

Wageningen University - Department of Social Sciences

Strategic Communication Chair Group

Why good intentions are not enough

An interaction-based evaluation of a citizen initiative

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Summary

At first, the village development project (VDP) of Kapel-Avezaath, a village in the Dutch countryside, seemed a success given the high participation of inhabitants in surveys and meetings. However, when they proceeded to the implementation phase, the VDP was not well received and only few of the aspired working groups were formed. This *participation paradox* came as a surprise to the citizens initiative's organisers. To understand it I reconstructed the village development process and how it evolved over time on a local level. This understanding can help the facilitating organisation to improve their facilitation of future VDPs. The general research question is: How does the negotiation of actors, their roles and responsibilities within the wider institutional frames shape the VDP process over time? To research the VDP project a case study design is chosen as it allows for in-depth understanding of complex processes. Next to consulting written documents, in total 10 in-depth interviews were held with 11 participants ranging from working group members, village council and other involved actors. Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) guides the interpretation of the findings. EGT describes governance processes as evolutionary paths, the course of which evolves and is subject to, amongst others, actors and institutions. EGT gives room for constant change and acknowledges the interaction of all elements in the analysis and understanding of governance processes. We have seen how actors' expectations of their own and others' roles influence their expectations and perception of the process and its results. And how institutions as a source of disagreement and uncertainty were challenged but in the end sustained for offering a way out of the conflict. This institutional work draws attention to critiques on blueprint processes based on both theoretical reflections and practical experience and in respect of the participation paradox, the artificial separation of an "implementation" phase that characterises linear blueprints especially. Instead of finetuning the current process design, the advice given comprises practices that can help facilitate VDP processes that are build by and for each VDP project. Main advice entails expectation management, regular reflection moments, creating a safe space for respectfully expressing differences and with regard to community participation: the importance of early engagement combined with staying connected.

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Renkum, June 2020

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Introduction

Kapel-Avezaath is a small village in the Dutch province of Gelderland. It is home to approximately 825 people (CBS, 2017). Since 2007 a village council is active with the aim to increase the liveability of the village. Until now, several infrastructural projects, such as a public square with benches and a new pavement, have been realised in close collaboration with the municipality (Werkgroep Dorpsontwikkelingsplan, 2016). The council's latest project is of a more complex nature: a so-called village development plan (short VDP, Dutch: Dorpsontwikkelingsplan). Ideally, it includes a vision for the village for the next five to ten years and is rooted in the ideas and preferences of the inhabitants of the respective village or neighbourhood (DKK Gelderland 2017). For that reason a VDP helps to negotiate with the municipality for project funds, argues the DKK Gelderland (ibid.), the supporting organisation behind the concept and design of a village development plan project. However, ideal situations do not always play out in practice.

At first the VDP project in Kapel-Avezaath seemed a success, given the high inhabitants' participation in surveys and meetings. When the VDP is finished one and a half years later and the village council wants to proceed to the implementation phase, four 'low hanging fruit' topics were formulated out of the ten that resulted from the VDP. But despite the good start, at that time only two of the four aspired working groups were formed, on the topic of village beautification and communication. This mismatch between the perceived high participation at the start of the project and low participation towards the implementation phase left the village council confused and with the question: How can we get more villagers to engage in the working groups?

In the scientific literature, little is yet known about how participation processes affect *how* people are *actually* involved (Turnhout, Bommel, & Arts, 2010). This is quite a striking finding in the context of changing policies, where citizens are increasingly expected to engage in self-governance and increase community participation in the solving of local issues. Especially citizens' initiatives aimed at

improving the liveability of a neighbourhood or village such as the present case are seen by municipalities as a favourable alternative to their own policies (Bakker, Denters, Oude Vrielink, & Klok, 2012).

Despite the abundance of literature about community participation however, critical reflections are underexposed (Turnhout et al., 2010). Turnhout and her colleagues highlight the importance of future research to look at actors and how their identities and interests are articulated in and shape the participatory process. Following also the Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) in this, such processes always take place in a wider institutional frame (e.g. rules or expectations about how things are done) which also influences the governance process (Van Assche, Beunen & Duineveld, 2014a; Beunen & Patterson, 2019; Leeuwis, 2004). In this study I want to understand the village development process and how it evolved over time on a local level. More specifically the mismatch between the perceived high participation at the start of the project and low participation towards the implementation phase has sparked my interest. I coined this phenomenon the participation paradox and I asked myself: What happened to the community participation during the course of the project? And who decided about whom to involve in the first place?

To understand why and how participatory processes like this one may have unintended consequences or do not measure up to all of their objectives, I follow Turnhout's suggestion and EGT and zoom in to the working group of the project and how actors, their roles and responsibilities are negotiated through interaction with each other and the wider institutional frames. This analysis will shed light on elements of participation evolving during the course of the process and thus give possible explanations for the participation paradox.

Societal Relevance

In the Netherlands, the topic of community participation should be seen in the light of the recent decentralisations, transferring tasks from national to municipal level. These changes are accompanied by severe cutbacks in municipal budgets, therefore existing local citizens' initiatives are interesting partners in the transfer of

those tasks. In that process, the distribution of existing roles and responsibilities between municipalities and local initiatives and organisations is renegotiated.

At the same time, expectations of the cooperation partners about commitment and responsibilities of volunteers in citizen initiatives are likely to increase which might influence the willingness of citizens to commit longterm to such initiatives negatively. This puts citizens' initiatives who are depending on the effort of volunteers, such as the afore mentioned village development plans, under pressure. Especially because existing structures in a village can be challenged by the newly introduced division of tasks that "belong" to a project.

To understand this dynamic it is helpful to take a process perspective on the case. Such an analysis is also helpful for the DKK as a facilitating organisation, especially when a project does *not* live up to its expectations or leaves a bad aftertaste. The analysis can show how existing and new actors and roles interact in a village development plan project, finding crucial elements that influenced community participation. The information can be used to make the best out of skills and resources available in the local context of future projects.

Research Objective and Questions

I choose to study the village development project of Kapel-Avezaath by means of reconstructing the process within the working group. For this purpose, the focus of the research is as follows:

The objective of this research is to help the DKK improve their facilitation of the village development projects by studying how the negotiation of actors, their roles and responsibilities within the wider institutional frames shape the VDP process over time.

The following general research question has been formulated in order to achieve this objective:

How does the negotiation of actors, their roles and responsibilities within the wider institutional frames shape the VDP process over time?

Three specific research questions are developed to better understand the several elements of this question.

1) How does the DKK's design of a VDP look like?

The first specific research question covers part of what is meant by "the wider institutional frames" in the general research question. The VDP design is expected to significantly influence the expectations that actors have on their own roles, responsibilities and those of others in the process. The next step is to see how this design was put into practice.

2) How were roles and responsibilities allocated within the VDP working group?

The second specific research question is part of the process reconstruction. With the help of interviews and written material the steps and choices made by the working group are reconstructed. This question is closely related to the first specific research question, as the allocation is probably at least partly informed by the official design, however, also by the existing division of roles and

responsibilities in the village. This research questions thus starts with the investigation of the interaction within the working group.

3) How did the group process ultimately influence participation in the implementation phase?

This last specific research questions takes the answers from the previous question and puts them back into the context to make sense of the participation paradox.

These three questions are actually also a representation of the research process of unraveling the participation paradox: starting with "the ideal", the theoretical design of the process, then reconstructing what happened and how it was perceived by the working group members, to finally go back to the occasion of the research, the participation paradox. Answering those three specific research questions will, in the end, give an answer to the general research question is. The result is a synthesis of the several actors' perspectives interpreted from my perspective as a researcher and supported by the conceptual framework. They are not only helpful to the DKK Gelderland for their facilitation of future VDP and similar processes, but are also relevant for the progress of VDP related activities in the village and similar governance processes.

Research Design

The phenomenon of interest in this study is the village development process of a small village in the Netherlands, Kapel-Avezaath. The choice for this specific case was guided by the overarching Science Shop project¹. Amongst the available cases, this one sparked my interest because of the aforementioned participation paradox. I choose a case study design to research that paradox, because it is a strategy of inquiry that allows for in-depth understanding of complex processes as this multi-stakeholder governance process (Creswell, 2003; De Vaus, 2001).

I enter this study from a constructivist perspective, seeking to understand the meaning that participants assign to the world. From this perspective, those meanings are assumed to be socially constructed in interaction (Creswell, 2003). In order to understand that meaning, I considered a qualitative approach suited best. Its open-ended questions enabled participants to construct the meaning of a situation in our interaction (ibid.). I as a researcher I then made sense of, i.e. interpreted the data. Furthermore, answers to interview questions are necessarily selective and construct one perspective on the topic. In the process, neither of these perspectives is considered more or less true than the other. More so, they are considered pieces of a puzzle that are put together to see the bigger picture, to unravel dynamics of multi-stakeholder processes that cannot be understood by studying a single stakeholder, i.e. perspective (De Vaus, 2001). As I look at the data through the lens of my personal, cultural and historical experiences, it is fundamentally interpretive (Creswell, 2003.). Therefore, reflexivity of the role of the researcher is constantly needed in designing the research, collecting data and interpreting it (ibid.; Haverland & Yanow, 2012). This implies that my bigger picture, my interpretation is only one of many possible interpretations and by no means aims to represent one "objective truth".

¹ According to the DKK Gelderland various citizens' initiatives experience a lack of volunteers. Seeking more information to solve this issue, the DKK Gelderland approached the Science Shop of Wageningen University for help. One of their main questions is: How can volunteer organisations find and bind volunteers to take on new tasks and responsibilities? (Aalvanger, A., 2016). Several affiliated cases were selected to be studied by students.

Data Collection Methods

A case study design follows a holistic approach. It strives to collect a lot of information and therefore makes use of several data collection methods (van Thiel, 2013). This case study applies two basic types of data collection of which interviews is the most prominent, followed by the study of written material. Observations, e.g. interaction in group meetings was considered a suitable third data collection method. However, since the major part of the village development plan process already lies in the past at the beginning of this study, it was not realistic.

Interviews

Interviews are the most prominent data collection method for this research for two reasons. First, interviews can provide information of historical events (Creswell, 2003), which is necessary in this case, as a significant part of the process of interest lies in the past. Second, as a form of interaction conversations allow the participants to construct their meaning of the world which can then be recorded and interpreted by the researcher. For the interview to be considered a conversation, open-ended questions were asked in an unstructured way, also called an in-depth interview. This approach gives the participants space to construct and share their perspective on the situation.

By interviewing 11 of the involved actors with different positions in the process, I was able to collect a variety of perspectives on the VDP process. Perspectives vary in the actors' proximity to the VDP process, e.g. somebody who was not present at the monthly meetings cannot evaluate the atmosphere of those meetings. Being in the same proximity class (see figure 1), however, does not mean sharing the same perspective, since it is not only shaped by recent but also former experiences.

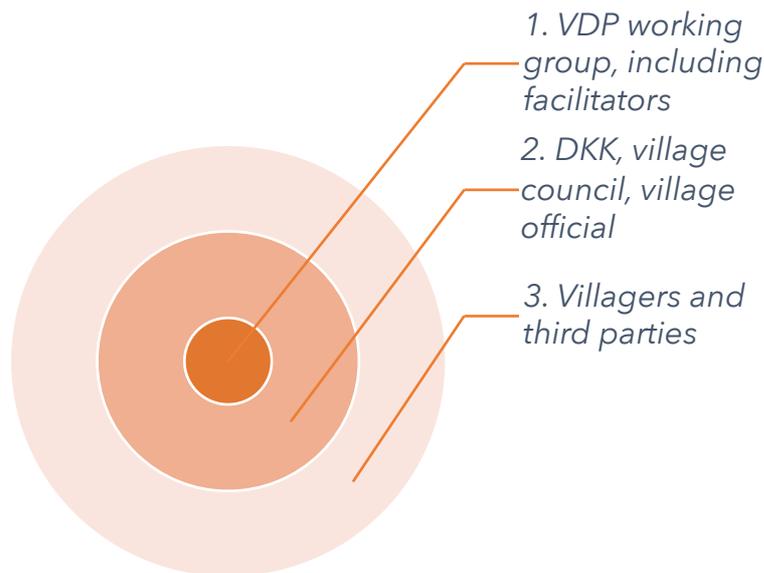


Figure 1 Actors ordered by estimated proximity to the VDP process

The actors were identified with the help of literature and contacted by reference from previous interviews, i.e. snowballing. In the orientation phase of the interviews, the DKK coordinator and two of the three involved facilitators were interviewed to their perspective about their and the DKK's role and perspective on the VDP processes in general and this specific case. Furthermore, the chair of the village council, the last remaining member of the former village council, was talked to for his initial vision and perception on the VDP process now. In total also six of the ten working group members were willing to participate in this study and share their varying perspectives on the choices made in the course of the VDP process. It must be added here, that the chair of the working group joined the village council shortly after the VDP was finalised. At the time of the interviews, he could therefore speak from his experience as a chair during the core VDP process and his village council experience during the following execution phase. Finally, the perspective of a municipality representative was added. Since 2015 the municipality works with local officials who are assigned to neighbourhoods to improve cooperation between citizens and the municipality. The respective official for the neighbourhood of this case joined the working group meetings on a regular basis and is therefore asked to participate in this study as well. Thus, a total of ten in-

depth interviews with eleven actors were performed, that each took one to two hours. For an overview see table 1 below. In order to be better embedded in the local context, most of the interviews were held in Kapel-Avezaath. Since the interviews might cover sensitive topics, such as the perception of the roles of others, the interviews were held one-on-one. The only exception to this rule is the interview with the process facilitators, since there was no reason to believe their relationship was a sensitive topic. Due to possible sensitivities, anonymity in this report is provided. Since my focus is the process within the working group, villagers were not approached to partake in the case study.

TABLE 1. Research participants.

working group	6	immediately involved
village council	2*	involvement grew
village official	1	present at meetings
process facilitators	2	involvement declined
DKK staff	1	not directly involved

* one working group member had joined the village council by the time of the interviews

Workflow

All interviews were recorded with the participants’ consent and transcribed as quickly as possible after the interview, while memories are still fresh. The audio-recordings and transcriptions allow for a more detailed summary and analysis of the spoken word, then mere hand written notes could (see also Data Analysis). The audio-recordings were complemented by handwritten field notes including the date, time, place, participants and goal of the meeting, as well as observational notes that the audio-recording cannot document. Observations and reflections on them were clearly divided in the field notes.

Content Analysis

The second data collection method is content analysis. For a general overview of the setting of a VDP, extension material such as the handbook for village development plans by the DKK and the village development plan itself are

regarded an important information source and were covered first. Further sources comprise: the village website including minutes of some meetings of the village council at the time of the VDP process, the official website and booklet of the DKK, the survey flyer that was handed out to the villagers and local newspaper items regarding the VDP project.

Data Analysis

The data analysis consists of two major stages: first, the preparation and second, the detailed analysis.

The iterative process of data collection in the field and analysis

The first stage included writing-up field notes and transcribing interviews. Both were done immediately after every day of field work, when memories are still fresh. Writing up the fields notes is most urgent, as they are usually not complete. The write-up triggers the researcher's memory so missing content can be added (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). A detailed transcription of the interviews recordings on the other hand enabled me to listen to the interview again more carefully which supported the emergence of new (unanticipated) ideas. Transcription is therefore seen an important first step in data analysis (Bailey, 2008). It is also the step when initial deductive coding takes place, based on the codes of the topic list of the interview. However, responses might also trigger the creation of other codes, which is called inductive coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Writing-up, transcribing and coding after every day of field work implies that data collection and analysis is not a linear but rather an iterative process. This cycling back and forth between the collected data and the research questions can improve the data collection (ibid.) as preliminary findings can be incorporated in the following interviews.

Content analysis to prepare for fieldwork

The preparation of the content analysis is different from the preparation of fieldwork data. The written data such as texts on websites, booklets, reports and so

on were read in order to learn about the local context and prepare for the interviews. On the one hand this gave the researcher the opportunity to ask questions about anything unclear, on the other hand this increases the risk of asking questions based on untested assumptions. This risk was acknowledged and minimised by asking for correction if questions included assumptions rooted in information from other sources, since the opinion of written text might not reflect the opinion of the interviewee, even if they represent the same organisation. That way assumptions can be tested and the content analysis does not dictate the results but adds another perspective to the data.

Ordering data and analysis

While reading the material again the initial codes are revised, extended and ordered. As coding involves reflection and interpretation of the meaning of the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) this revision is the starting point for a second more detailed analysis. With the help of the final codes the findings can then be clustered per topic for a synthesis of the findings. Doing so, the data are reduced, yet the context of the coded findings and quotes remains highly relevant for a proper interpretation of the findings. Writing up those summaries was an important step in drawing conclusions. It forced me to explain the links that emerged from the data. At the same time verification was needed in the form of quotes, which prevented me from interpreting too much and straying off the data.

The code list itself also supported reflecting on my assumptions and expectations of the results by looking for codes that were added or revised and the ones that were not applied as often as assumed.

Conceptual Framework

The village development process as an evolutionary governance path

The village development plan project of Kapel-Avezaath is an example of what one might call local spatial planning or a citizen initiative intended to include forms of community participation. In more general terms, independent of who initiated the project it is an example of participatory governance where people from different backgrounds, e.g. villagers, local government, civil society and businesses, come together to serve their common interest. Scientific literature agrees that traditional linear and static planning models do not accommodate for planned and unplanned change in the environment of the process or the agency for transformation of people involved (van Woerkum, Aarts, & van Herzele, 2011; van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014b). From this perspective, Evolutionary Governance Theory was built. The Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) is a theory which is based on concepts and approaches from several disciplines such as: economics, public administration, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, political science, history and cultural studies (Van Assche et al., 2014a). It describes governance processes as evolutionary paths, the course of which evolves and is subject to, amongst others, actors and institutions (ibid., chapter 4). EGT acknowledges the interaction of all elements and with that sees change as a pronounced part of governance processes. Taking this evolutionary perspective for the case of Kapel-Avezaath means looking at the process and aiming to reconstruct how the actors negotiated their roles and responsibilities in an institutional context. This institutional context however is in itself not static, but also subject to human behaviour and agency (Beunen & Patterson, 2019). Expectations are another element that shapes the governance path of the project. What I mean by these concepts, how they relate to each other and how they will help me understand what happened in Kapel-Avezaath, that is the topic of the remainder of this chapter.

Institutional Frames

While some scholars write whole articles about the concept of institutions (Hodgson, G.M., 2006), others simply define it as formal or informal rules that restrict or enable human behaviour. In the end, the definition used should fit the purpose of the research. It should enable me to define the border of my research and interpret my findings. Therefore, what follows is a more precise definition for the concept of institutions than the one presented above.

In EGT van Assche et al. (2014a) use the analogy of the game to explain how they define institutions. If the governance path was a game, individuals and organisations would be the players and institutions “the rules of the game”. Institutions interpreted as a coordination mechanism thus influence the way the game is played. EGT separates formal, informal and dead institutions. Its differentiation is however quite unique compared to how formal and informal institutions are usually separated.

Formal institutions

If a certain coordination option is repeatedly chosen in each situation, this process makes it a formal institution in EGT. I would like to add the following remark to this definition. Using the term formal in combination with institutions, it is often interpreted as something that is legally enforced like contracts (Klein Woolthuis, 2005) or law (North in Hodgson, 2006 and in Faundez, 2016). Legal enforcement implies a written documentation. Continuing from this association, formal institutions could be interpreted as being explicit. However, I argue that explicitness is not inherent to written documentation nor the formalisation process. In order to *be* explicit, even documented formal institutions have to be *made* explicit by presenting them in some way or the other in a specific situation to a group of people to whom it is then - hopefully - explicit. Then again, the degree of presentation and explanation needed differs from person to person, depending on their former experiences in general and with similar or other institutions. With time, what was once explicit can become implicit. In case of a changing group constellation those now implicit institutions can be surprising for new actors and influence how they relate to the process in the future. Besides, also an

undocumented institution can be formal. What makes a coordination option formal according to EGT is “the weight of general expectation” (van Assche et al., 2014a, p. 22) that is rooted in its repeated application in the past. In the oxford dictionary expectations are defined as “a belief about the particular way something should happen or how somebody should behave” (Expectation, n.d.). I argue that this still does not make a formal institution explicit, since the choice for it can be subconscious, made unaware of the fact that one *made* or even *has* a choice in the first place.

Informal institutions

Following EGT’s definition of a formal institutions as the “standard option”, informal institutions are the alternative coordination options. This unique differentiation between formal and informal institutions emphasises the evolutionary aspect of governance, as rules (institutions) guiding the path, can change during the course. In other words, what was once an informal institution can become a formal one and the other way around. Eventually, the formal-informal distinction is a labelling that arises with every decision (Van Assche et al., 2014a). Beunen et al. (2015) summarise the function of informal institutions as follows: Informal institutions “sustain, modify, undermine, reinforce, and complement formal institutions” (p. 341).

Dead institutions

Finally, EGT adds a third type of institution: dead institutions. Van Assche and his colleagues (2014a) perfectly summarise what is meant by dead institutions: “These institutions were once considered formal, (...) but have no effects currently because they are not considered a real coordination option; yet the fact that they are on the books makes it possible to revive them.” (p. 22) This ability to revive dead institutions means it can bring back lost “coupling” between actors or give existing objects new meaning (ibid.). The interesting part about this concept is that, in my view, whether an institution is dead or not and thus whether something is a coordination option or not can be different for different actors.

Actors

I employ EGT's definition of actors here: individuals, groups or organisations participating in the governance process. Actors can be included in governance but they can also be formed in governance (Turnhout et al., 2010), for example to represent the interests of a previously unrepresented group, assigning a role and certain responsibilities to that actor. Through the interaction within actors, with other actors and the institutional frames, actors can evolve and emerge in diverse ways (Van Assche et al., 2014a). For example, internal discussions can divide a group, leading to withdrawal of individuals or segmentation, creating a new actor. This new actor again shapes the governance path as it takes on a new role, introduces new mechanisms (ibid.), challenges formal institutions or affects expectations of the present and future of the governance path in any other way.

Roles

The example of interest representation illustrates how certain *roles* can be (in-)explicitly attached to actors' participation. Turnhout et al. (2010) suggest to look at participatory processes as a "performative practice", referring to them as "staged performances", like in theatre, thereby emphasising the role actors play. Planners of the governance process might have certain roles intended for certain actors in the governance process. However, actors are no puppets and Turnhout et al. observed how unintended forms of participation can emerge during a governance process, changing the course of the path significantly. Those unintended roles can for example be more passive or more pro-active than expected of the participants, making unexpected forms of interventions necessary. Therefore they conclude, in line with EGT also, that initiators and participants of a governance process are actors "in the sense that they act and shape participatory processes." (ibid., p. 12).

Without being synonyms, roles are linked to identity. From the discursive psychology perspective, identity is an achievement (something that is worked up, or failed to be) as well as a tool that is pervasive in interaction and thus part of our everyday routine (Sneijder & te Molder, 2006). This perspective underlines the performative view described above in the sense that a role and thus (part of) an identity can be worked up in interaction with others. The role that is assigned to

actors by the (planners of the) governance process and their own feeling of identity can create tension. For example, images of the past (“we are who we are because we have always done it like this”) can reduce governance to identity politics and hinder reflexivity (van Assche et al., 2014a). This example illustrates that *assigning a role* is not a one-way-street. In the end, how roles are fulfilled is the result of a complex and dynamic interplay of actors’ perceptions, identities, experiences and expectations of themselves, others, the governance path and its (expected) result.

Responsibilities

With a certain role, comes a responsibility: e.g. the chair prepares the agenda for the meeting. This conceptualisation has parallels with what Sack calls “category-bound activities” (Sacks, 1992 in Sneijder & te Molder, 2006). Category bound activities (short: CBA) are certain kinds of behaviour that are typically associated with that certain category (or role for that matter), but it can work both ways. So by showing a certain behaviour (executing a responsibility), one can in-explicitly try to build the identity of belonging to a certain category, or fulfilling a certain role in the governance process. However, responsibilities are not always explicit. Different actors can expect different responsibilities attached to a certain role, which can lead to a gap between expected and performed responsibilities. Especially when responsibilities remain unfulfilled actors might challenge each other in the appropriation of that responsibility. Unfulfilled roles and responsibilities can also be the result of uncertainty. In that case, actors tend to fall back on existing institutions (Bisschops & Beunen, 2018) pushing the governance path from innovation (in whatever way) to maintenance.

Interplay

In the end, actors, their roles, responsibilities and expectations, institutional frames and the governance path are all interconnected and affect each other. Figure 2 (next page) illustrates this interaction. The governance path exists with a certain configuration of actors, roles and institutions at a moment in time. The institutional frame describes the context in which the governance path takes place and builds actors’ expectations of not only the present but also the future. As the governance

path evolves, so do the actors involved and their roles and also the institutional frame is subject to institutional work, being altered, challenged or maintained. Interaction and change are omni-present, but for readability reasons the amount of arrows in the figure that represent interaction is reduced. Actually every element should have an arrow to any other element of the diagram.

For example, it might seem that institutions enable a look into the future by imposing a certain form of behaviour or procedure. However, this is only a belief and actors potentially possess the agency to challenge formal institutions by introducing informal or dead institutions, i.e. more and new coordination options. With those other coordination options, new (groups of) actors might form and new roles might be created. Those roles can be partially overlapping with existing roles and responsibilities that should be sorted out by actors to avoid confusion. On top of that the result of the interplay of actors, the institutional frames and expectations, i.e. the governance path, creates a vision and expectations of how the path will co-evolve in the future. This vision of the future feeds back towards the

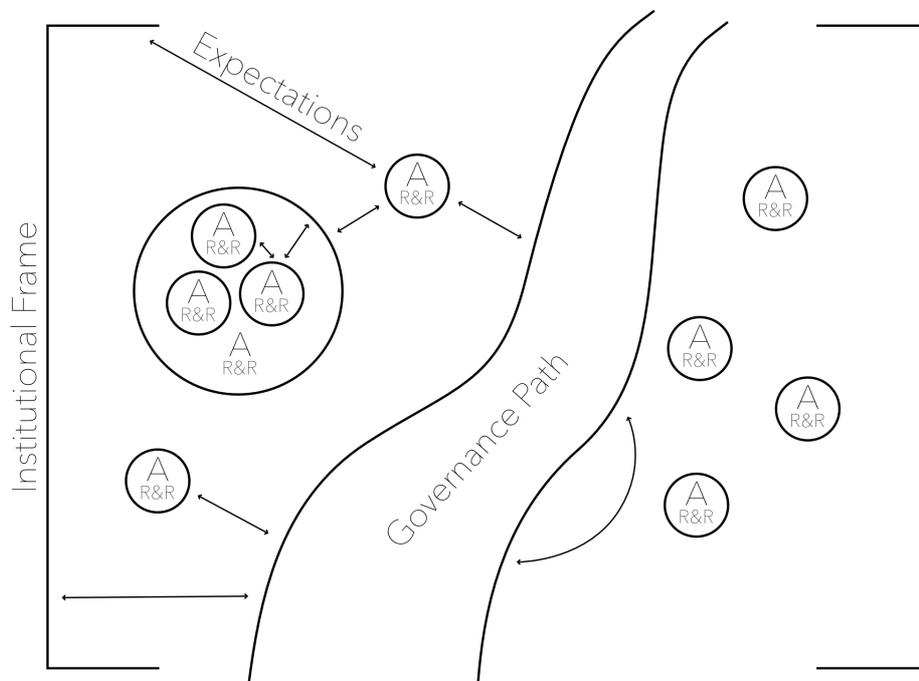


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of a governance path interacting (arrows) with actors (A), their roles and responsibilities (R&R), the institutional frame, interactions intertwined with expectations.

present to influence how actors see each other and the common goal. But even if all expectations and visions seem to be aligned for a moment, since change is omnipresent, this apparent “stability” is not so stable. Actors and their views on roles and responsibilities evolve due to the governance project or some event totally unrelated (e.g. in the private sphere). Therefore, a role division and institutions that fitted once, might be necessary to change in order to continue to be helpful in the future.

Village Development Process

Before going into the reconstruction of the specific village development process, I will give some background information about the facilitating organisation, the general project design and how the idea came to Kapel-Avezaath.

Motivation to have a VDP

In the beginning was the village council, established in 2007. Back then the municipality liked to have a representative body of the village to talk to for their policies. Together they would organise annual public meetings where all inhabitants of the village are invited to discuss some issues playing in the village. The main topics of discussion were infrastructural problems, like holes in the streets.

One of the founding members soon got fed up with the negative vibes of those meetings, which according to him focused too much on complaints instead of looking towards the future and creating a vision for the village. After some village council members left, the remaining board members asked him to become the new chair. He accepted the role and responsibility under the condition that the village council will become a more future oriented body. *"I won't become a chairman of a complaints committee, of a complaints club. All it ever was was complaints, complaints, complaints. Without any further prospects of certain developments or alike. That's nothing for me. Thus I thought: "How can I change that?"*" In the meantime, after losing many members, the council did not meet its own condition anymore, that the council members should cover representatives of all the villages' associations. When the chair finally found out about the concept of a village development plan of the DKK Gelderland, he introduced it to his fellow board members. They were hesitant and reportedly did not share his enthusiasm. For him, however, this project was his last straw of hope to realise his wish of a more positive and future oriented village council. It seemed to be a major reason for him to stay in the village council at all. *"I thought: If this doesn't work out, there will be nothing and we can just as well stop as village council. In any case I would*

stop. I'd leave. Just because I don't like these meetings, that would only be a complaints club."

After some years went by he tried to convince the village council board again. This time, everyone agreed on the condition they would find the people needed to install the VDP working group in accordance with the DKK's design of the process. Their first joint attempt only brought up five potential working group members, so the new chair put in extra effort on his own and found another five inhabitants willing to join the working group. This marked the start of a turbulent one and a half years. As one of the working group members admits: *"It's super to find those ten people, willing to [join the VDP group], but none of the ten actually knew what they signed up for."*

Background on DKK and their VDP projects

DKK Gelderland is a merger of two organisations from Gelderland, the Netherlands. DKK stands for villages and small neighbourhoods (Dutch: dorpen en kleine kernen), which is its core target group for support. One of the two has a long history of facilitating the inhabitants of villages, districts or cities in developing their own vision plan for the upcoming five to ten years. The idea of a vision plan started to get shape in around 2003 and is rooted in the increased interest of village interest groups to get support in working on a vision for their village. The "village development plan" project was born. 15 years later, the DKK has a tried and tested approach that over the course of time supported over 65 projects (DKK Gelderland, 2017). In the next paragraphs I will introduce you to their approach, the phases it is made up of and the vision behind it.

The bottom line of the village development plan approach is that inhabitants work together to preserve or improve the liveability of their living environment. *"Some core values of the methodology are that every village defines its own topics, formulates its own goals and builds its own network around the VDP."* (DKK Gelderland, 2017) This implies the approach is not about the specific content of such a plan, but is rather a rough design of the process. Therefore, it is designed to

bring together the various actors that are likely to be relevant for the VDP and its execution: the VDP working group and other inhabitants, organisations, associations, businesses and municipalities if applicable.

DKK's process can be summarised into five phases. First, the initial phase, where a local interest group looks for support in the village and approaches the DKK. Once support is found, both financially and in manpower (i.e. volunteers), phase two starts. The VDP working group consists of ten to twelve volunteers from the village and two DKK facilitators. They get acquainted with each other in a first meeting, also allocating roles like chair, secretary, treasurer and some people responsible for PR. Together they pick a date for a bicycle tour through the village to exchange about their views on the nice village spots and those that could be improved on. The bicycle tour is also a good opportunity for the facilitators to get to know the place.

As a next step the DKK advises to have a village gathering to inform other inhabitants about the project. Its intention besides launching the idea and project in the village is to exchange expectations about the direction of and possible contribution towards the project. Also some first input can be gathered here, marking the start of the next phase in which the working group increasingly works on the village vision content wise. Results from the village gathering are clustered per topic. The village can give feedback again, including a go/no go moment. In case of a go, the feedback is incorporated resulting in a concept plan.

Phase four is about improving, elaborating on and finalising the concept plan based on interaction with several actors. For example via a meeting with local stakeholders who are connected to the topics of the VDP and possibly play in role in the execution of it. They are invited to give advice and talk about their expectations and possible roles in the further course of the project. This advice is again incorporated and a final plan is written by the VDP working group.

A turbulent transition phase is coming, where some leave, others join and roles are redistributed. This fifth and final phase is actually open ended. It starts when the final VDP is handed over to the formal client of the working group, often the village

interest group, and presented to the municipality and the rest of the village during a festive event. Before the facilitators leave the project for good, they hold an evaluation session with the working group. The work of the VDP group is officially done. Now it is the village interest group's responsibility to organise new working groups for the execution of the plan. According to DKK's coordinator, three to five people per topic are sufficient to translate the vision of the VDP into precise action plans and/or start to work on them. *"It's not about them inventing something totally new. They simply have to work with what they got."* DKK Gelderland is aware that this transition phase can be challenging, especially if not as much volunteers are found as expected. Therefore, after a year the DKK returns to check on the progress of the project.

It may seem there is a strict division between writing the plan and its execution, but according to the coordinator of the DKK the working groups are actually encouraged to work on so called low-hanging fruit also earlier in the process. The stakeholders meeting in the middle is a good example of a situation that can already form new alliances and/or working groups. *"You don't have to wait until the plan is finished to work on the low-hanging fruit. (...) If it turns out well it can help people to see the effect immediately: "Oh great. We have been busy and this is what came up. Everyone thought it's very important and so we immediately jumped into action.""*

So much about the process in theory. However, the DKK acknowledges that every place is unique and their approach might not always fit one hundred percent. The coordinator of the DKK shared in our interview: *"It seems as if it has to be this way and cannot be otherwise, but that is not true. Actually this is a guideline."* Some flexibility is built in, like the possibility to hold a survey amongst the inhabitants at different moments in the process. But also other changes made by the working group in this case were welcomed by the facilitators: *"[The VDP process] is under development. Therefore, I was really curious how this would work out, how it will go and what the effect will be."*

What does that mean?

The village development plan design presented functions as part of the institutional frame this project takes place in. For the facilitators the project design is considered a formal institution, however they are open for informal institutions altering the design. It introduces a few new actors to the village such as the VDP working group, including two facilitators from out of town. In the VDP design the working group is considered to be operating as a group, one actor. We will see how that develops in the course of the project.

The existence of the village council is another part of the institutional frame. However, the decline in membership of the village council, together with losing its representative function for the villages' associations, I interpret as the village council losing its relevance as an actor and institution in the village. As a founding member it seems difficult for the current chair to give up the council just yet, so he initiates the VDP project. The project is a second chance for the council, changing how it operates in the village but at the same time also challenging its necessity as we will see.

The upcoming three subchapters each deal with different phases of the village development project in Kapel-Avezaath that emerged during the analysis. The transitions from one to the other are subtle and gradual, but each one has a distinct focus. The phases that I identified are: (1) starting with enthusiasm and confusion, (2) negotiating the decision-making power and (3) wrapping up and starting anew. In the following, I present several perspectives that are available from the interviews. Regularly they might seem contradicting. At this point I want to repeat that I perceive neither of those perspective as the truth, but rather that they are all part of one complex story.

Phase 1: Where are we going?

Starting: with enthusiasm, confusion and hidden expectations

After the village council made contact with DKK and the required amount of volunteers from the village were found, two facilitators were assigned to the VDP project. Usually those facilitators are volunteers of the DKK, however this time due to shortage a long term employee joined a new volunteer to facilitate the process. Once the municipality was willing to contribute to the costs of the project it could officially start. That was in July 2015, when working group and facilitators met for the first time. This was an introductory meeting for getting to know each other and DKK's approach. It was clear that the facilitators would be part of the working group to support them throughout the whole process. One of the two introduced her work and what is about to come with enthusiasm, shared a working group member in our interview. However, she felt the information provided by the facilitator was not enough. *"We knew little when we met that evening. [...] And it was presented as if everyone already knew what was going to happen, but it was a mystery to everyone."*

Others felt similarly lost and took the initiative to propose an action plan: *"We proposed: "Guys, if we do it, we'll do it right." And where do we have to start? We are working on a village plan, so we have to make an inventory: What is going on in a village like this? Which items are important?"* They suggested to start with holding a survey amongst their fellow villagers. This action plan was reportedly accepted with enthusiasm by the other group members and after successfully holding the survey in which more than half of the village's households responded, they organised a village event to present the findings. The event was also well attended, with around 160 visitors in a village of about 830 inhabitants. *"Usually (...) about 12 to 15 people attend."* Reported one of the working group members. *"This time 160 attended! (...) That's a lot."* It made them proud. Also, reportedly, the villagers were quite fond of the project at that time and were talking a lot about it in the streets. Someone else said: *"For us it was simply a very important motivation and grounds, thinking like "We have to continue, we can continue"."* This enthusiasm and interest gave the working group a lot of energy to continue with their effort.

Fuelled by this energy, those who proposed the survey (from now on the “initiators”) put forward a new action plan for the coming weeks. It was meant for translating the input until now into more concrete action plans that would be part of the village development plan: *“Definitive steps. These are the projects, these are the items. And we have to take these steps, for then we’ll progress.”* And while the initiators continued with enthusiasm, discomfort spread among other working group members. I will discuss the sources of discomfort one by one in the next paragraphs.

One source of the discomfort was the direction that the initiators wanted to go. At that time it became increasingly clear to the working group members that the goal definition of “writing a plan” was interpreted differently by different group members. Yes, they agreed upon “making a village development plan”, but there was no shared understanding of what the word “plan” actually entails. Whereas for the village council chair and the facilitators of the DKK Gelderland - the ones who were familiar with the DKK’s standardised format of a VDP - there was no doubt that the “plan” is another word for a rough village vision on paper. For some working group members this was also clear, or at least they shared this expectation. For the initiators and others on the other hand a “plan” meant a very detailed action plan: *“Guys, we promised to a village there would be a plan, not a list of ideas, but a plan. So we have to write a plan.”* Again others assumed that doing things would be the focus of the working group and were annoyed and disappointed to find out that a written document was what they were expected to deliver: *“I thought that the VDP was about doing things. That was not the case. I only figured that out later.”*

Next to this diverging goal expectations, another source of discomfort is a struggle just as important for the working group: the decision making power about what to do next. One of the initiators about this phase of the project: *“The steps are worked out and next a discussion developed. At that time also another discussion developed within the group, saying “you [three] decide everything”. And yes, to be honest, that’s how it was.”* In the next subchapter we will look at this struggle more detailed, how it is resolved and what we can learn from it.

What does that mean?

The newly formed working group consists of a diverse set of actors who were unfamiliar with each other and the institutional context of the VDP project. Reports by the working group members about the start of the initiative were characterised by uncertainty about the role of the facilitators and village council, the skills of their peers and expectations of the project goal and process. Even though they explicitly agreed on the goal, the different interpretations of the word “plan” which only became clear further down the road, led to surprises.

Something else can be observed here: unintended forms of participation as Turnhout et al. describe them (2010). In this case a group of actors who are part of the working group are more pro-active than anticipated by their peers and the facilitators and take the lead of the project resulting in two discussions coming up: about the where to go and what to do next on the one hand and on the other hand who has the power to decide that. Taking a step back it gets clearer that those discussions have the same root. They are both a matter of clear role allocation including responsibilities. Questions that were not sufficiently explored in this first phase are for example: First, the responsibility of the working group in the context of the VDP: Is the working group installed to write a plan or to also actually do things in the village? Second, the responsibility of decision-making within the group: Is it shared or granted to one or a few actors? Although the working group announced a chair, responsibilities were not specified, leaving the responsibilities of a group leader unfulfilled at first. Now, what these responsibilities are and whether the group finds them necessary and if yes, how and by whom they should be fulfilled, those questions stayed unasked. Again, actors were left to fill in the blanks themselves, only to find out about their diverging views later.

Those uncertainties show us that aligning the group goal at the start of a governance process is not enough. Roles, responsibilities and ways of collaborating are just as essential to agree upon. But even when they are

discussed at some point, subconscious or hidden expectations can show up later and alter the course of the governance path. Besides, as the path evolves, actors, their roles and their expectations of the path does so, too. This shows that at any given moment there are many possible future governance paths. Only by repeatedly exchanging about their vision and expectations, actors can potentially align. The next phase however, will show that more than just exchange is needed.

Phase 2: What happens when there is no boss?

Continuing: negotiating the decision-making power

Before continuing with the process I want to pause and answer the question: How did the initiators come to think they have the decision-making power without the rest of the group agreeing?

One of the initiators admitted that the three of them took the lead of the working group. In itself, this does not have to be a bad thing. In this case however, because of the diverging goal expectations present in the working group, them taking the lead meant the initiators decide which goal to pursue. Reportedly the initiators were very convinced about their approach, in a way that it was hard for them to consider other ways. One of the working group members summarised it as follows: *"Look, if everyone supports it, it's different. If at a given moment people take the lead and get ahead of the others, while the rest thinks it unworkable.. Yes, than you have a problem and that's what it was."* By having such a clear goal in mind, the initiators became single-minded and did not question the decision-making power they took.

In order to answer the question of how the decision-making power seemed to have come with the initiators I would like to turn to the words of three working group members, starting with one of the initiators:

"Actually the three of us talked and summarised: "There were initial discussions, but it is very vague." Because nobody knows what the result should look like, how it

should be done and nobody who can tell us. So you start and three people took the initiative. (...) Which is okay, somebody has to take the lead and the rest has to follow. Only we did not agree on it explicitly. Neither who should do it nor whether it should be done at all."

Another working group member does frame it as if there was some level of conscious decision made:

"They had the expertise [...]. So they took it on: How are we going to do it? How do we communicate towards the village? And in the end we as a group handed it over to them, because we saw that they were prepared and had the expertise."

Yet another working group member frames the decision as a rather passive act:

"(...) In my opinion, the whole survey was Frank² and Paul's¹ baby, they took it on quickly. And initially, I think, the group received it well: "oh, nice that they take the initiative". And then later others thought they had too much of a say in it. But yeah, of course we gave it to them ourselves. So there was a little fuss about it. But yeah, you know, they picked it up and if nobody says anything or does anything, of course it stays with them."

What does that mean?

The question was "How did the initiators come to think they have the decision-making power without the rest of the group agreeing?" The quotes show that in fact the perception of the group of this process is rather diverse. Some frame the decision-making power to be taken, others as been given, and again others as - at first glance - a more passive act. It also shows that the group members did not share the same judgment: It seems not everyone disagreed with the initiators having the lead. Therefore, there was no group effort in changing the situation. Instead, they were asked to take a step back in a private conversation with the village council. As a result the initiators did not feel appreciated, which affected their commitment and

² Names changed.

relation to the governance process negatively. It was a crucial moment in the governance path, leaving empty the role of the leader and causing uncertainty about the way to proceed.

Before continuing with the results, I want to discuss the last quote again. It highlights a dynamic that is easily overseen. The last sentence namely acknowledges that the governance path is continuously shaped by every actor and even by doing "*nothing*" you do *something*, namely maintaining the status quo, i.e. continuing the current path. That way, without anyone noticing, the roles of the initiators shifted steadily towards group leaders, until "suddenly" a point is reached that was neither the intention of the process design, nor in agreement with the rest of the group.

Now we know there was disagreement in the group about who has the decision-making power and we know more or less how it developed. The next question is: How is the disagreement resolved? There is no simple answer to this question, as it was not a straight forwards process, but characterised by a lot of negotiation and one could argue whether the disagreement was actually *solved* or rather *silenced*. To sum up the process: It was unclear who was entitled to make decisions, therefore, choices that were made in one meeting were repeatedly challenged in the following meeting. Next to that the initiators wanted to continue with their plans, but supporters of the VDP being a vision instead of a detailed plan constantly blew the whistle on them. At some point in this struggle, the village council chair had joined the working group and what happens next is very circumstantial. All these discussions hindered progress relating to the content of the plan and since the project is designed to be carried out in a year which had almost passed, the working group felt some time pressure. Besides, the project demanded more effort than some of them expected. In the end, tasks between the village council and the VDP working group were divided as the village council saw it all along: "The village council board commissioned the village development working group to write a plan and that plan had to be returned to the board [for execution]. That is what happened. [...] For me, this has never been unclear." So the

working group agreed the project should be finished soon and accepted the implications this decision had.

What does that mean?

The dynamics above clearly show what it means to a working group when roles and responsibilities of the actors involved are not properly defined or agreed upon. Especially the power and responsibility to make decisions with regards to the project is a crucial one. Institutions and decisions made are likely to be challenged time and again. This uncertainty and instability led the group run in circles which introduced frustration and conflict. What stopped them in the end was the institutional frame, the agreed-upon time frame for the project. The end of the year was approaching. Considering the tension and disagreements in the working group, the project could have come to a halt here. But their commitment towards the other villagers and time and energy that was already put into it prevailed. And not unimportant: in this context, the formal institution (from the perspective of the village council) of role allocation between council and working group was finally accepted, although partly reluctantly. All things considered, maybe the fact that the village council was the official client offered just enough justification to accept their decision-making. And with that, the relevance of the village council as an actor and institution in Kapel-Avezaath was restored, not to its old glory, but enough to turn from a - for some - dead institution to a formal one again, for now.

Phase 3: The VDP as a means or a goal?

Finalising: wrapping it up quickly to finally start anew

The previous subchapter explained how unclarity about roles and responsibilities within the working group slowed down progress regarding content of the VDP up to a point where the group simply wanted “to get it over with”. The following paragraphs will show and interpret what the implications of this decision are and how they affect the group and - to the extent that is possible - the recruitment of volunteers for execution.

With the decision that the VDP project should be finished soon, two other choices were made. First, the tasks of the working group shifted even more from *taking action* with or for the village towards *writing* the brochure. This meant the importance of connecting and staying connected to other villagers did not have the same priority as before according to a working group member who was particularly fond of this task. She repeatedly tried to explain the relevance of staying connected to pro-active citizens, an experience she had learned from being a part of the village council in the past herself, but she did not feel heard.

Second, because of the perceived time pressure, some group members and the village council decided that the VDP should only contain the general vision for the domains that came out of the survey held at the beginning of the project. Their argument was that it would give future volunteers more freedom in their newly formed working groups (per domain of the VDP). Neglecting that today's volunteers worked weeks to find collaboration partners and formulate shared ideas on the several domains. Unfortunately, because it was work in progress, this progress was not yet put nicely on paper. Therefore, it was mentioned that it would have also taken more time to include those concrete ideas for projects and collaborations in the village development brochure, the second argument for a vision VDP. A handful of working group members including the initiators strongly opposed this decision to exclude their joint work. *“It's a pity that so many nice ideas got lost.”*, one of them said.

Those smaller more tangible projects and collaborations were exactly what she and others loved doing and expected to be doing within the VDP project to begin with, instead of writing the brochure. So those group members felt disappointed and sometimes even frustrated. In the end, the brochure became a vision document. As a compromise a clustered action list with rough timeframe was added as an appendix to the VDP brochure. While some are proud of this list comprising 49 actions, others deem it too vague and prefer the “work in progress”-document including all their ideas, and information on possible collaborations. According to one group member this document was supposed to be published together with the VDP brochure on the village website for future volunteers to have all the information readily available. However, according to my research it was never published.

Those two developments made that a relevant part of the working group and those who are fond of taking action especially, got disappointed in the results of the VDP brochure, in the process, or both. This negative feeling associated with the project made not all of them but some decide to take a break and not to play a role in the execution of the VDP. Although it was not made explicit, in the interviews people reported that it felt as if they were expected to be the teamleaders of the newly to be created domain working groups. Them not taking part at all thus meant less teamleaders than anticipated by the village council. Those that I spoke to who *did* continue with the VDP reported that they felt they were reinventing the wheel (referring to the unpublished working document) or explicitly mentioned they were happy they had their own project and would hardly work together with whom they had conflicts before. This shows clearly how the group process affected the group members themselves to be part of the execution.

According to the village official, villagers did not feel like it was their plan. It was more the baby of the working group and village council. That makes it even harder to find volunteers. Furthermore, she explained, people want to *do* things, not hold a meeting. Luckily the latter was understood by the village council after months of low activity, which resulted in parts of the topics finally being tackled on a small scale.

What does that mean?

This case shows that enthusiasm of the lesser involved actors built in the beginning is likely to die down when the connection is lost during the course of the governance path. And why was the connection lost? I argue that at some point (if not from the beginning), the village development plan switched roles from being a means for village development to being a goal in itself. This analysis is supported by the “getting-it-done”-mentality towards the end. If it were a means, it would be a way of doing, alone or with other villagers, for the village, which has no foreseeable end. Especially, since the whole project was about the liveability of the village, how people interact. That is a timeless struggle. But the village development plan was seen as a goal on its own and due to unresolved conflict, frustration and disappointment, it needed to be finished soon, which puts less tangible goals like future participation on a lower step. This is a classic example of discussions revolving around “implementation”. The result of this short-term prioritising is as mentioned before, the loss of connection with other villagers and with that their support for the outcome of the plan. The VDP turned from a village project into a project of a limited group of people, decreasing the chances of finding actors who want to get involved.

Another example of a kink in logic revolves around the challenge of participation. Independent of whether or not that was the intention, the working group had done lots of research and laid connections to support the execution of their plans. However, future working groups were supposed to do most of the work in the “execution phase”. In order to give future volunteers more freedom in their work, the work of present volunteers is partly neglected. Though it might seem a good idea for actors who are yet to be involved, the impact this decision had on the commitment of those already involved was highly underestimated if not ignored. If working group members feel unheard and unappreciated, it also influences other actors’ decision also from outside the working group to get

involved, too. Again, one decision is not separated from the other. All of them influence the course of the governance path and all things connected to it. Because of those complex feedback mechanisms, visions of the future are likely not to play out as expected.

The dynamics regarding participation in the project show that engagement is a constant effort. If we want actors to join the governance path at some point, engagement is actually needed before that moment, too.

Governance projects are often artificially divided into a preparatory phase and an execution phase. This case shows that focussing on an intermediate goal (the VDP brochure) can make actors forget the overarching goal (improving liability in the village) with all its consequences.

Discussion

Discussion of results

In the following, the three specific research questions will be answered and discussed in relation to scientific literature.

Design of the village development plan project

The first specific research question was: How does the DKK's design of a VDP look like?

DKK's design of a VDP contains 15 steps, or 5 phases: (1) preparation and initiation, (2) getting to know each other, dividing roles and taking stock, (3) working on content, (4) feedback and wrapping up, (5) execution. Those phases are promoted by the DKK to be executed within one year, execution of consequent more specific projects excluded. Strikingly, this is not how it happened in Kapel-Avezaath exactly, not as smooth as the phases make it sound and not within a year. The DKK director explains their design is merely a guideline. The process is designed to bring together various actors that are likely to be relevant for the VDP and its execution: inhabitants, local associations and businesses and municipalities. Therefore, every phase has scheduled one or two smaller or bigger events. The design is explicitly not concerned with the content of the VDP, as that is to be determined by the villagers themselves through the course of the process, explains DKK's director. Additionally, facilitators have reported they are aware this design does not fit every village which is why also in this case they were open for changes.

This matter of following a guideline touches on the discussion around (blueprint) planning that is decades old, but still relevant (Healey, 1992; van Woerkum, et al, 2011; and from a rural development perspective: Umans & Arce, 2014). The discussion knows several entry points. Patsy Healey (1992) discusses the future of planning on the conceptual level, following Habermas' concept of "communicative rationality" that should in her opinion form the bases of governance processes. Communicative rationality means human reason shifts from an individualised conception to something that is formed in interaction. Therefore, knowledge

claims on which (collective) action is based are justified discursively, through dialogue³ amongst those who wish to act together in a shared space, like a village. Healey concludes: if the tasks a governance process must address are “discovered, learned about and understood” (ibid, p. 241) in interaction, they cannot be predefined, thus arguing against blueprint processes. Next to conceptual-level arguments against blueprint processes, other scholars arrive at similar conclusions, rooted in experience. They observe that situations can be too complex and dynamic (van Woerkum et al., 2011), or blurry and unstable (Umans & Arce, 2014) and therefore unpredictable. Umans and Arce (2014) advice to recognise the “interrelationality” of things, and to “go-with-the-flow” instead of following a pre-determined process.

How does this discussion around blueprint processes relate to the results of this case study? It is notable that the DKK is aware and in the midst of the struggle of blueprint processes and the fact that every project needs their own process. That is why their blueprint is designed around interactive events in which issues of the governance path are co-created. But if the source of disagreement is not the issues to be solved *through* governance but the way of collaborating *in* governance, the VDP design does not provide much room for discussion. In fact, it maintained uncertainty: At times of unclarity or disagreement, actors would repeatedly refer to the process design to offer a solution. But this behaviour did not ease discussions, because the way the guideline was interpreted and handled, differed among actors. Also, disagreements regarded not only content but, maybe even primarily, process-matters. This is a self-referring loop: uncertainty due to disagreement, tempting actors to refer to an institution that only gives the illusion of a solution but actually does not solve the disagreement, thus maintaining the uncertainty. Because DKK’s process design, how interactive it may be designed, still draws the attention towards the topics, the content, away from the meta, the ways of doing. Besides it is linear, there are no decision points, thus no possibility to “go with the flow” as suggested earlier. Indeed, Bisschops and Beunen (2018) find that when

³ Healey used the term debate, but for translation of her past work into the current scientific discourse, I argue the concept of dialogue corresponds better with how she describes the communication practices.

actors experience difficulties with uncertainty, they can have the tendency to resort to and maintain the relevance of existing institutions. Such institutions can be process blueprints like here. Van Woerkum and colleagues (2011) therefore present a model that is meant to help planners embrace that uncertainty in their plan making. Otherwise, the mere availability of a “certain” planning might trigger the above loop and prevent critical reflection on the current path.

This dynamic calls for broader guidelines: not the ones that tell actors what to do, but such that encourage reflection and the deliberation Healey advocated. Healey shares a list of appropriate practices that in her opinion should prevent process blueprints (Healey, 1992). Those practices are amongst others: grasping and exploring diversity, respect, in-built critique and mutual learning. Healey emphasises the importance to *not* attempt to construct one-dimensional language, instead acknowledge ambiguity, ambivalence and dilemmas, find agreement on what should be done without unified lifeworlds. Similar practices are advised by the authors of the MSP Guide, a guide on how to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs). It is grounded, too, on the aim to strengthen communicative rationality, and backed up by more than a decade of experience in initiating, facilitating and participating in MSPs. They write: “(...) your aim is to encourage participants to develop a range of options and to avoid deciding on a single solution or direction too early.” (Brouwer, Woodhill, Hemmati, Verhoosel, & van Vugt, 2016). This is in line with Healey’s suggestions. Another major insight from current literature is to not let starting agreements consolidate, but to reflect regularly on what is needed as the process advances (Healey, 1992; de Vries, Beunen, Aarts, Lokhorst, and van Ark, 2014; Van Assche et al., 2014a; Brouwer, et al., 2016). The VDP process design and workbook, however, are quite straight forward and focus on organisational matters. Besides, it does not cover any recommended practices with regard to *how* things should be done. Not surprising, the working group did spend little time on exchanging their intentions and expectations about the project, the process or result but jumped to content-matters quite fast. The consequences of which are discussed with the next two specific research questions. With regard to critical reflection moments, the process design includes a “go / no go” moment after consulting the villagers. However, the

design lacks options for action in case of a “no go”, as a result of that, undermining its meaning. Considering the amount of effort that has been put into the project until that point, it would be understandable if actors are not willing to stop that easily, although they might not fully agree with how things are at the moment. To conclude: because the institutional frame does not stimulate critical reflection it promotes path dependency and the maintenance of the same institutional frame, *even though* it does not work properly.

To summarise: if we understand blueprint planning as setting out what to do beforehand, it is likely to fail its implied expectations on how easy and smooth the governance process will be, due to the complexity and unpredictability of actors and our world. The way the VDP process is designed currently, it is an institutional frame that favours deliberation about content rather than process. And lacking moments that allow for critical reflection it stimulates actors to continue on the current path with all its consequences. Therefore, scholars came up with recommendations not for actions but for ways of cooperation. How-to's in contrast to what-to's, that encourage learning and critical reflection, thereby acknowledging the evolutionary aspect of governance.

Roles and responsibilities

The second specific research question was: How were roles and responsibilities allocated within the VDP working group?

In the previous chapter we concluded that an incomplete role allocation might have been the starting point of many of the misunderstandings, disappointments and confusion. Another insightful point of discussion would be what actors were *expecting* of the different roles and what those uncommunicated expectations meant for the process. And as we can see from the results, not only the roles within the working group are relevant, but also the role of the working group itself and in relation to the facilitators and village council. The relationship of this triangle was not understood in the same way by all actors which led to confusion and frustration. Domingo and Beunen (2013) support this observation by writing that “planners can also generate unrealistic expectations that lead to frustration if they do not recognise their limitations and the complexity of controlling reality.” (p.

200). An example from the present case: when uncertainty about an issue increased and the working group was not able to make a decision, some actors hoped the facilitators would step in to help make that decision or at least moderate the discussions. The lack of such support made some actors wonder what the role of the facilitators was altogether⁴. Thus through the presence of external facilitators some role expectations were generated that stayed unfulfilled which emphasised the confusion already present.

Another way to look at the role allocation is through the lens of Belbin's Team Roles. A Team Role refers to a "tendency to behave, contribute, and interrelate with others [...] in certain distinctive ways." and should be distinguished from a functional role (Belbin, 2010, p. 24). The nine Team Roles Belbin identified through experimental and field research span a variety of behaviours that can be categorised into action-oriented, people-oriented and thinking-oriented (Batenburg, 2013). Belbin found that a balanced team consists of complementary Team Roles and is "self-contained and knows it" (Belbin, 2010, p.93). It does not only not need help from outside, but is even resistant to interference. Belbin concludes that the other way around, should teams be looking for help it is an indicator that the team is unbalanced (ibid.), thus being subject to mismatching, missing or a surplus of roles in a team. Looking at the VDP working group through this lens sheds new light on the struggle between the action- and connection-oriented working group members and those who preferred to first finish writing the brochure. The decision that implementation and networking was to be left for future working groups was also an act of muting certain team capabilities that might have made for a balanced team when appreciated, thus impacting team performance⁵ negatively. Literature on multi-stakeholder processes also points out that thinking-oriented and action-oriented actors complement each other in that the latter creates momentum for the ideas of the first (Brouwer, et al., 2016). What

⁴ It might be worth mentioning here that one of the two facilitators had fallen ill and had to leave the project. The facilitator was replaced by a colleague, who then had difficulties catching up which impacted DKK's facilitation immensely.

⁵ One could raise the question whether the working group was actually performing as a team as opposed to a group, but that goes beyond the scope of this research and discussion.

does that mean for the role and goal of the working group as a whole?

Considering the competences and expectations of the actors that comprised the working group, a broader working group goal and role might be legitimate, namely writing the plan while at the same time starting to connect with others to go into action. This is also supported by van Dams study on citizens' initiatives. She found that initiatives using a wider range of relational strategies (i.e. connecting to like-minded actors, not like-minded and across power positions) are more successful in realising their objectives (van Dam, 2016). (At this point the discussion also links to the third specific research question regarding the implementation phase which is also shortly discussed in the next subchapter.)

One must be cautious, though, to think that a balanced and diverse team automatically leads to good team performance. Besides the mere presence of diversity, it requires *understanding* of the roles members tend to take on, including their strengths and weaknesses, and constant teambuilding including frequent feedback sessions (Batenburg, 2013; Belbin, 2010). This is supported by the working group's evaluation session with the DKK facilitators. In hindsight, they concluded that the working group members did not know each other well enough to make optimal use of everyone's strengths to achieve their goal(s), leaving capacities unused and actors unsatisfied with their own role.

The above findings and discussion suggest that a proper role allocation entails more than assigning the chair and secretary. It is also about making use of the qualities that are present in the group, and with that seeing and appreciating every group member. Whether Belbin's Team Roles serve as a guideline or not, the findings suggest that it is helpful to be aware of those behavioural role tendencies next to the classical functional roles. Another important element of role allocation are the *expectations* of actors' own and others' roles and their corresponding responsibilities. And whether and how those expectations are met again affects actors' commitment to and participation in governance.

Group process, participation and implementation

The third and last specific research question was: How did the group process ultimately influence participation in the implementation phase? Two discussion

points can be distinguished here: first, the effect of the group process on participation; second, the position of the implementation phase in the governance process.

Let's start with a short recap of how the disagreements were handled: When the diverging expectations of the process and its results became more apparent, as the official client the village council repeatedly was the one to cut the knots after reiterating discussions. During those discussions and due to the final decisions made several working group members felt unheard and unappreciated. When looking at the whole process of how the working group collaborated, I see an unresolved conflict that affects how the current volunteers relate to the village development process, also after the brochure was finished. To be clear, this is no value judgement about the whole governance process as such, a conflict does by no means mean that the governance process failed. In fact, literature suggests that conflicts are normal, legitimate and unavoidable in governance processes (Beunen & de Vries, 2011; Domingo & Beunen, 2013; Christmann, Ibert, Jessen, & Walther, 2020). But although conflicts might be normal, this legitimacy "should not be an excuse to ignore them", Domingo and Beunen go on (p. 200). However, they admit that conflict resolution is not always possible, but feeling listened to is important to the success of the governance process. Leeuwis (2004) writes about the possibility to take a negotiation approach to pre-existing conflicts or emerging tension in interactive processes. Conditions for a negotiation approach are: divergence of interests, possibility to communicate with each other and feeling of mutual interdependence. What happened in Kapel-Avezaath is that a cause of the tension was muted, but the underlying disagreement was not resolved. It influenced the volunteers' willingness to stay involved. And it is at least possible if not likely that sharing their (negative) perception with other villagers also influences the willingness of potential new volunteers to get involved. Besides, I also mentioned earlier that according to the village official, villagers did not feel ownership of the final VDP, but thought it belonged more to the village council and VDP working group, which also impacts the perception of their own ownership and support for the project. However, ownership of the working group was also challenged. When the village council stepped up and emphasised their role as the official client to

take the necessary decisions, they created a hierarchy in the collaboration that undermined the apparent intention of collective meaning- and decision-making. This suggests that the organisers of the village development process were unaware of the fact that participation is not a constant. It shows they were unaware of the fact that everything is interconnected and the impact their decisions have on other actors and the governance path as a whole. From an EGT perspective, where change is the only constant it becomes clear that participation is not something that is built to last, but it has to be maintained and with that the feeling of mutual interdependence and shared ownership.

Another discussion point of the third specific research question is the position of the implementation phase in the village development process. That distinction has several implications and previous discussions touched upon it. For example, it assumes that implementation is only a final step in governance processes and those who will be “implementing” will simply execute plans that were decided before and maybe even without them. In Kapel-Avezaath I have seen that this is not how it works. Van Assche et al. (2014a) explain that actors also have to be *willing* to implement the results of governance, and if so, they will always put their own mark on it. Therefore, I argue, implementation is not a final step in a governance process, and also not a “next” step (acknowledging the lack of a clear ending, but still assuming chronology time-wise). It is just as complex and unforeseeable as the strategising and writing processes, maybe it is even a part of those processes for you are already engaging with others to strategise and write. Therefore “implementation” should be considered an integral part of governance processes, from the start. This is also supported by the earlier discussions of action-oriented roles and connecting with external actors to achieve the initiatives objectives in the previous sub-chapter.

Theoretical and methodological reflections

The conceptual framework

Concepts provide the researcher with words for observations or dynamics that could otherwise not be discussed. Frameworks and theories putting several

concepts in relation to each other are often simplifications of reality and therefore help to focus on what is deemed important coming from a certain perspective. For this case study I used the Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) and some of its core concepts to make sense of the data. EGT is a relatively novel and quite complex theory coming from a holistic view bringing together concepts of several disciplines. It is aiming to do justice to the complexity that separates reality from theory. But because of its complexity, it is hardly a simplification of reality which makes it hard to fully grasp and apply. Nevertheless, I find this theory with its evolutionary perspective helpful and satisfying, because it acknowledges in a way that we cannot know where we are going, just as the results of evolution in biology are characterised by coincidences as well.

Besides the general advantages, the way I used the theory here was not helpful in analysing in detail what moved actors and their decisions. Theories on commitment, conflict (interdependence), trust and shame might be of better help to understand each individual's thoughts and feelings better. But then again, if we can understand such feelings and thoughts in hindsight and we stay focused on the details, we might think we could predict and steer behaviour the next time. However, our future is unpredictable and the acknowledgement of that is a big benefit of EGT as a theory. It helps to be mindful of our ignorance and focus on how actors, institutions and dependencies interact in the moment, advocating for repeated reflection instead of assuming one ideal way of doing things.

Limitations of methodology

A major limitation of this study is the fact that it is a process reconstruction, rather than a longitudinal study, following the village development project realtime. The disadvantage of this approach is that participants' recollections are subject to recall bias, which means they are probably not complete and not 100% accurate. Having that said, it is true for researchers' observations during a realtime study, too.

Besides, the different stories of the participants add up to a rich picture of the VDP project.

Another limitation is that this rich picture I painted based on the data was not reflected upon together with the participants. My assessment of the situation was

that further repetition and focus on the conflict and what went wrong would not benefit the progress of the village project and the well-being of my participants as some were quite emotional. However, points of confusion were incidentally brought up in conversations with other participants, checking up on their understanding of a certain situation.

In a study more elaborate interviewing the villagers would have been an interesting additional perspective, including first hand information about the (de)motivation to join the project at some point.

Reflection on the research process

When I started this case study, of course I had expectations about what I would find. One possible explanation I had made up for the perceived lack of participation, was that the villagers did not really support the whole idea of the VDP as initiated by the village council. Furthermore, I suspected the working group might only have consisted of the village council and friends, excluding most of the other villagers. Next to that I assumed maybe during events when working group and villagers could interact, things happened that somehow harmed their relationship. The leading concept here is exclusion. However, in reality it was present in a way much more subtle than I anticipated and not from the start.

Then I thought I would find my answers in comparing the theoretical process design of a VDP with what actually happened in Kapel-Avezaath. Maybe if I found a deviation from the DKK's tried and tested approach, it could be good explanation for the participation paradox. An obvious and simple advice for the future would be: stick to the process design. Lucky for me though, there was more going on and I was able to learn from it.

First, if we compare the theoretical design of the VDP process with the activities organised by this specific working group, in the end there are not so many differences. And the ones that exist do not explain what happened. For example, a very elaborate village survey even boosted participation at the start of the project. Reconstructing other one-time events like the village meetings yielded no results as working group members could hardly remember specifics. So second and more

importantly, I learned that it is not enough to look at the big events of the process and possible deviations, because it neglects the importance of more continuous elements like decision-making processes and role division. Although a process reconstruction was the tool that helped me to get an overview of the process and what happened when, it did not help me to understand why certain things happened and decisions were made. Reconstructing the process based on one-time activities that were organised puts emphasis on those events and makes it hard to incorporate the struggles that were perceived throughout the whole process that might not be directly linked to one of those events.

From that perspective, the observed confusion, conflict and disappointment can better be explained looking at misunderstandings or irritations occurring during and in between working group meetings. So that became my focus, guided by what the interviewed were able to remember and wanted to talk about.

If a governance process is for a big part determined by actions in interaction during and between meetings, that means that people in interaction are of major importance. Therefore it is important to at least try to understand their ideas, expectations and preferences in order to understand the situation and decisions based on these. Another argument not to focus on the major process steps solely.

Recommendations for future research

Before, I emphasised the importance of looking at actors in interaction instead of the process design, i.e. the method to analyse a governance project. Coming from this perspective my recommendations for future research are also on the level of the individual and focussing on how they interact in the present actor-constellation, e.g. a working group, facilitators and a village council or similar. Due to the diversity of actors, world-views and expectations in governance, conflict is easily around the corner. This needs to be acknowledged, in science as well as in society.

So my questions for future research are: What characterised the group work and/or collaboration of village development processes that was characterised as successful by all participants? More specifically: How were expectations managed? How were decisions being made? What was the group culture of dealing with

differences? What kind of skills were present and how were they used (to deal with conflicts)? Answers to those questions can provide helpful insights in preventing unnecessary escalation of disagreements and dealing with conflicts in future village development projects and other citizens' initiatives.

Conclusion

How does the negotiation of actors, their roles and responsibilities within the wider institutional frames shape the VDP process over time?

Let me start to answer the question saying that the VDP process *is* a constant negotiation of actors' roles, responsibilities and the institutional frames. And in this case study we have seen the importance of expectation management especially, around all of those elements. While the village council and DKK facilitators took most of DKK's VDP design for granted, working group members with less pre-knowledge on those aspects (i.e. the institutional frame) repeatedly challenged those institutions having in mind their own expected and preferred roles in this process. Furthermore, the uncertainty and divergence about the goal and role of the VDP process itself led to the emergence of discussions around decision-making and leadership styles, uncovering the importance of specifying not only functional roles, but also corresponding responsibilities and one's qualities. While in the end the village council was satisfied with the results of the process, part of the working group was very disappointed, not only with the results but also the process itself and how disagreements were handled. This dissatisfaction is half of a possible explanation for the participation paradox. The other half is the insight that participation and commitment are not a constant but have to be built and maintained. The VDP process was designed to support villagers in this process in order to improve the liveability of their village grounded in the diverse visions of its inhabitants that emerged during the very process. However, in this specific case, the VDP design brought more confusion than grip to the working group.

Part of this study's objective was to help the DKK improve their facilitation of the village development projects. It is tempting to suggest simple solutions, for instance elaborating on the group forming at the start of a project so that volunteers can get to know each other. But it is fallacy to think a new/other/better blueprint VDP design will automatically lead to a smoother VDP process where no one gets disappointed. A process design can aim to include all kinds of (group)activities that are necessary or helpful in theory. But one can never know

what a current project needs. And what it needs changes over time as the path evolves and the actors and their expectations with it. We have to accept that we cannot always avoid conflict or “detours”. Because only in hindsight the detour seems such. Because only at the end we know where we stand and that particular outcome was unpredictable at the start. Therefore, it is necessary to critically assess the VDP blueprint itself. The DKK is aware of that, but is also struggling.

Recommendations

Based on the thoughts above, improving the facilitation of VDP processes is not so much about preventing conflict. Instead the aim is to not ignore or silence the conflict, but to deal with the disagreements, misunderstandings and expectations that are the source of it. In other words, it is about encouraging each other to acknowledge the ambiguity, ambivalence and dilemmas and finding agreement on what should be done without unified lifeworlds. In order to acknowledge, one has to be aware first. To support VDP working groups in this, might ask a more proactive attitude of the facilitators. I continue with some suggestions for the DKK that affect the facilitator’s training. I am aware that it is not as easy as “implementing” those. Over decades the DKK developed their way of doing things including the VDP projects and it depends on their capabilities, resources and endurance whether this almost cultural shift is possible, realistic and at all desirable. Some thoughts:

As we have seen the importance of expectation management, it might be wise to start off with an inventory of everyone’s expectations about the project’s goal, results, process, and their own role (based on their qualities) and the role of others including the facilitators and the village council (or any other initiating body). Then, try to find agreement on the process and desired (intermediate) results that accommodate the groups diversity. If necessary, emphasise the importance of engaging with potential collaborators and volunteers from the start and to *keep engaging with them*. Next to that, we have learned it is important to not let starting agreements consolidate. Embracing an evolutionary perspective on VDP processes

can help break with path dependency and remind us to cultivate the practice of frequent reflection and critically assessing the group's actions, expectations and goals. And maybe the most important one: It turned out important to create a safe space for mutual learning and where differences can be expressed respectfully.

On a final note I want to add: For some people joining or facilitating a citizen initiative might only be a hobby but as you can see in this case study, such a project is real work, with the potential for real conflicts that impact the life of all villagers, involved or not, and other associates. Governance can change the way people see each other and their place of living for the better, but also for the worse. Community participation and citizen initiatives are seen as miracle cure that magically solve all kinds of local issues. However, it is hard work and does not always create the hoped for results, because good intentions are not enough.

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