our ACT team coach Djura and my aunt and uncle.



When Jorita started the presentation of our catalogue it seemed like there were a lot more people, but maybe this was just because a number of the volunteers joined as there were no visitors left on the main part of the square so they didn't need to man their stands. I didn't hear the presentation because I was talking to the co-creators, facilitating networking between them (luckily they all made useful contacts so at least they got something out of it!), drinking wine and chatting with the boys from my band. At the end of the day the breaking off went flawlessly and a group of around 10 people declared they'd like to become active in working groups, so I was quite content. The domains of the working groups were created in the workshop that Lynn gave after the presentation of the catalogue, which seemed successful and fun for the participants. Michiel collected the contact details of the people who indicated they'd like to become active, and I noted them down for the volunteers and other co-creators.



As can be derived from my account, the organization of the event was for me personally mostly a frustrating experience. My reason to include such an elaborate account in this paper is that it provides a rich description of the context in which the collaboration and learning process took place. The organization of events has been - and will continue to be - an important part of the neighborhood collaboration, and this experience has provided many lessons that can be valuable not only for the ongoing collaboration process in this neighborhood, but also at broader scales. For me the main lessons are:

- Two months was not enough time for developing the idea and organizing the event;
- It is not convenient to organize a Dutch neighborhood event with mainly non-Dutch speaking people;
- Unless unlimited funds are available, it is necessary to mobilize enough volunteers for the practical work;
- Every agreement needs to be formalized in writing;
- Geographical proximity is essential for more than one of the main organizers;
- All of the enabling parties (like the municipality) must be kept updated and involved throughout the whole process;
- Commitment from every stakeholder must be secured in advance.

Of my interviewees mostly Lars, Michiel and Frits were actively involved in the organization of the Inspiratiedag. Richard and Liza mainly helped with the promotion, and on the day itself Richard pitched Pad2Wijken and Liza paid a short visit as she had another engagement.

When I asked them in the interviews, they were all positive about the implementation of the activities and the parties involved on the day itself. For Michiel, Frits and Lars their main comments concerned the problems with the permit. To Lars the organization seemed rather messy; he found he was involved too late and furthermore in his opinion the event should have been at the other square in De Wijert, where the shops are. Trivializing the messiness, he did acknowledge that we had little time to organize the whole thing. Frits also thought that the activities and the parties invited were very good, but in his view the promotion before and during the event left a lot to be desired. He does think however that the event has contributed to creating trust between the different parties, in particular because of the problem with the permit as this enabled Terra to put in the necessary effort to make it happen anyway. Through the interviews I actually heard for the first time that the borough coordinator fixed the problem afterwards by calling with the boss of the two city patrol officers. Furthermore, the trust that was present between a number of people within the municipality and Terra helped to get this through. Frits saw this as creating a chain in which people realized that Terra is a useful partner because they proved their worth by helping them. Both Frits and Lars saw this as an advantage of the problem that arose. Lars pointed out that he has a clear example now to illustrate what needs to be changed within the municipal organization. Frits told me he would have been willing to accrete a lawsuit, in order to be able to show the next day that something went horribly wrong. But even though this was not necessary, the incident has contributed to the realization within the municipality that the way city patrol is instructed must change. Furthermore, Frits actually sees the incident as a crossover point that has contributed to a transition in the city. It made a number of issues so manifest that Terra, Lex from the municipality and his colleagues as well as opponents have united in taking a stand. This gave Lex more fuel to bring the changes he was implementing in the municipality to the next level. Not coincidentally, Lex is the representative of the municipality in the neighborhood collaboration project group, as well as the one responsible for the policy note that gave Terra the management of the square where we

held the Inspiratiedag. Next to the permit issue there was also a money issue, because Lars had money available and promised for the Inspiratiedag- deserved, according to Frits, because there were 'nice interesting appealing activities on the square'- but Terra did not make use of it. Frits was the one who submitted the declaration at Terra in order to get it ready for the municipality, and he declared that it would have been perfectly possible to get it through, but that it just did not fit in the procedures at the time due to a sloppiness of Terra in the past.

Michiel thought the Inspiratiedag was a lot of fun, and also well organized. His concern was mainly how hard it was to get people to the square, and in his view this had to do with the limited awareness of the existence of the path:

Pad2Wijken in itself is not really something yet. You are something when you work with more parties towards a greater goal, and know how to reach many people.

Like Frits, Michiel acknowledged that the borough coordinator really saved the day. He thinks that now, 3 or 4 months later, the problem would not have occurred, because the partnership with the municipality is much firmer. At the time of the Inspiratiedag there was an agreement with the municipality, but this turned out not to be enough as also trust, familiarity, and a history of positive collaboration are necessary, and this was not yet developed then.

Richard was not involved in the troubles with the permit, but he attended the Inspiratiedag and was very enthusiastic about it. He recognized the same issue that he had encountered himself with Pad2Wijken:

It is very hard to activate people, but the design and the idea are very good. I think when you organize this a few times, make it continual and do it at different places along the path, it will become more familiar and you can set a trend. You have picked the hardest part, De Wijert North, where it is always hard to activate people. So when you take this into account still a lot of people showed up- but it has to be followed up.

4.6 Neighborhood cooperative

The idea for the cooperative originated at the intermediate vocational school Terra through the joined efforts of lector regional transition Wim and teacher Michiel. It was formalized when a connection was made with Lex, who was enabled to represent the municipality after the covenant was sealed with a unanimous consent of the executive board in December.

During the period of the second ACT project I was present at a few meetings about the startup of the neighborhood cooperative, which were facilitated by Michiel. The meeting in which he agreed to be our commissioner took place a few days before the start of ACT, and my supervisor dr. Ina Horlings and Pad2Wijken volunteer Liza were also present. Michiel explained there that the cooperative would be based in a shop-premises in De Wijert. The plan was to connect education with activities in the neighborhood, and for Michiel it would be useful for our ACT group to focus on how to give the movement a push and get people active. The cooperative originated from the education collaboration fund KIGO, and according to Michiel the main goal would be to get people out of a situation of unemployment. Before and during this period Michiel had a lot of meetings with representatives from the municipality and other actors interested to get involved, but at most of them I was not present. The next meetings that he invited me to took place on September 18th 2014. As they are exemplary for the way Michiel was building the cooperative, I will now share my account of the day from my research journal. With this account I aim to give the reader a flavor of the context and conditions in which the meetings took place.

The first one was right across the street from my house, at the residential care facility Coendershof that is currently being renovated. I did not understand that the meeting would take place in a construction shed, and while Michiel tried to guide me by phone the receptionist at the main entrance wrathfully cried out to me that 'you lot don't have any manners!'. I hadn't even seen her sitting in a small room besides the big empty hall, and this was obviously bothering her... Eventually I spotted Michiel waving at me from the entrance of the shed, and after climbing the wobbly stairs he introduced me to our discussion partner: the head of construction, who then showed us the plans for the new Alzheimer Garden, using extensive maps with drawings and models. We talked about ways in which the design of the garden could contribute best to the wellbeing of the residents. One conclusion was that - as access is not restricted to Alzheimer patients - it should have a different name so other residents and visitors won't feel excluded. Another idea from Michiel was that the child care across the garden presents opportunities for interaction between the children and the elderly people.

Michiel explained the purpose of the neighborhood cooperative, and what it can mean for the residents of Coendershof. He mentioned that out of the 20.000 citizens of Helpman-De Wijert 2200 are unemployed, and that one of the purposes of the cooperative will be to provide these people with possibilities to do volunteer work in their neighborhood. The head of construction agreed that Coendershof is very suitable to facilitate this as they always need volunteers. Michiel stated that some of the partners of the cooperative are Terra, Radar, Menzis and Martini Hospital, but it was not clear to me if the latter partnerships are yet formalized. There is also a chance that De Friesland care insurer will get involved by investing in prevention, but Michiel thinks this will be tricky because prevention is so hard to measure. He thinks that it can be done however, applying the method of first measuring people's health, then applying the intervention and then measuring their health again after six months. Here an intervention could be for instance senior gymnastics.

Michiel explained that the plans for the cooperative are based on the pillars wellbeing, changing behavior and health. This seemed not very complete to me as he had always particularly stressed that the goal was to create a 'sustainable green living environment'. The head of construction continued by telling us the plans for the renovation of Coendershof, including an air bridge that connects it to the retirement home Groenesteinflat, so the two facilities can collaborate and the residents of the Groenesteinflat can come to the new restaurant that is being built in Coendershof with place for 300 people. I could imagine that many volunteers will be needed to guide (old and/or disabled) people around in such a large space.

The second meeting of today was at Terra with a landscape architect. The school is just 5 minutes cycling from my house and, as Frits once noted, I'm starting to feel quite at home there. I usually pour myself a coffee in the teacher's room and wait there for Michiel or Frits. This time Michiel came to get me and showed me to one of the smaller meeting rooms. We started with some introductory chatter with the landscape architect, and he told us that he started a working group for redeveloping the estate Coendersborg. Officially this estate is not in Helpman but it is on the border, and when it is improved the restaurant will open more often and the park will be nice for walking and include a soccer field. The owners will also participate and support the plans. The working group now consists of 5 or 6 people that the architect recruited through an appeal in neighborhood periodical 'De Helperbel'. Apparently he is also involved in the developments around the old sugar factory terrain, of which part has been allocated to Terra for agriculture and livestock farming with a usage contract for 20 years, besides the old director's residence that is turned into a homeless shelter for young people. They got pretty carried away in their conversation and continued discussing local politics, as the city council of Groningen recently turned from social-democratic (main party PvdA) to liberal (main party D66), leading to a change of policy that stimulates more participatory citizen initiatives. The main pillars of the new policy are sustainability, mobility, energy, greening, and health, and both Michiel and the architect want to tap into that with their projects in order to get support from the municipality. I was not part of their enthusiastic conversation and at some point the architect seemed

to notice this and started asking me questions about my thesis. I told him about ACT and Pad2Wijken which he found very interesting, but Michiel interrupted me because it was time to end the meeting. He escorted us to the exit and told me to go home for lunch and then meet him again at Terra to go to the next meeting.

When I got back Michiel introduced me to an intern that he invited to join the next meeting, which took place at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences. I had never been inside the Hanze building and was surprised to enter into a huge hall filled with people making a lot of noise. Michiel laughed that it was not usually like this, as there was some sort of award ceremony going on. The receptionist directed us to wait upstairs at the Institute of Healthcare and Wellbeing, which turned out to be completely empty and looked like an office building. We sat down in the waiting room and after some time the head of the department Applied Psychology (and group leader of the institute) came in and took us to a meeting room. He sat down at the head of the table, introduced himself and stated that he would facilitate the meeting. He took us through the agenda setting and we continued with an introduction round. Present were one student Applied Psychology, two students Nursing with their teacher and the Director Care and Wellbeing of residential care facility Zonnehuis Olderloug in Slochteren. It turned out students of Terra were constructing a 'generation garden' there and the Hanze students were planning to do an intervention study to assess the effects of the garden on the residents' health, including questions like: "do the residents really go outside?" The study will be part of the learning lab's project for vulnerable elderly people.

In the introduction round Michiel again told a lot about everything he is working on. He mentioned the National Green Day, amongst developments like the current number of a hundred city council members with green in their portfolio, as well as a combination of care and wellbeing. He also told that he is working with an environment psychologist at the department Applied Psychology.

The director from the residential care facility explained the plans for the generation garden that was named 'Joen Toen' (your garden in Groninger dialect). It is a collaboration project including a working group with neighbors, the village association, RegioLeren (regional learning program developed by Terra), and some primary schools that will organize activities for children. The purpose of the generation garden is to bring generations together through cross pollination (for instance involving elderly residents in a primary school biology class that is given in the garden). The focus is on exercise, doing something physical in the garden, social interaction, and education for children. Residents who want something in the garden also get space for this, and if possible their wishes will be realized. There has been an official opening before the summer holidays, but they are still working on how to design the space. The project is funded by the municipality, the province and European subsidies that were given because the project is innovative and connecting. The idea is to also transform the restaurant in the facility like the concept of 'Resto VanHarte', especially for the neighborhood. In 2011 five Terra students created the initial design, including a special pond with a kind of underground passageway with see-through walls. The surface of the garden is 1000 square meters and located within 5 meters from the building, and the dream is that it will be buzzing with all kinds of activities, stimulating both the residents of the facility and the neighborhood to go outside and become active.

The rest of the meeting was mostly about the research that the three students will conduct together. Questions were which design keys to use for changing which kind of behavior, and the effect of a change of environment on elderly people. The students will do a baseline measurement and design a framework for supplementary studies. They will map the current situation of six sub-projects, design a measuring instrument and test it in the zero phase. This should not be directed top-down but made attractive so that people will be stimulated to act or cooperate on their own, without being pushed. The director advised to focus on what people find interesting to do in a 'moving garden'.

Michiel spoke some more about the need to go with the flow but also to monitor, audit and check. He explained the four domains for which care- and living plans need to be drafted, illustrated by the example of drawing volunteers for the neighborhood cooperative from the bureau for work reintegration. Apparently now a smaller group has an increased demand for care when it comes to

prevention. He also told about another innovative local project: a care farm along the lake 'Schildmeer' for young people with dementia.

Before the meeting Michiel had asked me not to mention the neighborhood cooperative, but when people asked me questions about my research he changed his mind and told them about it. This got us talking about similarities between the projects. It was clarified that Joen Toen is a participatory project which is really about making a neighborhood center of the care facility, and we concluded that we should visit the facility with the ACT group and interview the director.

In my account the spaces in which the meetings took place, as well as some other seemingly insignificant occurrences, are described in detail because the paper at hand presents a reflexive study for which it is important to make my own experiences as a researcher explicit and to understand the social environment of the participants. In regard to my research question a valuable observation from this account is that the meetings had an emergent character in the sense that they were exploratory and most participants had an open outlook and were curious to find out what value they could have for one another. This is in line with literature on the workings of social capital, including the sort of chemistry that it can generate, which is necessary for finding new and innovative solutions. The way that Michiel organizes all of his meetings is to invite anyone who is interested, even very last-minute, and just let it play out. When I asked him before this day what my role would be, he told me that he never defines roles beforehand, and that it would become clear during the meetings. In my experience this did not happen as naturally as he had predicted, which made me a bit insecure. This might indicate that the success of such an approach partly depends on the characters of the people involved. Another condition that I found to be important for the way social capital could be built and utilized was the environment. For instance the construction shed somehow made me feel very comfortable and uninhibited so I could freely discuss and explore possibilities with my discussion partners, while the overwhelming entrance at the Hanze vocational university and the subsequent formal office space did the opposite and made me feel small and overly self-conscious.

Besides these workings of social capital, in the content of the meetings I encountered many incentives towards social learning. All three meetings were about creating something new in a multi-stakeholder setting, involving residents, professionals, local government and/or knowledge institutions. However, it has become clear in the literature section of this paper that whether social learning will occur or not depends on many factors and is not an easy thing that can be arranged overnight.

After this day I arranged for our ACT team to visit the garden in Slochteren and conduct the interview. Eventually two of my teammates joined this excursion on October 1st and this would be the last time that students from my team came to Groningen until the Inspiratiedag event that we organized in the neighborhood on October 18th.

After the ACT period I was not involved in the development of the neighborhood cooperative until January. During this period the representatives of Terra were focused on the greening of a few educational programs that were in line with challenges that the municipality formulated, including the health and wellbeing of people in the neighborhood, sustainability, self-sufficiency, solitary elderly people, and creating opportunities for initiatives. This has, amongst other things that I shortly described in the introduction of this paper, to do with the switch of the municipality of Groningen from social-democratic to liberal. Terra subsequently made a definition of the 'sustainable green living environment', as a sort of umbrella term for capturing all of these goals, to win the municipality over and get the agreement for a partnership. When the covenant was approved in December, the office of Radar was appointed as the headquarters of the project team.

They had their first meeting there on December 1st, followed by meetings on December 18th and January 4th. Two days after this last meeting Michiel invited me to join the project team and from then on I have been present at the weekly or fortnightly meetings. As the basis for my work with the neighborhood cooperative pilot I use the results of student research reports that I have gathered from vocational university Van Hall Larenstein in Leeuwarden and Wageningen University.

Currently, it is not clear yet what the role of Pad2Wijken will be in the neighborhood collaboration, apart from the path being one of the initiatives that will be somehow incorporated within the cooperative. The goal of the cooperative is in line with the description of Medema et al. (2014):

Vertical and horizontal integration of ideas, knowledge, experiences and practices (linking personal and local behaviors to outcomes at a broader scale) may be achieved through [...] learning platforms that include a strong commitment to ongoing multi-loop social learning. These learning partnerships have also been referred to as 'bridging organizations' that provide a 'polycentricity' of diverse, redundant organizations, coalitions, and networks that facilitate sustainable governance. Multi-level systems, cross-scale interactions and informal networks connecting actors and stakeholders at multiple levels are crucial for multi-loop social learning.

(Medema et al. 2014: 7)

Social learning is to initiator Wim (until now) the best model that he has encountered for the neighborhood collaboration, so it is likely that the concept will be studied and applied in the further process of establishing the cooperative.

5. Data analysis

Based on extensive participatory observation described in my 45-page research journal and interviews with five key actors in the process, this section will attempt to answer my research question "What is the role of social capital and social learning in the context of a neighborhood initiative in Groningen?". In order to assess the role of social capital I have explored the nature of the relationships between the different actors in the Pad2Wijken working group and the neighborhood collaboration, focusing mainly on the presence or lack of trust and reciprocity they experience. In the literature section of this paper I have elaborated on neighborhood social capital and the application of social capital and social learning for sustainability purposes, as this is the aim of the collaboration initiative. Through my data analysis however, I have studied this form of social capital in the smaller setting of establishing the initiative, for results of the collaboration in the neighborhood are not present yet in this stage. As for now, it can be said that the working group is rather isolated from the neighborhood and broader neighborhood participation has not yet occurred. For this reason, the formation of social capital and occurrence of social learning are explained in this chapter within the context of the Pad2Wijken working group, rather than the entire neighborhood.

The role of social learning was more natural to study in this small setting, as social learning usually occurs in small groups. As Pad2Wijken is a participatory bottom-up project aimed at greening the neighborhood as well as improving social cohesion, it is a perfect case to study if and how social learning occurs when it is not the explicit goal of the project (as it almost never is). As the collaboration developed further the importance of different aspects of social learning was increasingly acknowledged by the participants.

5.1 Context factors

5.1.1 Continuity

The first main factor that every respondent mentioned about the project was a lack of continuity in the Pad2Wijken working group. This is an important factor, since social capital cannot be built without a solid and reliable base of stakeholders and organizers. As statements from different stakeholders illustrate, this was not the case in the working group. From the perspective of Terra Michiel indicated that they already used to search for projects to connect students to the 'authentic professional situation', but that what he now hopes to find with Pad2Wijken and the neighborhood cooperative is more continuity. Frits observed that the Pad2Wijken group was 'not very stable'. Also he found that the group was 'fairly isolated from the rest of the neighborhood'. He can now see that the contribution of the activities by the Van Hall Larenstein students was also limited in the respect of anchoring the group and the idea more in the neighborhood. This was due to initial members of the working group becoming sick, too busy, and two of them even died. Michiel recognized that:

The initiators of Pad2Wijken had fantastic ideas, but some puzzle pieces were missing, for instance in the organization- the continuity therein, and then I reckoned; well, we could play a role there. We want this very much, and we also want to collaborate with the university, so then you just try to find each other. Yes, positive intentions, I think that is a very good basis.

Liza also pointed out that there was a lot of fluctuation in the Pad2Wijken process. She joined the process together with someone else, who quit after a few times because she found it too much talking. Someone else got sick and for a while there was a treasurer who also quit:

It was a constant coming and going of people and sometimes I didn't understand where they came from, but Richard was really the core. He was so captured by the idea so with him I had- like he's a very strong motor.

Richard acknowledged that his goals for Pad2Wijken are far from coming true, and since he has recently moved to Haren, which is another municipality, he is afraid they never will. Since he is not pulling the project anymore, he had hoped that the neighborhood cooperative would take it up. Even though he still believes it will at some point, he reckons that it will take some time before the cooperative is ready to take Pad2Wijken further and he is afraid that during this time the path will relapse, which would be a shame because a lot of people have invested time in it:

It is not even so interesting to me in which form, as long as the path remains there in itself, as long as the bonding subsists. I have set the foundation, and if people will reshape it because it could be better or different... Well people change and such a path has to change with them, not rigidly hold on to what I have in mind. No, the people have to make it, not me.

The reason Richard thinks that the cooperative will not take up the path soon is that the organization is not fully operational yet. The cooperative is still being set up and more people have to get involved and find their way. In contrast, he stated, the organization of the path was already there, and according to him much further developed than the cooperative. As Terra was very enthusiastic about the path and Richard happily relinquished the control when he had other things on his mind, he is now disappointed that it is going so slowly.

5.1.2 Diversity

As explained in the literature review in the second chapter of the paper at hand, most theorists agree that diversity can greatly benefit both social learning and social capital. In order to create new knowledge it is often assumed that a group of stakeholders should at least be heterogeneous in terms of backgrounds, values, interests and perspectives (Brouwer et al. 2010: 20). Unfortunately, this is also a factor where the working group falls short. Purely looking at demographics, the people involved with Pad2Wijken and the wider neighborhood collaboration are fairly uniform. My interviewees are all aged between 50 and 62, and though I have not asked them, the other members of the cooperative pilot seem within the same age group, with one or two exceptions who are still in their 40s. They are all white natives from Groningen and active within the field of sustainable community development.

Most respondents have little to say about this issue. Richard does see diversity in the group, mostly regarding age and socio-economic status. Education level, occupation and place of residence of the members have always varied according to him, though most of the people involved were higher educated. The only thing he missed regarding diversity was that everyone was native from Groningen. Apparently there are some clashes between my observations and those of Richard. I believe that this may be due to bias on his regard, since he is very involved in the group and focuses more on small differences, whereas I have found these differences to be rather insignificant from a broader perspective.

5.2 Process factors

5.2.1 Collaboration

Social learning can only be achieved through collaboration, which in its turn requires several important conditions. In this section, it is shown how different respondents highlight different conditions, which together can be seen as contributing to the collaborative potential of the working

group. All respondents agreed that collaboration in the neighborhood is more important than the physical path, but that the path can have a role in realizing this collaboration. As Frits argued:

It goes two ways: if the collaboration is better the path will receive more attention and develop further, and the other way around; by using the path well the collaboration can be improved. The ACT groups gave a good impulse to this; by linking the local coordinators constantly to the people in the neighborhood, increasingly cores of people that are more active can emanate, using the path to achieve more collaboration.

Firstly, one condition for successful collaboration is the enthusiasm of the individual members, which strongly varies in this group. Richard noted that the people who are actively engaged are the ones that already did volunteer work before in the neighborhood. They are for instance the members of the neighborhood committee, and also schools are enthusiastic. He sees a clear dichotomy here: the small group of people that was already active take it up and the others do nothing:

It seems like there is no midway solution; people are enthusiastic and active or they are not involved at all. There is no one doing a little bit.

Another condition mentioned by my respondents is coordination, including a reflexive component. According to Liza this has been rather lacking, especially in the beginning. She could not find out what the intention behind the project was and recently discovered that the initiators just wanted to lay down a route and then 'let it happen'. Liza had expected that it would be more hands-on, adopting and developing a plot along the path with the working group as well. It has not been an easy process for her to discover this, and in retrospect she thinks she should have been more firm because now she has been searching for a long time as she was trying not to be too forceful:

Sometimes I thought; should I say now that I don't like this one bit? But then I thought; well, it is not so important. I have been struggling a lot with what is really important to me and what isn't, when do I respond and when not, so it was searching, walking on eggshells and this was also why I sometimes dropped out and didn't come for a while, because I didn't have this feeling like YES, we're going for it, it is becoming concrete and tangible and we get down to work. I have missed that, but it is also my own role.

She recognizes that working together is always difficult, especially when you are with very different types of people. She also saw this in the first ACT group of which she was the commissioner, but she did enjoy that experience because of the new, fresh energy that she always finds very valuable about working with students. She does wonder however if there is really a desire to work together in the working group; she did not experience it as a collaboration process:

We do not reflect on how we work or look at what goes well and what doesn't. We sit together and an agenda is made. [...] Sometimes you did something and then it turned out that someone else had suddenly done that already.

As for the neighborhood cooperative, she still does not have a clear image of what it encompasses, but she sees possibilities for the cooperative to mobilize people who can help with projects along the path.

Within this aspect of coordination, Michiel highlights the importance of a distribution of tasks based on all members' strengths and weaknesses. It is of vital importance for everyone to be honest and vulnerable in this initial stage of the collaborative process. He explained that what's special about these kinds of initiatives is that there are no job vacancies:

You just sit together with a group of people, you explore who has which skills and competences and what the stakes are, and then it actually has to crystallize out what you are going to do. In my case, I

find that I am better at networking and connecting different parties than some of the others, so yeah, then that becomes your task.

For him, these processes always take too long, as everyone has to change. To find synchronicity herein is tricky, but he reckons it will be achieved because different people with different qualities are united through the same goal. As he sees it as an organic whole where the members identify each other's role, he deems it necessary:

To be vulnerable and to be clear about what is holding you back, what you cannot do and what you have doubts about. It just forces you to be vulnerable and then you notice that the other opens up as well, and if you can find each other herein this generates a kind of flow.

Altogether, there appear to be different views amongst the participants on whether collaboration is actually achieved. The main conditions identified are enthusiasm and coordination. Enthusiasm appears to vary between members. Coordination seems to have been the largest continuing problem in this group. This has limited the potential for true collaboration in this project.

5.2.2 Trust

Regarding the theme of trust, which has been identified as an important aspect of social capital and a condition for social learning, respondents had radically diverging experiences. This is partly due to their different viewpoints in the sense of representing different stakeholders in the process and thus being part of different groups that did not go through the whole process together. Liza and Richard, as members of the Pad2Wijken working group, were my only interviewees who attended the working group meetings. Frits and Michiel were involved in the process representing Terra, and Lars is my only interviewee representing the municipality. In regard to (multi-loop) social learning, Medema et al. note that:

Multi-loop social learning generally involves complex multi-actor and stakeholder networks that are characterized by multiple differences in goals and interests playing out at different levels and scales. It is therefore important to recognize that such multi-loop social learning processes are embedded in a web of power and trust dynamics.

(Medema et al. 2014: 5)

Although it cannot be said that my interviewees went through a social learning process together, differences in goals and interests were still played out at multiple levels including complex power and trust dynamics. For instance, Frits noticed that the Pad2Wijken working group had difficulties finding its role within the broader collaboration that originated at Terra. He observed that the members of the working group became insecure when the discussion was not about the path, and he thinks this is because they are mainly focused on how to get residents involved with Pad2Wijken. In his view they are scared that when this happens via a detour by including other activities (like redesigning a square), their intentions will be snowed under. He reckons however that their fear is unfounded because the course that has been set with establishing the neighborhood collaboration for the past half year, using Pad2Wijken as one of the means to accomplish this, will do them more good than harm. At least, he argues, the neighborhood is step by step mobilized a bit more, which could not be done by just talking about Pad2Wijken. Furthermore, he experienced no distrust between the different actors in the neighborhood collaboration but not really a sense of trust either. The reason is according to him that from different sides there has been a lot of talking but it still has to be proved that the actors really want to get to work in the neighborhood.

Michiel on the other hand firmly stated that trust was present between the people involved in the process. He also recognized something formal, which he thinks is necessary because there is money involved, but he has still sensed trust and sees this as an important condition, next to formal

agreements that people can call each other on. Within the Pad2Wijken working group he sees another kind of trust than he was used to, as some of the members are occasionally absent which makes it necessary to be able to trust that they are there for one another. In the school context that he is used to it is not common to work together in this way, but he finds it very interesting and comparable to how he personally deals with business relationships.

Richard also stated that trust is present between the actors, but Liza is not sure about it:

I think trust is a big word. I mean, I think you should always begin with trust and I did trust that everyone could contribute something but it was not clear for me what we were heading for. [...] I can imagine that a group with real trust in everyone's capacities, and in the fact that people really want to achieve something together- because I think this is what it's also about- yes then I think you can move mountains. So I do see it is an important factor, but I don't feel like I have reached that level yet.

It has become clear to me that without the presence of trust people will not feel safe enough to make misunderstandings explicit, which dooms a social learning process from the beginning as it will not be possible to go beyond superficialities when people are busy covering up that there is no common ground. In my view, these are factors that led to a situation in which the Pad2Wijken working group got stuck and did not develop further, with its members now seeing a partnership with the emergent neighborhood cooperative as the only possible way to move forward.

5.3 Individual attributes

5.3.1 Capacity building

When capacity building is defined as the process in which interactions at an individual level lead to benefits enabling collective action (Hornings 2014), it can be argued that conditions for the desired collective action should first be agreed on. As we are talking about the role of social capital and social learning in a specific neighborhood initiative, the interactions that are relevant in this context would be mostly between members of the Pad2Wijken and neighborhood cooperative working groups. In this respect, Frits identified the capacity to network as very important for the kind of collaboration that is desired here, as people that operate in one or more community networks can achieve more than when they only have very weak ties in the neighborhood. In line with the theory on social capital for sustainable development, he distinguishes here between being member of for instance a billiard club and a network that concerns itself with green in the neighborhood. Furthermore, he thinks that being able to connect people to things that are happening in their neighborhood - in so far that they become active themselves - is the most important capacity that is needed to reach the goals of the collaboration. From experience he knows however how hard this is, and that often the main reason that a neighborhood project fails turns out to be that the right chord to activate people has not been struck. This suggests that the responsibility is with the organizers to keep searching for the right chord to stimulate people to become active.

The very beginning of the process towards setting up Pad2Wijken was more than 10 years ago, when the Helpman neighborhood committee established the ecological historical walking path, which was the brainchild of Richard. Since then the aim had always been to extend this initial greenway, which happened in 2010 when Richard, in his own words, 'threw the idea [for Pad2Wijken] into the neighborhood committee and created the support base'. After that the neighborhood De Wijert was involved in the plan 'after the green could not go further' and Richard contacted his acquaintances at the municipality and got them to 'row in the same direction'. He also involved the schools Terra, Van Hall Larenstein, the universities of Groningen and Wageningen, and the primary schools in the neighborhood. Furthermore, Richard stated in the interview that he was the locomotive in the process, and that next to involving other groups he also monitored the

progress. The reason he could do this was that he had been doing volunteer work for a long time and therefore knew a lot of people. As he had intimate experience with the formal lines, he did not have to work his way through the municipal structure, which, he said, 'would make you so frustrated that you would fold up quickly'. However, as he had already done small projects and joined citizen initiatives in the neighborhood, people were familiar with him and knew what to expect from working with him. Therefore, from what I have heard and experienced, it seems like the establishment of Pad2Wijken was enabled mainly by the individual networking efforts and pre-existing ties of initiator Richard, and not by capacities generated through social interaction between members of the working group. Richard himself thinks however that the necessary knowledge and capacities were present in several stages in the form of capable group members, but that because of the high turnover they could not be applied to take the project further:

When people work their way in and it starts taking off and then they drop out again... Yes then you can have a lot of knowledge and possibilities and capacities but you don't achieve any progress.

For Liza, the most important capacity that is needed for Pad2Wijken is the ability to enthuse people. As for the rest, she thinks that everyone, 'from their best abilities will do what they can, with their own ideas, being who they are, and you just have to deal with that'.

In the process of setting up the neighborhood cooperative Michiel thinks that the necessary capacities are present, but that in a later stage more forms of knowledge and experience will be necessary. To achieve the vision of the neighborhood cooperative pilot, Frits argues that:

A coordinated approach is necessary to personally activate people, step by step taking people on welfare out of their homes so they can realize that they have possibilities, that this leads to appreciation and getting contacts that could even result in a job. But it will take big forces to organize these little furnaces and get them moving. As long as it's small it has little allurements so it first has to get bigger and then it can start. But nobody knows when the critical mass is reached, nor really how to get there. I expect that a lot can be achieved but not within half a year or so; it can be a matter of several years but then a lot can be accomplished.

The capacities that are necessary to accomplish the goals and activate people are according to Frits present through the collaboration between Terra and Radar and the facilitation of the city.

In my experience, capacities were not built together mainly because there was not enough continuity in the working group. However, as has also been identified by my interviewees, I think that also strong ties and anchorage of the project in the neighborhood are conditions to develop and utilize the necessary capacities. As for the establishment of Pad2Wijken mainly by one individual, I did get the impression that this was partly due to a tendency of Richard to stay in control. Therefore, it may have been possible to create more shared ownership and anchorage of the project in the neighborhood if people were given the opportunity.

5.3.2 Learning

In the interviews the distinction between individual learning and social learning became very clear. Everyone agrees that all individuals involved have learned a great deal in the process, but nobody thinks that they have really learned from each other. In my own experience as participant in the Pad2Wijken process I did not encounter learning beyond an instrumental level either, so I can safely say that most of the learning that occurred was single-loop. Learning is therefore in this chapter designated as an individual attribute. As Medema et al. (2014) note, 'individuals and their attributes and characteristics form the basis through which change processes are manifested' (p. 9). It is thus not necessarily a bad thing if multi-loop social learning did not occur yet in the process, as long as participants are aware of the possibility to enter a next phase. Whether the process needs this is

however dependent on the type of goal that is pursued, as well as other conditions that are elaborated in the second chapter of the paper at hand.

One of the main lessons learned that everyone agreed about is how slow these processes are. As Frits put it:

I think that everyone has learned a lot from the process, and starts to notice what is necessary to accomplish such a development and how to do this, because at some point you know what must happen but you have to get it through. And yes, that this happens with very small steps is also one of the lessons. If you have high ambitions and want to get things done quickly you will have made a fool's bargain because these processes go little step by little step, the snowball only gets thicker very slowly and a lot of energy must be put in. So you also have to find buddies with a wide interest and much persistence because when people want to move quickly on a small terrain they will see too little of this small terrain or action program or whatever, and want to get results much faster than is realistic.

Richard thinks that it has been a learning process for most people involved, mainly because it is a large project. He agrees that an important lesson is how long it takes to set it up, and that progress comes very slowly. Some people who got involved tried to up the tempo, but Richard found it does not work like that. Liza also stated that she learned a lot in the process, but she does not know if people have learned from each other as they never talked about this.

As for social learning, Frits does see that it is important but he thinks it has not been utilized enough. He sees that in the process it has mostly been tried to avoid conflicts, with the result that the necessary edge has been missing. Also Richard stated that there has been a tendency to avoid conflicts in the process. He thinks this has to do with the Dutch mentality of being very wary of conflict. Michiel confirmed that conflict would be desirable in the collaboration project group. He does utilize it increasingly with his own colleagues and finds that it works quite well:

Also because you have to move away from structures and think more in roles and processes, and I find it interesting to take people out of their structure, out of their comfort zone, and take them along in certain processes. Sometimes it is necessary to organize a conflict, provoke people. I have to say I do enjoy this, but it has not occurred yet with the partners in the neighborhood. Maybe it's not necessary but maybe it will happen when we aim ever higher. For me it is sometimes also a kind of insecurity; that I am holding back more than when I have a clear role like professional coach or project office... yes then I am much more purposeful.

Richard thinks that the main reason that people did not learn from each other in the process is a lack of flexibility, meaning that people have their own ideas on how to fix things and they will hold on to them:

I think that 99 % of the people are conservative. Change is always difficult; people do want to change something but not in their own environment because that's familiar and they don't want to be taken out of their comfort zone.

Michiel does see social learning as a goal of the neighborhood collaboration:

Yes I find it very exciting. When we have a physical place, projects are implemented and residents get involved- as commissioner, instructor, coffee maker- then you get a blending of different roles and I think this will involve talking to people about what they're good at, what they want to contribute, what they want for themselves and what they can help others with. I have to say I find it quite thrilling and I can't wait to start.

For now, he thinks social learning is not a clear goal yet in the project group because it is very purposeful in setting up the organization and focused on making speed. He thinks the members are

unconsciously already learning from each other but that this will come forward more when the process finds itself in calmer waters.

Regarding the ways in which I learned myself during the process was in the context of meetings mostly incremental by connecting tatters of information that I overheard on different occasions as people were evaluating experiences or making plans. From the beginning I found a kind of balance during meetings between making notes of my observations and participating in an active way by making suggestions and giving updates about, for instance, progress made by the ACT students that were working for Pad2Wijken in Wageningen.

In some way the aspect of feedback loops - or evaluation after every phase - did happen in the Pad2Wijken working group as meetings were planned especially for this purpose after both events that were organized during my involvement. The experiences that were shared in these meetings were not recorded in any way however, nor processed or translated in the moment as lessons learned.

The distinction between different kinds of factors can shed more light on the question if social learning has taken place in the process or not. Medema et al. (2014) clarify the conditions for different types of learning:

One could state that for double-loop learning to take place, changes must occur mostly related to the way that a change/learning process is organized (process factors) as well as who are involved in this process (individual attributes). While triple-loop learning naturally follows double-loop learning, it would require the same changes as double-loop learning, and in addition, it would also require changes to take place within the internal and external context.

(Medema et al. 2014: 5)

This description makes it clear that the Pad2Wijken process did not exceed single-loop learning, as underlying beliefs and assumptions were not examined or challenged in the process.

6. Discussion

Having presented the findings of this research, it is also valuable to consider the theoretical contributions of this study as well as its limitations. The limitations of the research have been divided into two sections, namely the generalizability of the study and my own bias as a researcher.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

In describing the role of social capital and social learning in a neighborhood collaboration initiative, this research contributes to understanding the connections between these two fields of inquiry. Experiences of members of the Pad2Wijken working group support the premise of Medema et al. (2014) that 'there is a great risk in failed change attempts as these may result in a sharp loss of motivation, satisfaction and commitment of participants' (p. 3). Pad2Wijken is now in a phase where these sensations have the upper hand, and this has led to, for instance, a sharp reduction in the number of meetings that are planned.

The majority of the literature that is discussed in the second chapter of this paper is focused on positive exertions of social capital and social learning, and little has been written about how to recuperate when the process has gone downhill. In this case study one possible solution that has been found is to partner with another initiative or project in order to get physical and promotional support, as well as move the process forward by adding new energy, capacities and diversity. In the context of my research the alliance between Pad2Wijken and the neighborhood cooperative has not been implemented in a practical way yet, so it could not be tested if it indeed leads to the dynamics, energy, creativity and vibrancy that are so naturally linked to these processes in the type of literature that deploys them for sustainability purposes. As for the improvements to natural capital that are linked to investments in public social goods, a good example is the predecessor of Pad2Wijken; the Ecological Historical Walking Path, as this green zone is protected by the path's allocation plan. The exact reasons that Pad2Wijken did not get such an allocation plan are not clear, but the most obvious difference between the two projects is that the first path was established by the neighborhood committee. The formalized status of the committee might have been an advantage for negotiations with the municipality, which is in line with literature that emphasizes the importance of social capital on the bridging and vertical levels.

In my interviews it became apparent that the different stakeholders understand and see the value of social learning. They also had a good sense of the reasons why it did not occur in the process until now:

- Social learning was not facilitated as it was not a deliberate intention of the process;
- Participants learned a lot a lot from the process individually, but not from each other because the focus in meetings was mainly on arranging practical issues;
- A lack of continuity, time constraints and the voluntary nature of the work impeded informal social interaction to build trust;
- Actors in the process strove to avoid conflicts so diversity in the group was not utilized;
- People were not encouraged to move out of their comfort zone, nor were they willing to compromise or adjust their ideas so there was little flexibility in the process.

6.2 Generalizability

First of all, the length and scope of this research are very limited. Because it is a master's thesis, no time and resources were available for a longer and more in-depth research. Having interviewed only 5 participants and the whole research being conducted in one neighborhood, this naturally limits the

generalizability of the research. Furthermore, with all my interviewees being over 50 years old, the perspective of the younger generations is missing in this study.

The intention of this research is to contribute to the understanding of a social phenomenon in the whole of the Netherlands, and while some aspects of this research can certainly be generalized to other cities and neighborhoods in which collaboration projects are being set up, there are other aspects that cannot be generalized. For example, Helpman-De Wijert is a very interesting area from a policy point of view, and other neighborhoods might not receive the same amount of (financial) support. Furthermore, the policy direction as dictated by the national government is not implemented the same way in every city. It is the distinct focus of the municipality on improving the living environment in neighborhoods that has facilitated the cooperative pilot, and even though a project in Rotterdam is linked to the one here and trying to get the same pilot status, my research is the first on this particular construction; simply because it did not exist before.

The way some elements of social learning and social capital worked in the context of this research may come into play elsewhere and are therefore worth sharing with others outside of this particular research setting. Some findings that may transfer to other settings are:

- Continuity: this study suggests the necessity to form a solid and reliable core group with a (possibly formalized) commitment for at least a few years;
- Trust: it is advisable to invest in building trust so people dare to open up, be vulnerable and make mistakes, as this is the only way to really learn together;
- Capacities: if there is no stable core group to provide continuity it is hard to build capacities together. When there is strong anchorage of the project in the community this also provides opportunities to build and utilize capacities.

6.3 Researcher bias

Besides the limitations of the study itself, limitations can also be found in the researcher. Being a resident of the neighborhood has given me certain advantages in pursuing this research, but it has also at times proven to be a limitation because I had to switch between different modes and sometimes got involved with personal issues more than I should have as a researcher. At other times, I feel that the lack of clarity about my role impeded me in participating in the process in a conducive way. Some of my interview respondents gave me the feedback that I was not showing myself enough, which made me seem less capable than I really was in their view. I have indeed felt that I was in a way dissociated and thus not my natural self in meetings. In my research journal I described some of my feelings during a multi-stakeholder meeting at Terra:

At the agreed time only Michiel, me and Richard were present. When Liza, Lars and Lex from the municipality had also arrived we decided to start with the introduction round. Lars and Lex were cracking jokes a lot and the only thing they mentioned about the whole trouble with the permit for the Inspiratiedag was that the woman from the event office did her job well, and that it just hadn't been necessary to alert them and request a permit. As I was still feeling down I didn't respond. I was intimidated by their jovial behavior and feeling bad that I forgot to bring a notebook and pen. I considered to ask one of the others for a paper and pen but I felt too inhibited and anxious to do so. Halfway the introduction round E. from the learning lab arrived. I asked about Frits but nobody had heard from him. The other person from the municipality that was invited and agreed to come was H., but it turned out it was his last week in office and no replacement had been appointed yet so he decided not to attend the meeting. For most of the meeting I was kind of listening but mostly dissociated and overly self-conscious. It was nice that Michiel explained the neighborhood cooperative based on a colorful overview that he printed, so Richard and Liza also got a better understanding of it. It seemed to me like Lars and Lex were most of the time displaying macho

behavior, using this meeting for their own networking purposes until Lars had to leave early. Lex and E. also left and me, Michiel, Liza and Richard kept talking for a while about Pad2Wijken. I agreed to plan another meeting to discuss Pad2Wijken's membership of the neighborhood cooperative.

In my research journal I included accounts of some personal struggles in the fall of 2014, hence the note that I was 'still feeling down'. I do not think that I was behaving like an 'artificial other' in the meetings as a result of my conflicting roles (Wals 2015, personal comment), but that my reserve had more to do with my mental state at the time. I did however justify my distant disposition sometimes from my role as a researcher who was observing the process. As for the interviews, the openness of my participants suggests that I succeeded in my efforts to withhold judgment and to really listen and try to understand what the other was saying. As one-to-one conversations are my strong suit - contrary to group conversations which often make me nervous - I believe that bias as a result of my interview style was limited. It is however possible that I influenced my participants as researcher or because of my personality, causing them to tell me different things than they would tell someone else. Specifically I think that the different types of responses from my interviewees on the topic of learning could have to do with the way I explained social learning, as this occurred somewhat different in every interview depending on the person I was talking to, and sometimes other context factors such as my own mood or time pressure.

7. Conclusion

This research set out to assess the role of social capital and social learning in the context of a neighborhood collaboration project in Groningen. As was highlighted in the data analysis section, the main issues that arose within this collaboration had to do with factors of continuity, coordination, and conflict avoidance.

It is not possible to pin down the role of social capital and social learning in the collaboration very concretely, but it can be concluded that conditions for the occurrence of both concepts overlap, and these conditions have been recognized and acknowledged by the participants of the process. The main form of social capital that was deployed for the process was derived from the different networks of individual actors, as Pad2Wijken could not have been established without the contacts of initiator Richard - mostly within the municipality but also with different knowledge institutions including the primary schools in the neighborhood. The wider neighborhood collaboration also depends on the facilitation of the municipality for obtaining a pilot status that involves different actors having a formalized and paid role, and for eventually creating an official cooperative. This suggests that, even though "participation society" might be a disguise for policy goals of efficiency and cost reduction, the way it is translated by the municipality of Groningen does enable the development of citizen initiatives.

In line with the literature on social capital, trust was acknowledged by my interviewees as an important condition for success of the collaboration. However, it cannot be said that Pad2Wijken was established through a particularly successful collaboration process, and the path itself is not the success it aspires to be yet either, so it is hard to identify if this is due to a lack of social capital and social learning. One reason that social learning has not clearly occurred yet can be that important conditions have not been met because learning goals were not defined. Moreover, the results from the interviews suggest that a lack of continuity within the working group has impeded the anchorage of Pad2Wijken in the neighborhood. This lack of continuity is clearly linked to aspects of social capital and social learning that become apparent in a lack of synchronization between the members. Although discontinuities and bringing in other people is sometimes required to move the process forward, it is clear that the amount and pace of fluctuation in the Pad2Wijken working group has impeded a sense of stability that is also necessary to move forward.

Trust is also an important condition for social learning to occur, and its absence has led to conflict avoidance, while my interviewees did acknowledge the importance of conflict for getting results. Even though the project groups are not very diverse, this has not been recognized as an impeding factor because the diversity that is actually present has not been fully exploited yet. It should also be noted here that, as Van Assche et al. (2013) state, 'the multiplicity of co-evolving learning sites renders meaningless most attempts to reduce social learning to one parameter that can be measured, quantified, evaluated' (p. 234). Although the presence of trust and diversity have been identified as important conditions for social learning to occur, they are broad terms that can be understood in many different ways. Moreover, clear facilitation of the process did not occur and the capacities that have been identified as important in a social learning process - mostly for the role of facilitator - have not been recognized by me nor my interviewees in the process. Comparing the Pad2Wijken process to literature however, it can safely be concluded that multi-loop social learning did not occur in the context of this study. As the purpose of the neighborhood cooperative pilot includes changing external context factors, in order to be successful the collaboration should commit to going fundamentally deeper in the learning process, reframing underlying assumptions

and patterns and then going even further to create a real shift. Finally, even though social learning has not clearly occurred yet in the process, it has been recognized by myself and my interviewees as an important condition for taking the project further. Based on these findings, social capital and social learning can be considered useful concepts in the context of neighborhood collaboration projects, however, it is very hard to identify their role without intentionally operationalizing, applying and testing them.

Recommendations for further research

First of all, it would be valuable to do more research in other neighborhoods across cities in the Netherlands, in order to compare and provide a more complete picture of the workings of these kinds of processes. Further research could also include a larger diversity of participants, such as residents that are not active in the project being researched, and including more diversity of demographics, interests and occupations. An interesting experiment might be to test if cultural reasons for conflict avoidance could be broken through by purposely adding more diversity.

As for my choice to write a reflexive account, I agree with O'Reilly (2012) that 'reflexivity needs to be relocated within the context of other social science debates about the reflexive nature of social life' (p. 531). Furthermore, I hope that the value of acknowledging and utilizing one's subjective (academic, economic or personal) perspective will become more widely appreciated within academia.

It would also be very interesting to compare studies of deliberate social learning processes to the type of research that I have conducted, exploring the role of social learning in a process where it is not intentionally applied. It can then be tested if, as some literature suggests, when different people with different qualities are united through the same goal, dissonance can be deliberately applied for creating a dynamic energy, finding new innovative solutions and learning from and with each other. Another valuable addition to literature on participatory change processes would be a qualitative longitudinal study where the field site is revisited regularly over a period of a few years, monitoring important developments and phases (O'Reilly 2012).

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form²

Toestemmingsverklaringformulier (informed consent)

Scriptieonderzoek Buurtsamenwerking Helpman-De Wijert, Groningen

Verantwoordelijke onderzoeker: Iris Bekius

In te vullen door de deelnemer

Ik verklaar op een voor mij duidelijke wijze te zijn ingelicht over de aard, methode, doel en [indien aanwezig] de risico's en belasting van het onderzoek. Ik weet dat de gegevens en resultaten van het onderzoek alleen anoniem en vertrouwelijk aan derden bekend gemaakt zullen worden. Mijn vragen zijn naar tevredenheid beantwoord.

Ik stem geheel vrijwillig in met deelname aan dit onderzoek. Ik behoud me daarbij het recht voor om op elk moment zonder opgaaf van redenen mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek te beëindigen.

Naam deelnemer:

Datum: Handtekening deelnemer:

In te vullen door de uitvoerende onderzoeker

Ik heb een mondelinge en schriftelijke toelichting gegeven op het onderzoek. Ik zal resterende vragen over het onderzoek naar vermogen beantwoorden. De deelnemer zal van een eventuele voortijdige beëindiging van deelname aan dit onderzoek geen nadelige gevolgen ondervinden.

Naam onderzoeker:

Datum: Handtekening onderzoeker:

² <http://www.utwente.nl/bms/onderzoek/regeling-ethiek/bijbehorende-documenten/voorbeeld-informed-consent-formulier.pdf>

Appendix B: Interview Guide

1. Background

- Demographics: age, education, current workplace and function.
- How and when did you get involved with Pad2Wijken?
- How does Pad2Wijken relate to your professional career?
- How does Pad2Wijken relate to your personal values and ideals?

2. Process

- What is your role in the neighborhood collaboration?
- Which enabling and disabling factors have you encountered in the process?
- How do you evaluate the collaboration between the actors in the Pad2Wijken process?
 - Trust
 - Diversity
 - Learning
- Which capacities are present in the current network and do you think they are sufficient to reach the goals of the initiative? Which other skills and competencies should be developed or attracted in your opinion?
- What is your overall assessment of the organization of the Pad2Wijken Inspiratiedag by the ACT group from Wageningen University? What went really well and what did not go so well?