MSc Thesis Research

Citizen forums in local environmental policy making - A comparative analysis between France and the Netherlands

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Today is the day that marks the end of a journey that has been very insightful on a personal and professional point of view. While reflecting on the last six months, it seems that I started researching on citizen participation yesterday... How fascinating is the human brain? Time is faster when you do the things you love!

As said by the political leader and philanthropist Nelson Mandela, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" and I must thank Wageningen University & Research for providing me with an excellent educational background that I will certainly use throughout my personal and professional journey to contribute to a better world.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Kris van Koppen who trusted me and supported me all along this journey. During our meetings, he gave me confidence and trust to successfully write this Msc Thesis. Having the opportunity to study such an interesting topic was a chance and I must thank him for giving me this great opportunity.

Then, I want to thank all the interviewees for their time and the G1000 organization for its precious help.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank my family and friends who gave me their love and support during this process.

Camille Skutnik,
Lasne, May 2022.

ABSTRACT

Citizen participation has taken a central stage in addressing local issues, encouraging citizens' involvement in local policy making and increasing social cohesion within a municipality. This is certainly the case in relation to the environment, in which citizens and public officials collaborate to solve local environmental issues. This research thesis aims to contribute to the citizen participation research by providing insights from local environmental citizen forums taking place in small and medium sized cities (SMCs) in France and in the Netherlands. By analyzing the interplay between citizens, local municipalities, and sometimes external organizations but also the cultural and political variables influencing it, this research provides a cross-cultural and unique understanding of the factors influencing the input, throughput, and output of citizen forums in SMCs. Four environmental citizen forums cases were selected in these two countries that increasingly make use of citizen participation at the local level to solve local environmental issues. The analysis was built upon two analytical frameworks: a citizen participation framework to highlight the impact of citizens in local environmental policy making within a deliberative governance approach and Hofstede's 6-D model to analyze political and cultural differences and between French and Dutch cases. Findings demonstrate that cultural and political factors create strong differences on citizens' impact on local environmental policy making, more favorable towards Dutch cases. As a matter of fact, among the political and cultural variables identified, one particularly stands out in this research: the power distance level of each country. Findings tend to show a relationship between the power distance level and citizens' involvement in local environmental policy making, resulting in a higher impact of citizens on local environmental policy making in situations with a relatively low power distance level. Nevertheless, another variable has been of great importance in this analysis: external organizations. They also play a prominent role in the input, throughput, and output of environmental citizen forums since in some cases they have the authority to determine the power distance level between citizens and public officials. Therefore, this research demonstrates that environmental citizen forums in France and in the Netherlands can not only be explained through a cultural and political lens but also through the strategy used by the external organization.

Key words: *Citizen forums; Local Environmental Governance; Local Municipalities; France; The Netherlands.*

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Source front image: https://www.dreamstime.com/earth-ecology-hand-draw-sustainability-development-world-environmental-concept-green-city-friendly-vector-illustration-image198512246

GLOSSARY

Conseil Aménagement, Urbanisme et Énergie du Val de Marne – CAUE

Environmental Citizen Forum – ECF

European Charter of Local Self-Government – ECLSG

Grand Paris Métropole – GPM

Local Environmental Governance – LEG

Non-Governmental Organization – NGO

Small and medium-sized cities – SMCs

Société du Grand Paris – SGP

Zone à Défendre – ZAD

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Citizen participation in political decisions is a central matter in modern democracy: it corresponds to the ability to identify or select the actors who participate directly in discussions or decisions about public matters (Fung, 2006). A recent body of literature points at declining satisfaction towards governments, stressing the positive effects of opening-up policy processes in order to enhance institutional legitimacy or reactivate citizen responsibilities (Bickerstaff & Walker, 2005; Petts, 2001; OECD, 2001; Aarhus Convention, 1998). At the local level, citizen's involvement in public matters can be translated into a multiplicity of actions such as: local assemblies, citizens 'mini-forums', deliberative polls, planning cells, citizens' juries, and consensus conferences (Sandover et al., 2021). Such ways of involvement serve various purposes such as enhancing the quality of projects, advancing social justice and social capital, or increasing confidence building between citizens (Michels & Binnema, 2018; Putnam, 1993).

This is certainly the case in relation to the environment, where sustainable development at the local level has taken a central stage these last years (Evans, 2004). As a matter of fact, local governments play an important role in contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation because they represent economic and social centers of action and innovation (Reisinger et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2021). In his analysis of Why the Global Environment needs Local Government, Verchick (2003) argues that municipal governments already lead the call for global sustainability by thinking *and* acting locally. Indeed, by organizing 'mini-forums' or 'climate assemblies', local municipalities not only allow weaker actors to voice their opinion and exert a certain influence on outcomes but also create effective policies fitting the local, regional, and national environmental needs (Petts, 2001). These types of public participation fit a deliberative governance approach and correspond to the selection of citizens with the aim of discussing local environmental matters. In doing so, local authorities reinforce the democratic process by combining local expertise and institutional capacity (Evans, 2004).

Citizen forums correspond to a particular type of citizen participation, in which randomly selected citizens are invited by their municipality to discuss public matters. This research will be conducted in two countries that are increasingly making use of citizen forums to deal with local environmental issues: the Netherlands and France. At a national level, the Netherlands have been a precursor in this area with the national citizens' assembly 'burgerforum' (Rovers, 2021). The Dutch government was the first government in the world to organize such a large-

scale national citizen assembly by involving 140 citizens in a public issue (De Jongh, 2013). A similar deliberative democracy initiative has been realized in 2019 by French Prime Minister Edouard Phillipe in response to the yellow jackets' protests. He created the citizen convention for ecological transition – Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat – with the objective of setting new measures to reduce greenhouse gas emission by 40% by 2030 (Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, 2021). At the local level, French and Dutch small and medium-sized cities (SMCs) increasingly make use of citizen forums to include their citizens in environmental policy making, promoting ecological, democratic, and social change.

Nevertheless, the success of citizen forums is not always assured, as demonstrated by the French climate citizen convention that has been labelled as a 'collective failure' by the French public opinion (Le Monde, 2021). Many authors stress the limits of public participation on policy making. Hoppe (2011) defines institutional constraints and practical dilemmas in organizing participatory projects while Michels & de Graaf (2010) highlight the instrumental purpose of public participation rather than the expressive one. Another study states that local municipalities use citizen participation as the means to "change citizens' perceptions without having to change policies or management" (Yetano et al., 2010, p.23). This thesis aims to research whether the involvement of citizens in local environmental policy making through citizen forums has a low, medium, or high impact on local environmental policies, resulting in an instrumentalization, consultation, or cooperation relationship between citizens and their local municipality. A central assumption of this research is that the outcome of the citizen forums is impacted by cultural and political dimensions specific to France and the Netherlands. As a matter of fact, there is still little knowledge regarding the influence of political and cultural factors on the design, implementation, and outcome of citizen forums. Seizing this opportunity, this thesis aims to fill that knowledge gap by researching different case-studies of environmental citizen forums in local municipalities in France and in the Netherlands and analyzing the political and cultural factors influencing them.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION

To determine the impact of citizens on local environmental policy making and the influence of political and cultural factors on the input, throughput, and output of local environmental citizen

forums, the central question of this research is: *What factors, in terms of politics and culture, influence the design, implementation, and outcomes of environmental citizen forums in local municipalities in France and the Netherlands?*

To successfully answer the research question, the format of this research is at follows. The conceptual framework firstly defines the key concepts and presents the two analytical frameworks which guided this research. Secondly, the research design and methodology are presented, followed by the history of the four case studies selected. The next chapter presents and analyzes the results of the cases separately, then confronts them in the comparative analysis. Finally, the discussion highlights remarkable findings and ads to literature by exploring how environmental citizens forums are being impacted by cultural and political factors.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter entails a theoretical description of the key concepts of this research, followed by a participation framework that will be used to differentiate whether citizens have a low, medium, or high impact on local environmental policy making in the case studies selected. A cultural framework is also presented in this section, followed by a review of political and cultural differences between France and the Netherlands to provide an overview of the potential variables influencing the design, implementation, and outcome of the citizen forums cases. Lastly, a framework to analyze environmental citizen forums is presented to understand the general dynamics of ECFs and the factors influencing them.

3.1. Key concepts

3.1.1. Democracy and local environmental governance

The concepts of democracy and governance have a central place in the analysis of citizen forums in local municipalities. In relation to citizen participation, two democratic views must be differentiated: the first one considers citizen participation as a limit to democracy while the second one claims that citizen participation is a central feature of democracy (Michels, 2006).

This research considers citizen participation as a key element of democracy and differentiates four types of democracy: representative, deliberative, participative, and local democracy.

Representative democracy, also known as indirect democracy, is a form of democracy in which citizens elect one citizen as their representative who will in turn, determine the policy for their jurisdiction (Kessler, 2005). Therefore, it corresponds to the election of representatives through representative mechanisms as elections where citizens "use the vote to select and judge representatives" (Urbinati & Warren, 2008, p. 402). In contrast, *deliberative democracy* is a form of direct democracy that provides the opportunity to directly involve citizens in policymaking rather than through representative mechanisms (Ross et al., 2021). This concept is defined by Zgiep (2019) as "a form of government in which people make decisions by means of public deliberation" (p. 1). A similar type of democracy is *participative democracy*, which arose in the sixties as a way for citizens to exert influence on political and bureaucratic decisions (Bherer et al., 2016). This type of democracy has similarities with deliberative democracy since it is also a form of direct democracy that aims to include citizens in political decision making. According to Carson & Elstub (2019), the two concepts differ in practice since participative democracy often favors self-selected participation while deliberative democracy include smaller but representative samples of citizens to obtain in depth and high-quality deliberation. Lastly, *Local democracy* refers to the decentralization of power to democratic institutions at municipal, city, town, and equivalent levels (International IDEA, 2017). Both France and the Netherlands signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ECLSG) in 1985, agreeing to give to citizens "the opportunity of participating effectively in the making of decisions affecting his everyday environment" (ECLSG, 2010, p. 29). The concept of local democracy is intertwined with the concept of Local Environmental Governance (LEG), which is defined by Ayeva (2003) as a process of redefinition of political powers to social actors at the local level. This 'political modernization' results in new conceptions and practices of governance, also creating new relationships between the state, market, and civil society (Arts & van Tatenhove, 2006). Therefore, this research is embedded in a multi-level governance context, corresponding to new forms of governing between different levels of public policy making (ibid). This multi-level governance is framed as 'horizontal' and 'vertical' (OECD, 2009) rather than as 'bottom-up' or 'top-down'. Indeed, there is no dichotomy between these two concepts in local environmental governance: whether a citizen forum is initiated by citizens themselves or by local authorities does not imply that it is part of a bottom-up or a top-down approach. On the contrary, academics prefer to use the term 'vertical' and 'horizontal'

governance to describe the dynamics between the different institutional levels. The vertical dimension corresponds to the collaboration between national governments and the local level to implement effective climate strategies while the horizontal dimension prioritizes cooperation and cross-scale learning between private and public actors at the same level (ibid).

This relocation of politics allocates more freedom and responsibilities to the municipal level for specific areas of governance such as environmental matters. Therefore, by cooperating with a multiplicity of actors at different levels, local authorities create effective environmental policies fitting local issues. Moreover, as stated by Luova in his analysis of local environmental governance and policy implementation, "environmental policies are cross-sectoral by nature" (Luova, 2020, p. 492). He argues that local authorities not only establish local environmental policies but also assist in implementing national and subnational environmental policies (ibid). As a result, by including local expertise and local institutional capacity (Evans, 2004), local authorities are a lever of change that improve the efficiency of regional and national environmental policies by enhancing cooperation at different levels. Local authorities are considered 'competent' to deal with public involvement because they play a vital role in promoting sustainable development to the public (Local Agenda 21, 1993).

3.1.2. Public participation and citizen forums

One way of promoting sustainable development to the public is to include citizens in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, public participation is a deeply political concept, hence a contested one. Multiple views and definitions contrast in academic literature, as shown by Hoppe (2011) who describes participation as a concept that has a 'diffuse' meaning. Public participation within deliberative forum was developed "as a means of encouraging a more active, participating mode of citizenship" (Newman et al., 2004, p. 203). Fung (2006) qualifies mechanisms of popular participation as 'mini-publics' to describe the intention to "gather citizens in discrete bodies to discuss or decide matters of public concern" (p.68). However, Fung's definition does not entail citizens' initiatives since it solely implies that mini-publics are initiated by local authorities. As a matter of fact, public participation can emerge from both the municipalities or from citizens themselves and can be translated into various types of action such as: assemblies, round tables, opinion surveys, stakeholder platforms or citizen forums (Arbter et al., 2007). For instance, multiple citizens initiatives exist such as civil society

organizations that cooperate with their local municipalities, reclaiming their role in managing public assets (Buemi, n.d.).

Within all these different types of mini-publics, an important distinction between stakeholder platforms and citizens forums must be clarified. Even though both concepts are part of a public participation and deliberative democracy approach, they differ in their legitimacy. Stakeholder platforms take place when representatives of specific stakeholder groups or categories are deliberating, which present limits in the citizens' representation. Although a key element of stakeholder's platforms is to attract a diverse and representative crowd, Michels (2017) points out the limited representation by showing that the citizens that decide to attempt are usually already politically active and well-educated.

This thesis solely focuses on citizen forums, which corresponds to the randomized selection of a representative sample of citizens to deliberate on public matters. The four case-studies selected are environmental citizen forums cases, depicted by Sandover et al. as "potentially the most radical and democratically robust" (2021, p. 78) type of mini-public that exist.

3.2. Types of participation in citizen forums

As stated previously, this thesis aims to shed light on the involvement degree of citizens in local environmental policy making by selecting four cases of citizen forums and analyzing the political and cultural factors influencing them. To do so, Yetano et al. (2010) participation framework was used. The authors distinguish three distinct levels of participation: information, consultation, and cooperation. However, participation as information is not taken into consideration in this research since citizen forums correspond to a direct involvement of citizens in the discussion and creation of environmental policies, in line with a deliberative democracy approach. Instead, participation as instrumentalization (Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Yetano et al., 2010) is added to the framework to research whether local municipalities aim to "limit democratic power" (Zgiep, 2019, p.4).

The participation framework below presents the three possible outcomes of the selected cases and will therefore determine which type of participation was fostered during the selected local environmental citizen forum cases in France and in the Netherlands.

Participation as instrumentalization	Participation as consultation	Participation as cooperation
Low impact of citizens	Medium impact of citizens	High impact of citizens
- Justifying political decisions - Disclosing information to narrow legitimacy gap - Complying with legislation	- Adapting local municipalities initiatives to citizens' needs - Learning about citizens' preferences - Improving services	- Fostering citizen influence in environmental policy making - Collaborating with citizen to create the environmental future of the city

Table 1: Participation framework. Source: Yetano et al., 2010; Michels & De Graaf, 2010.

As mentioned in the problem statement, this research assumes that the design, implementation, and outcome of the case-studies will be politically and culturally specific to the selected municipalities in France and in the Netherlands. To that end, a literature review between French and Dutch literature will pre-determine a set of political variables to compare the selected cases. Concerning cultural factors, Hofstede's theory of cultural dimension will be used since planning and management philosophies that are culturally specific to a national culture are not necessarily appropriate in another (Hofstede, 1984). France and the Netherlands' cultural influence on management and planning techniques will be compared through the lens of the 6-D Model developed by Hofstede (Figure 1).

3.3. Political differences

A comprehensive French body of literature points out various political limitations, arguing that public participation faces challenges, ranging from structural to legal constraints. For instance, the ex-minister of the Environment Corinne Lepage (2016) stresses that to enhance public participation in France, it is time to change the existing relationship between the state and civil society and to accept and implement a real decentralization process. Masingue et al. (2016) states that local and regional municipalities face a 'scissor effect' since the 2007 financial crisis: due to the widening of their intervention fields, their expenses are increasing but their budgets

are decreasing while Bherer (2011) mentions the tensions during negotiations on the design of participation, stressing the gap between the observed impact and the initial objective. In studying the impact of local competition on participatory democracy, Anquetin & Cuny (2016) point out that the design of citizen juries is principally oriented towards the political needs of the municipality. Lastly, Blondiaux (2005) stresses the lack of a real legal framework for public participation in France. This legal gap has two major consequences: on the one hand, public participation can be used by local authorities as a label hiding different realities due to the lack of determined objectives and the variability of the concept. On the other hand, public officials face issues of representation and legitimacy without having sufficient political and legal resources to solve those issues, creating confusion and dilemmas in implementing public participation initiatives.

Blondiaux's argument was also developed in Dutch literature by Uittenbroek et al. (2019), who state that there is still unclarity concerning the design of public participation and what objectives are served. Even though the citizen participation debate gained importance in the late 1960s in the Netherlands (Michels, 2006), major actors still discuss different discourses and views about this contested concept. Michels & de Graaf (2010) states that "citizen participation in policy making did not lead to a new division of roles between government and citizens" (p.488) after studying two Dutch cases of citizen participation. According to Michels (2006), politicians are said to be skeptical by showing little interest in interactive policy making. This reinforces the gap between the Dutch state and its citizens, due to the reduction of the state's welfare provision and the decreasing contact with the population (Koster, 2014). The problem exposed is that in theory, every citizen should bridge the gap themselves but in practice, these new spaces of governance require entrepreneurial citizens, which is not always the case (ibid). Indeed, equity issues are a main concern of practitioners since certain neighborhoods may not be well represented in citizen forums (Mees et al., 2019).

Even though the French and Dutch political systems differ by nature – the first one being a semi-presidential system and the second being a constitutional monarchy – the two countries seem to share similar issues while dealing with citizen participation at the local scale. Indeed, even though this section highlights the main differences between current French and Dutch academic literature, it seems that they are in accordance with the fact that there is no legal framework defining, guiding, or regulating the design and implementation of ECFs. This is an important observation that will be addressed in Chapter 8.

3.4. Cultural differences

Although the 6D model developed by Hofstede entails six variables, only three were selected to conduct this research according to their relevance and potential impact on citizen forums: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism.
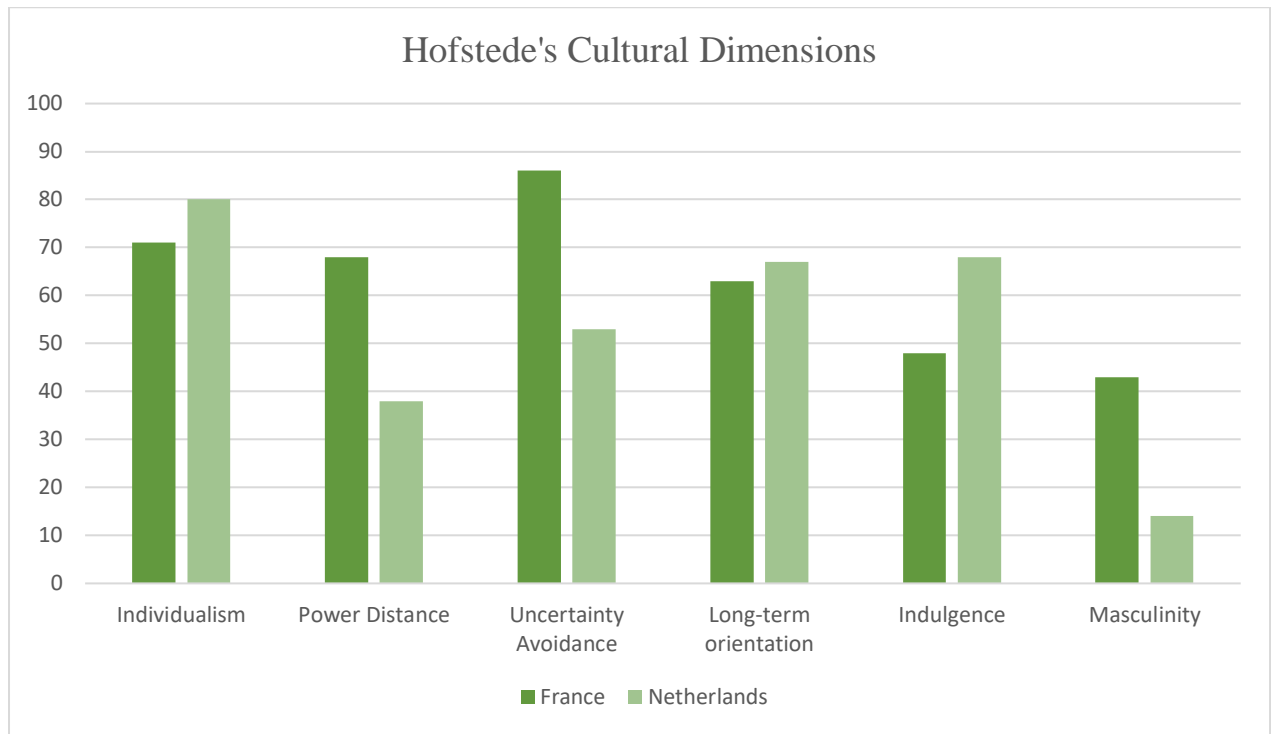

Figure 1: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 2021)

The gap between the French and Dutch power distance might largely influence the outcomes of the citizen forums cases. Hofstede defines power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 2021). This cultural factor might indeed influence the relationship between citizens and their local municipalities in citizen forums since instrumentalization, collaboration, and cooperation relationships are related to the power distance level of the country. France has a higher power distance than the Netherlands, which could potentially imply that the French citizens could have in a less fruitful collaboration with their municipalities. This power distance is cultural but also deeply political and corresponds to a huge difference in the centralization level of the state. Historically, the Netherlands have been a decentralized unitary state since 1848 while the highly centralized French state slowly began

to decentralize its organization in 1981 (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, n.d.; Vie publique, 2019). In the Netherlands, the long tradition of cooperation and consensus building that goes back to the pillarization era (Michels & de Graaf, 2010) explains the fact that more responsibilities are allocated to the regional and local level, which might potentially lead to a more consultative or cooperative relationship between citizens and public officials.

The second cultural factor that could influence the design, implementation and outcome of citizen forums is the uncertainty avoidance, defined as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these" (Hofstede, 2021). Therefore, since the Netherlands has a higher uncertainty avoidance than the French, the agenda-setting and outcome of the citizen forum cases might be culturally impacted. In other words, using an open-agenda and not having a precise topic of deliberation could diminished the political impact of the citizen forum, especially in France (Michels & Binnema, 2018).

Lastly, individualism is defined as "the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members" (Hofstede, 2021). In this research, the individualistic degree of a community can exert an influence on the throughput and outcome of the selected cases since the feeling of belonging to the local community, having a strong social cohesion between citizens, and acting for collective good are essential components of consensus building. This factor represents a central challenge in the organization of an environmental citizen forum since the citizens are from various socio-demographic backgrounds hence have different personal interests in joining the ECF.

3.5. Synthesis and presenting a framework to analyze environmental citizen forums

Figure 2 presents a graphical overview of the functioning of an environmental citizen forum within local environmental policy making. Figure 3 presents a graphical schematic overview of the interplay between the variables presented in the previous Sections 3.3 and 3.4. Lastly, Table 2 presents the main descriptive variables used to analyze the cases.
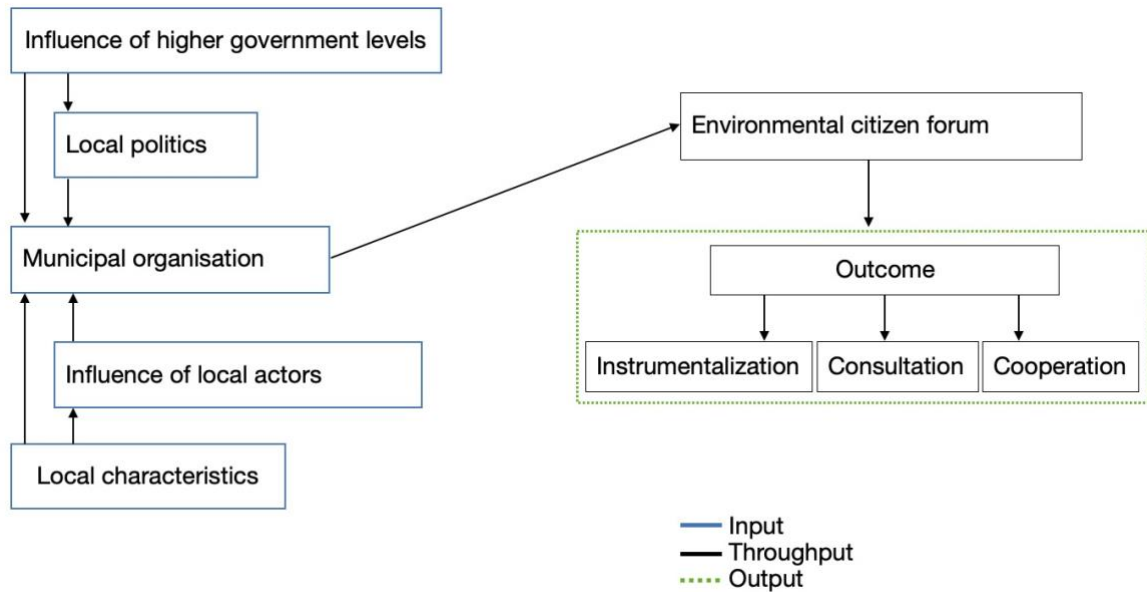
Figure 2: General dynamics of a local environmental citizen forum.

As depicted by Figure 2, higher governments levels can have a direct influence on local politics and on the municipal organization since local environmental policy making is embedded in a multi-governance context in which cooperation between local authorities and higher governments levels is an important feature. On the other hand, local characteristics can also largely influence the municipal organization to create a citizen forum, since citizens themselves can ask local authorities to include them in the environmental policy making process. These local characteristics can also exert an influence on local action arenas, describe by Hoppe et al. as actors trying to pursue their individual interests, "each having their own agendas, frames, resources, and forming coalitions with other actors to meet their goals" (Hoppe et al., 2016, p.6).

In this research, Hoppe's 'local action arena' becomes 'local actors' which are characterized by local inhabitants, local environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other associations formed by local actors having their own goals. As a result, these four variables – directly or indirectly – influence the municipal organization that oversees the environmental citizen forum, which will in turn have an effect on the three possible levels of citizens' involvement: instrumentalization, consultation, or cooperation.
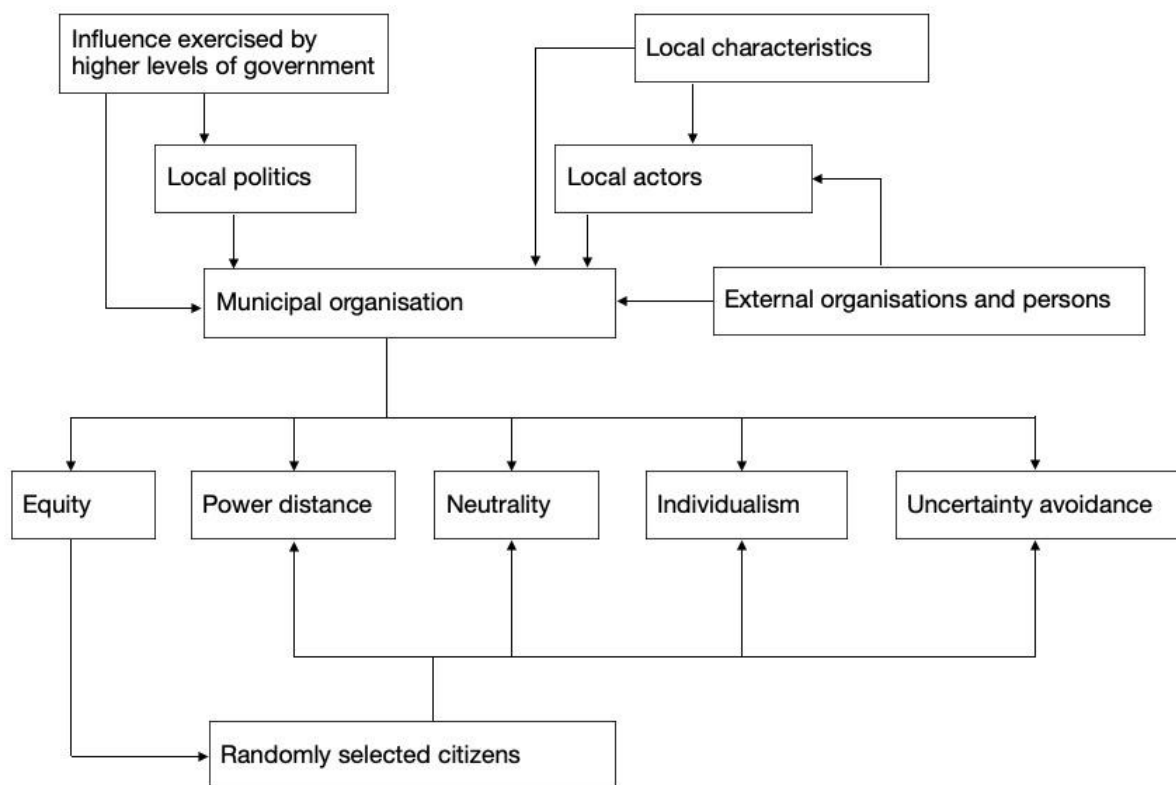
Figure 3: Factors influencing citizen forums.

As depicted in Figure 3, the municipal organization must deal with 5 main factors while designing and implementing a citizen forum: *equity*, *power distance*, *neutrality*, *individualism* and lastly, *uncertainty avoidance*.

Equity and representativity are a central challenge in designing a citizen forum. According to Bherer (2011), there are five selection mechanisms that exist, but this thesis solely focuses on cases in which citizens were randomly selected or drew by lot in order to have a 'mirror representativity' based on specific requirements.

Power distance is directly linked to the relationship between local authorities and citizens, as described in Section 3.4. The power distance level will influence the outcome of the citizen forum but also the quality of the deliberations.

Neutrality is essential in organizing a successful citizen forum since recent scholars pointed that the instrumentalized purpose of these forums, as described in Section 1. Since citizens recommendations are most of the time non-binding, the neutrality of the process will ensure

that the municipality is not using the citizen forum to manipulate its citizens' perception (Yetano et al., 2010).

Individualism is directly linked to the neutrality of the citizen forum since the local organizations and the selected citizens often face situations in which there are various conflict of interests. Since the aim is to find a common solution for the collective good, an interest-free dialogue is therefore essential for the success of the forum.

Uncertainty avoidance, as described in Section 3.4 has an influence on citizen participation since participants might "feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity" (Hofstede, 2021). Therefore, the municipal organization in charge of the citizen forum must be transparent in designing and implementing the forum to keep the citizens informed of the process and results of the deliberations.

Moreover, external organizations and persons can collaborate with the municipality in designing and/or implementing the citizen forums. As a matter of fact, the municipal organization of the environmental citizen forum (ECF) can hire external organizations or collaborate with external organizations or persons such as specialized companies in deliberative democracy or environmental experts for two major reasons. Firstly, both the lack of a specific legal framework and the lack of council members dedicated to public participation in SMCs result in a complicated task for the municipality. That is why specialized organizations in public participation can support the municipality in structuring the citizen forum. Besides, environmental experts can intervene if the citizens lack specific knowledge on specific matters. Secondly, hiring an external actor brings neutrality to the citizen forum, which is a factor of great importance since some citizens can be reluctant in joining a citizen forum. In this research, non-participation is linked to the individualistic level of a society and the uncertainty avoidance of the citizens, as described in Section 3.4. External organizations and persons can also directly influence the local actors since in some cases, an NGO can have an interest in a project, hence can collaborate with local citizens to create an opposition or a support from local actors.

The following table represents the key descriptive variables that will be used in comparing the selected municipalities. Clusters I to IV correspond to the design of the cases, while cluster V and VI respectively deal with the implementation and outcome of the cases.

Cluster I: Municipal organization

Financial resources (2022)	Total financial resources of the municipality for 2022.
Council members	Number of council members.
Citizen participation council	Council members dedicated to citizen participation
Number of inhabitants (2019)	Number of inhabitants in 2019.

Cluster II: Local Action and Supra Networks

Participatory practices in the municipality	Participatory practices in the municipality before the ECF.
Local environmental NGOs	Presence of local environmental organizations.
Collaborative ties with other local governments	Yes/No.
Membership of climate change issue network(s)	Yes/No.

Cluster III: Political factors

Legal framework for public participation	Yes/No.
Level of responsibility at the local level	High, medium, or low.

Cluster IV: Design of the environmental citizen forum

Selection process	Randomly selected/Selected according to equity criteria.
Number of members	Number of members.

Cluster V: Implementation of the environmental citizen forum

Total amount of meetings	
Involvement of external parties	Yes/No.
Number of propositions formulated	

Cluster VI: Outcome

Number of propositions accepted by the municipal council	

Table 2: Descriptive variables.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, a detailed description of the cases selection, data collection and data analysis is presented. This research design encompasses four cases: two in France and two in the Netherlands.

4.1. Case Selection

The analysis draws upon 13 interviews of citizens and public officials in 4 municipalities, conducted between February and May 2022. Four cases have been selected, both located in France and the Netherlands. The different municipalities have been selected according to 5 main criteria: the location, the inhabitants' number, the type of mini-public, the selection process, and the environmental focus of the citizen forum. As a matter of fact, the cases only correspond to citizen forums dealing with environmental matters in small and medium-sized cities (SMCs). SMCs were selected using Desmarais' analysis to differentiate small, medium, and large cities for academic researchers. Since more academic research on public participation in SMCs is needed, only municipalities with less than 200,000 inhabitants have been selected since it is "the category in which most urban citizens actually live" (Desmarais, 1984; Hoppe et al., 2011, p.2). The cases can be found in Table 3.

Project title	Municipality – Country	Number of inhabitants Source: INSEE	Project year
Jury citoyen, éco-quartier de la gare	Cachan – France	30 433 (2015)	2021
Quel avenir pour le quartier des Vaîtes ?	Besançon – France	116 676 (2015)	2021
G1000Heerenveen	Heerenveen – Netherlands	50 257 (2019)	2019
G1000Steenwijkerland	Steenwijkerland – Netherlands	43 940 (2019)	2017

Table 3: Case-studies

4.2. Data collection

Data used in this study is qualitative, it concerns literature review, analysis of policy documents and in depth-interviews. The literature review helped to understand global dynamics of citizen forum and identify a list of potential cultural and political variables that could influence these dynamics. A text analysis of official documents from the municipalities such as reports (if available) was also realized to compare the desired outcomes of the project to the interviews' outcomes. This text analysis aimed to find out if there was a gap between the indented and final outcome of the selected cases, resulting in an instrumentalization, consultation or cooperation relationship between citizens and public officials. Online ethnography of both the municipalities' and organizations' websites was also realized to gather factual data about the ECFs. Moreover, for each of the four municipality, at least 3 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from the case studies. Participants include at least one public official from the different local municipality, one citizen who was selected for the citizen forum, and if it is the case, one member of the external organization that designed and/or implemented the citizen forum. In depth interviews aimed to highlight the dynamics between the municipalities and their citizens during local environmental policy making and the different political and cultural factors influencing them. Semi-structured interviews were chosen in order to be able to guide the interviewee but also consider the fact that additional questions will probably come spontaneously during the interviews (Langkos, 2014). The list of interviewees and an example of the questionnaire used in various interviews can be found in ANNEX 1 and ANNEX 2.

4.3. Data analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data collected during the interviews draws upon 3 analytical frameworks. Firstly, Table 2 is used to provide an overview of the findings by comparing the four cases using descriptive variables. Secondly, Yetano et al. participation framework (Table 1) differentiates whether citizen forums cases correspond to a consultation, cooperation, or instrumentalization relationship between the local municipalities and the citizens, resulting in a low, medium, or high impact of citizens on local environmental policy making. Lastly, the qualitative data collected will be analyzed through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions framework and the political and cultural differences identified in Sections 3.3 and 3.4. in order to provide a cross-cultural analysis of the selected cases.

4.4. Limitations

Public participation is a vast concept that can be applied in different contexts, that is why this study solely focuses on environmental citizen forums. A major struggle was to find similar environmental cases of citizen forums in SMCs in France and in the Netherlands that deal with environmental matters. Numerous potential case-studies for this research were still in an early stage, hence impossible to draw conclusion on the outcomes. Another issue in the case-study selection was that numerous citizen forums were not dealing with environmental issues. Therefore, a possible consequence is a selection bias, that is why, given the scarcity of the cases, the results of this research are contextual to the municipalities selected and cannot be generalized to regional or national cases in France and in the Netherlands.

5. CASE STUDIES HISTORY

5.1. The municipality of Cachan

Located in the Val-de-Marne County in the suburbs of Paris, the municipality of Cachan (A) set up a citizen jury to design the future green neighborhood next to the train station. The project emerged after the decision of extending the Parisian subway directly to the municipality in 2011. Local authorities estimated that approximatively 14,000 passengers will travel through the future Arcueil-Cachan train station during peak period, resulting in an urging need to design a new sustainable neighborhood with green infrastructures. The future neighborhood is mainly focusing on four major points: low-carbon mobility; energy and low-carbon strategy; development of nature in the city; comfort and health (Site officiel de la ville de Cachan, 2022). In collaboration with public officials and the Conseil Aménagement, Urbanisme et Énergie du Val de Marne (CAUE), the main mission of this citizen forum was to rate 10% of the best project. The citizen forum had 15 members: 8 randomly selected citizens and 7 citizens representatives of deliberative bodies in the city such as neighborhood councils or merchant associations. The main objective was to enhance local democracy by giving the citizens the opportunity to express their ideas about the design of the new neighborhood and therefore chose the project that best suit their needs (ibid).

5.2. The municipality of Besançon

The municipality of Besançon (B) is located in eastern France, in the Bourgogne-Franche Comté county. Initially, the project of the Vaîtes neighborhood has been introduced in 2005 by the municipal council and has been launched in 2016 by the ex-Mayor of the city with the goal of building more than 1,000 homes to develop affordable housing prices within the city. However, this idea has been lively contested by citizens and local actors such as environmental NGOs, resulting in violent protests between local authorities and residents. Therefore, the new Mayor Anne Vignot decided to organize a citizen jury to convert the Vaîtes neighborhood into a green and sustainable neighborhood respecting climate change, local erosion, and the wishes of the residents. The main objective of this forum was to create a new neighborhood adapted to social, demographic, and local environmental issues. To do so, an online consultation was launched in a first time to give all the citizens the opportunity to express their ideas and wishes for the future neighborhood. In a following time, 50 citizens were randomly selected to provide recommendations on the design of the Vaîtes neighborhood, creating the citizen forum. This forum was realized in collaboration with the external organization Respublica, which has been hired by the municipality to structure and implement the forum.

5.3. The municipality of Steenwijkerland

The municipality of Steenwijkerland (C) is located in the Overijssel province, in the east of the Netherlands. In 2013, the municipality passed a motion with the goal of covering household energy consumption with energy sources within the municipality. This plan was revised three years later since consensus building was hard to reach due to numerous stakeholders pursuing their individual interests. That is why in 2017, the municipality launched in collaboration with the G1000.nu platform a citizen forum to discuss how the municipality could become energy neutral. By following the G1000 method, an invitation was first sent to 7,000 randomly selected citizens and a total of 275 citizens accepted the invitation. With a focus on energy transition and local democracy, the municipality of Steenwijkerland gathered citizens, politicians, employers, civil servants, and experts to jointly discuss how to reach an energy neutral city. Gathered in small groups, participants discussed and formulated several proposals during various sessions answering one question: *why is energy neutrality important for Steenwijkerland?*

5.4. The municipality of Heerenveen

Located in the Friesland province in the Netherlands, the municipality of Heerenveen (D) counts approximatively 50,250 inhabitants. Following the 2018-2022 council agreement that aimed to enhance new forms of local deliberative democracy within the municipality, a citizen forum was initiated in 2019 by the mayor Tjeerd van der Zwan in collaboration with the G1000.nu platform. More than 300 residents of the city were invited to participate to this citizen forum that aimed to create a more hospitable city center for Heereveen. The participants were asked to answer one question: *what do the inhabitants of the city of Heerenveen think is important for their center?* Citizens, council members and entrepreneurs jointly investigated how the future of their city can be improved, considering a sustainable point of view to revitalize the center of Heerenveen. During several months, participants discussed and formulated several proposals for a future-proof center following the framework created by the G1000 platform.
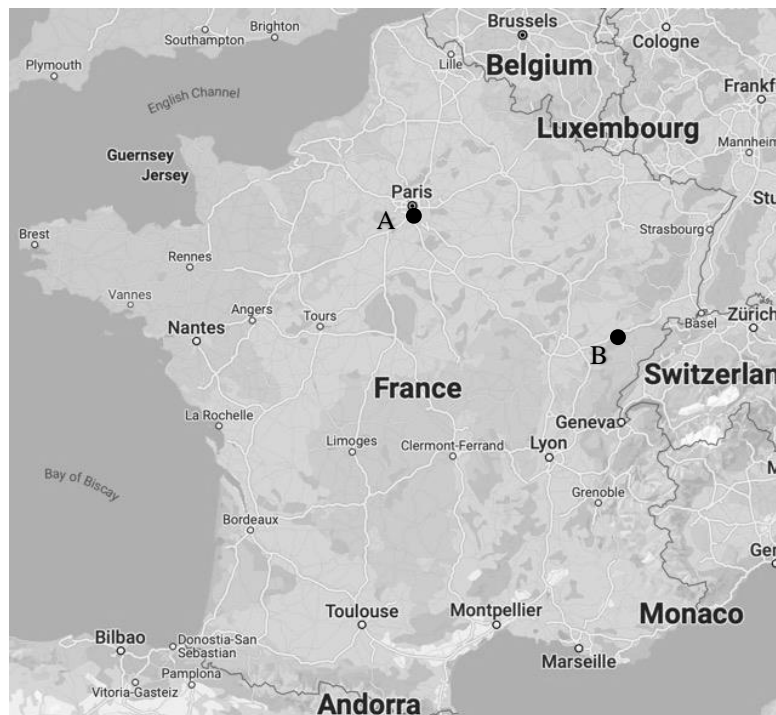
Map 1: French municipalities of Cachan and Besançon (Google, 2022)

Map 2: Dutch municipalities of Steenwijkerland and Heerenveen (Google, 2022)

6. RESULTS

After presenting a general overview of the results in Table 4, this section presents the data gathered throughout the research. For each municipality, the data collected is divided in three distinct parts corresponding to the input, throughput, and output phases of the ECFs.

6.1. Overview of the case studies

Cluster I: Municipal organization	Cachan	Besançon	Steenwijkerland	Heerenveen
Financial resources	78M€	202M€	134M€	185M€
Council members	39	55	27	31
Citizen participation councilors	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Number of inhabitants	31, 819	117,912	43,940	50,257

Cluster II: Local Action and Supra Networks

Participatory practices	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local environmental NGOs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Collaborative ties with other local governments for the ECF	No	No	No	No
Membership of climate change issue network(s)	No	No	No	No

Cluster III: Political factors

Legal framework for public participation	No	No	No	No
Level of responsibility at the local level	Medium	High	High	High

Cluster IV: Design of the environmental citizen forum

Selection process	Randomly selected from electoral lists following equity criteria	Randomly selected from electoral lists following equity criteria	Lottery	Lottery
Number of members	15	50	275	400

Cluster V: Implementation of the environmental citizen forum

Total amount of meetings	11	3	3 phases including numerous meetings	3 phases including numerous meetings
Involvement of external parties	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of propositions formulated	0	1	21	51

Cluster VI: Outcome

Number of propositions accepted by the municipal council	0	0	13	47

Table 4: Results of main descriptive variables.

This table provides an overview of the results of case-studies according to the main descriptive variables, but also highlights similarities and differences between the four cases. The following section draws upon elements of Table 4 and presents the results of each case separately.

6.1.1. The municipality of Cachan

Input

The municipality of Cachan is part of the Grand Paris Métropole (GPM), which includes 131 municipalities located next to the French capital, for a total of 7,2 million inhabitants. The GPM is a public establishment of intermunicipal cooperation that aims to improve the living environment of its inhabitants and to develop a sustainable urban, social, and economic model (Vie Publique, 2022). The GPM launched a project named the Grand Paris Express, which includes the construction of 4 new subway lines and the extension of the subway line 15. The overall project will gradually be brought into service between 2024 and 2030 (Société du Grand Paris, 2022). In order to supervise the project, the Société du Grand Paris (SGP) was created in 2010.

Cachan will be directly impacted by this project since the city is part of the GPM and will benefit from the extension of the subway line. Therefore, the municipality decided to build a new sustainable neighborhood around the future train station of Arcueil-Cachan respecting the Écoquartier label (sustainable neighborhood label). The new sustainable train station project was launched in collaboration with the SGP, which manages the overall project of the Grand Paris Express. The future neighborhood represents approximatively 30,500 square meters and will include five zones next to the train station: housing units, shops, a hotel, space dedicated to tertiary activities such as offices or co-working spaces and undefined space. ANNEX 3 presents the five different zones and the scope of the future sustainable neighborhood while ANNEX 4 shows the localization of the future train station.

More than 300 companies presented plans to the municipality for this project but the municipality of Cachan and the Société du Grand Paris together pre-selected four of the offers. In 2017, the SGP began construction work by supervising the urban planning and implementation while the municipality of Cachan oversaw the organization of a citizen forum to create the future sustainable neighborhood. Since this future train station includes the subway line 15 which serves 22 municipalities part of the GPM and will affect the daily lives of more

than 95,000 inhabitants, both the municipality and the SGP decided to include local inhabitants in the design of the future neighborhood around the train station.

To put the citizens in a central stage in the decision-making process, the municipality opened 'the house of the project' in 2012 and asked 300 citizens to answer a questionnaire to prioritize their wishes and needs for this new neighborhood. Five workshops were also held on various topics related to the project. Between 2016 and 2019, a first consultation phase was organized with more than 150 citizens. Ten strategic points were developed by the inhabitants: developing green continuities, ensuring cycling continuity, promoting social cohesion, reinforcing acoustic comfort, establishing urban agriculture, ensuring conviviality, supporting local businesses, regulating the place of the car, guaranteeing pedestrian safety, and lastly, guaranteeing a resilient architecture (Ville de Cachan, 2022). In 2021, 36 inhabitants also participated to a 'visual survey' under the form of a documentary of approximatively 25 minutes. This initiative was realized to better understand citizens expectations for the project. After all these different concertation incentives, the municipality set up a citizen jury in May 2021 to reflect on all the challenges of the future green neighborhood and attribute 10% of the overall score that can be divided for each of the four projects.

In this case, the municipal organization of Cachan entirely designed and implemented the ECF without hiring an external organization. Local actors did not foster the creation of this forum since it was the municipality's will to include them in this project. Nevertheless, the Société du Grand Paris and the ÉcoQuartier label can be considered as higher government levels that played a role in the input. Indeed, even though the Société du Grand Paris was not directly involved in the design of the citizen forum, the company kept track of the different stages of the deliberative concertation and voted for the final project. On the other hand, the ÉcoQuartier label is a national incentive that was created by the French ministry of Ecological Transition. It consists in signing the charter and building the project in collaboration with external experts who identify the strong and weak points of the project, which means that the municipality of Cachan had to respect certain criteria to obtain the label.

Throughput

The citizen jury for the new neighborhood is composed of 15 members. The municipality invited all the citizens to register online if they wanted to participate to a citizen jury to help designing the future sustainable neighborhood. In total, 90 citizens registered and 8 were drew

by lot following certain criteria such as gender and age to create a 'certain representativity' of the citizens (Interviewee 5). The other 7 participants are members of representative bodies of the city that were invited to participate by the municipality. Inviting local associations such as shopkeepers' associations aimed to make sure that the future neighborhood will not compete with the actual city center and to make sure that the interests of all citizens were represented. To avoid conflict of interests, the municipality asked the members to sign a sworn statement stipulating that they had no direct or indirect conflict of interest linked to the project.

The citizen forum consists in different activities and meetings such as urban walks, meetings, or visits of other sustainable neighborhoods. An online platform was created to allow the 15 members to keep track of all the meetings and discussions but also to interact with each other outside of the official meetings. At the end of every session, the agenda for next session was set. According to a council member, having a precise agenda was "fundamental" to define precise meeting objectives (Interviewee 5). Despite the precise agenda-setting, the citizens had the opportunity to choose themes and experts that could intervene during the various sessions. As mentioned by a council member, the participants chose the themes biodiversity in urban areas and noise pollution in order to deepen their knowledge. The municipality also organized a visit of another sustainable neighborhood located in Bagneux. During all the deliberative journey, council members dedicated to citizen participation and two urban architects from the association CAUE94 (Conseil Aménagement, Urbanisme et Énergie du Val de Marne) accompanied the citizens throughout the process to answer scientific questions and provide relevant knowledge about urban planning and management.

Output

The citizen jury attributed their final note on the 19 of March 2022. Overall, the project has been a real success and increased social cohesion within the participants. As described by a council member, it brought "the individual to the collective" and created a real social cohesion between the participants (Interviewee 5). A citizen qualified the forum as "a positive lobbying for collective good" stressing the fact that this urban operation was a strategic one (Interviewee 9). In terms of output, the relationship between the participants and the municipality can be seen as twofold. On the one hand, citizens impact could be characterized as limited since the municipality and the Société du Grand Paris already pre-selected four projects beforehand and can still modify the project chosen by the citizen forum before obtaining the construction permit. This could be seen as a justification of political decision, which corresponds to an

instrumentalization relationship. Furthermore, the municipality selected two architects from the CAUE organization to answer citizens' questions, but the neutrality of these experts could be subject to further research. Nevertheless, by giving the citizens 10% of the final vote, the municipality aimed to include the participants in the real decision-making process, which was very successful since the inhabitants of the city felt "represented and respected", as mentioned by a participant (ibid). This project allowed both the municipality and the citizens to cooperate for the collective good in a collaborative way. For the municipality, it helped to understand better citizens' expectations for the future neighborhood and to deliver a high-quality sustainable project adapted to local needs. For the participants, various positive aspects were mentioned during the interviews such as the importance of having a fruitful dialogue with other members of the forum, but also with public officials. In 2021, the municipality of Cachan won a participation and consultation trophy organized by the media Gazette des communes, specialized in local public policies: the municipality obtained the maximum score of four stars for its citizen initiative.

6.1.2. The municipality of Besançon

Input

The project of renovating the Vaîtes neighborhood has been a conflictual case for the municipality of Besançon. Located at the north-east of the city, the Vaîtes neighborhood represents approximatively 34 hectares in which local inhabitants traditionally used to grow vegetables. The municipal council voted in favor of a renovation project in 2011 and started the construction work in 2019. The main objective of this project was to rebalance the urban development of the city in the eastern part and to provide affordable opportunities for housing for local inhabitants (Ville de Besançon, 2022). The project consisted in building 1150 housing units on 7.3 hectares respecting strong environmental requirements (ibid).

Nevertheless, the municipality was forced to halt the work by the prefecture of the Doubs and by the Administrative Court few months after the start of the project because local actors officially contested the project by filing a law case against the municipality and protesting in the streets, but also by illegally occupying the zone and creating a 'Zone à Défendre (ZAD)' (Zone to defend). In this case, six local environmental NGOs (Le jardin des Vaîtes, Les Vaîtes, Alternatiba, France Nature Environnement, Extinction Rebellion and Agir pour la Biodiversité)

contested the project. These NGOs argued that the municipality wanted to "destroy the habitat of protected animal species" (Association les Vaîtes, 2022).

The local actors and higher levels of governments had a strong influence in the creation of this citizen forum. Indeed, since the project was already approved and launched by the municipal council, it is only because the local actors filed a law case against it that a solution had to be found. That is why the new Mayor Anne Vignot decided to organize a citizen forum to re-establish the dialogue between the local actors and the municipality.

Throughput

To resolve this political and legal conflict, the idea of an environmental citizen forum was introduced by the new mayor Anne Vignot and in January 2021, the municipal council voted in favor of having a deliberative approach to solve the conflict. To effectively design and implement it, the municipality of Besançon hired the company ResPublica, who was entirely in charge of organizing, structuring, and implementing the forum. As a result, the municipality played a minor role in its own citizen forum. For instance, council members were not present during the different meetings and did not interact with the citizens. The major reason mentioned by a council member to explain this lack of involvement from the municipality was that the company had "a real expertise" and it helped to bring a "strong neutrality and credibility to the process" (Interviewee 2). Indeed, since this citizen forum aimed to resolve a conflict between the municipality and the local actors, the municipality wanted to have a completely neutral position and to empower the citizens to design the future Vaîtes neighborhood.

To obtain transparency and neutrality, 12 independent experts were asked to write a report about the Vaîtes neighborhood situation. This groupe d'études de l'environnement et du climat (environment and climate study group) was in charge of reporting information form a scientific point of view (ibid). The municipality only chose the person in charge of creating this panel of 12 experts but did not have any contact with the experts. The report was published on the municipality website in March 2021 and was accessible to all the citizens. In a second time, an online consultation was launched on the platform J'enParle, created by ResPublica, to give all the citizens the opportunity to express their wishes and expectations for the Vaîtes neighborhood.

Then, the citizen forum was created. The municipality sent 12,000 invitations based on electoral lists and based on positive answers, the municipality removed people that had potential conflict of interests such as ex-politicians or members of local environmental NGOs to select 50 participants representative of the city of Besançon. The participants were selected according to five main criteria: age, gender, level of education, geographical zone, and relationship to housing (Interviewee 3). These different criteria were selected by both the municipality and Respublica, which also divided the number of participants according to the number of inhabitants per neighborhood for equity reasons (Interviewee 11). Three sessions of one day each were organized, to answer the question: *What are your recommendations for the future of Les Vaîtes? Under what conditions do you think your recommendations could be implemented?*

The first day was an information day in which several participants that had a direct or indirect link to the original project were invited to share their opinion and to answer citizens' questions. These participants were citizens involved in the local action arena, independent experts, consultants, or ex-council members. The second session was divided in two parts: in the morning, the six local environmental NGOs were invited to share their arguments while in the afternoon, the experts who published the scientific report came to clarify scientific issues. The last session was a debate between the participants to define and write a final proposition. Most of the sessions started as plenary assemblies and then the citizens were asked to form small groups of 5-6 to discuss and share ideas. These plenary assemblies created difficulties for some of the participants, who dropped out of the citizen forum, as mentioned by a council member. The 3 sessions were entirely supervised and led by four employees of Respublica, who were in charge of setting the agenda in collaboration with the municipality (Interviewee 11).

Output

The municipality successfully organized a citizen forum and re-build a new dialogue between the local actors and council members. Indeed, this citizen forum helped the municipality to learn about citizens' preferences and to adapt the Vaîtes project to their needs. Nevertheless, the outcome is only partly based on the preference of the participants since the option preferred by the citizens was still modified by the municipality, which changed the location of several building zones (ANNEX 5). As mentioned by an employee from Respublica, "it was clear from the beginning that the municipality was not going to hand over all the power and that the proposal would be subject to modifications" (Interviewee 11).

Therefore, the relationship between Besançon and its citizens is a consultation relationship. The original project voted in 2011 did not correspond to the needs of the citizens and the organization of a citizen forum helped the municipality to learn about citizen's preferences and to partially adapt the project to citizen's needs. Even though the municipal council voted in favor of another project plan, the citizen forum successfully achieved its main goal: re-establishing the broken dialogue between the municipality and its inhabitants. By hiring the external company Respublica, the city Besançon organized a completely transparent and neutral citizen forum and created a sustainable project resolving local socio-demographic and environmental issues. However, the administrative court still needs to pronounce the result of its decision, so the actual renovation work is still pending.

6.1.3. The municipality of Steenwijkerland

Input

In 2013, the city council passed a motion stating that by 2020, all household energy consumption would be generated from the municipality itself. However, this ambitious and sustainable plan could not be achieved because it was heavily relying on the fermentation of biomass and manure and because it received a large opposition from local residents (G1000Steenwijkerland, 2018; Interviewee 12). Finding new solutions to achieve this goal was therefore needed for the municipality, which considered using other sources of energy such as solar meadows or windmills (ibid). The discussions involved various stakeholders with different interests resulted in a complicated task for the municipality. Therefore, after signing a partnership agreement with the G1000 platform, the municipality of Steenwijkerland organized a citizen forum to answer the question: *how can Steenwijkerland become energy-neutral?*

From November 18, 2017, to April 7, 2018, the municipality of Steenwijkerland held a citizen forum in order to find solutions to make the city center energy-neutral and to let the citizens decide what is important for them. According to council members, the goal was to include all the citizens in local environmental and climate matters to raise awareness but also "to think about the way we can work on this ambition together" (Interviewee 8; Interviewee 13).

Throughput

The G1000 method is a methodology that consists in three distinct but consecutive phases: the citizens' summit, the citizens' forum and lastly, the citizens' assembly (OECD, 2020). These

three phases result in the citizen's decision, which will later be presented and voted by the municipal council.

The first phase is the citizen summit, which took place in the sports hall of the city in November 2017. Out of 7,000 invitations sent to citizens more than 275 citizens accepted the invitation and participated to the forum. During the entire day, citizens, local professionals, entrepreneurs, and politicians were gathered to engage a dialogue and formulate ideas together. As mentioned in the official report, the aim was to gather the whole system in the room, corresponding to all the actors involved in the community. To generate a powerful impact, the G1000 asked the municipality of Steenwijkerland two things: to accept their autonomy by signing a partner agreement and to take seriously the results of the citizen forum. As a matter of fact, the G1000 methodology was designed as a power free dialogue arena in order to connect the lifeworld to the system world, a theory developed by the German philosopher Habermas, which respectively corresponds to the citizens and the political world (Interviewee 1). To obtain this power-free dialogue, the G1000 platform followed six principles: equality, drawing lots, dialogue, autonomy, transparency, and safety. After gathering the citizens in small groups for the morning, the G1000 asked three questions to all the participants: *why energy-neutral is important*, *what needs to happen to make Steenwijkerland energy neutral* and *how can you contribute to this*. The important points identified in the morning were used to set the agenda for the afternoon, in which participants were gathered in small groups – one for each theme – to make a proposal. After the presentations of the different proposals and a vote for the best 10 proposals, participants were asked to sign up for the next phase: the citizen forum.

The citizen forum phase is purely based on voluntarism from the participants and consists in 9 workshops and 3 supporting workshops. Each workshop had a theme and was designed to translate the ideas from the first phase into concrete ideas. All ideas and proposals were shared on an online platform specifically created for the G1000. To support the workshops, three specific workshops were organized to share insights and ideas with local experts or to prepare for the final presentation and discussion of the proposal. During the entire process, participants were gathered in small groups to discuss their ideas and wishes for the sustainable future of the city. On April 7, 2018, the final citizen assembly took place chaired by the Mayor of Steenwijkerland, Rob Bats. During this assembly, participants jointly discussed how Steenwijkerland could become energy-neutral by presenting the 21 proposals formulated during the first and second phases.

Output

Out of the 21 proposals, 13 were adopted by the municipal council without any modification. This high citizen impact on local environmental policy making results from a cooperative relationship between local authorities and the citizens, who had a fruitful dialogue together. Indeed, during almost three-quarters of a year, the citizens selected discussed, debated, and designed the energetic future of their city. A public official mentioned the that the conversation between all the participants was "very good" and that more people wanted to contribute to make Steenwijkerland energy-neutral (Interviewee 13). Therefore, by combining local needs, local expertise and local politics, the municipality of Steenwijkerland and the G1000 platform successfully gave a voice to local citizens to design an energy neutral city.

6.1.4. The municipality of Heerenveen

Input

The city council of Heerenveen signed a 2018-2022 agreement, dedicated to enhancing new forms of local democracy in the municipality. According to a council member, it is "the citizens of the community who sent a letter to ask for more influence [in the decision-making process]" (Interviewee 6). Therefore, in 2019, the municipality of Heerenveen collaborated with the G1000 organization to organize a forum to 'revitalize' the city center. After sending 7,000 invitations to randomly selected local inhabitants, numerous citizens responded positively to join the citizen forum. In total, more than 300 inhabitants came to spend the day discussing the future of their city for the G1000Heerenveen. One question was asked to all the participants: *What do you think is important for the future of the center?*

Furthermore, local entrepreneurs also wanted to join the talk so the G20 was created in order to gather ideas for the city center from these local entrepreneurs, with the same goal of creating an attractive and hospitable center for visitors (HKB & IXIN, 2019). Even though the city of Heerenveen does not count any local environmental NGOs, the citizens and entrepreneurs answered positively and were aware of environmental issues that were happening in the region, that is why sustainability was important to them. According to interviewee 6, the citizens of the city are "very active" because "around 80% of citizens are involved in a way or another to the municipality" (Interviewee 6).

It is the municipality that directly asked the G1000 organization to organize the forum. This imply that the municipality signed a partner agreement, agreeing to the three G1000 values: autonomy, quality, and connectedness. This is closely related to transparency, an essential feature of every citizen forum according to a G1000 member. As mentioned previously for the G1000Steenwijkerland, the G1000.nu platform has a whole methodology already in place, so the municipality has no saying in the design and implementation of the forum. Consequently, council members became actors of the forum rather than organizers since they participated to the different workshops organized by the G1000 to discuss with their citizens and to identify what was important for revitalizing the city center of Heerenveen.

Throughput

As mentioned above, the G1000 model is a whole methodology itself consisting in three phases: the citizens' summit, the citizens' forum, and the citizens' assembly. After these three phases the citizens' decree is presented and voted by the municipal council.

The first phase of the G1000Heerenveen began with the citizens' summit in February 2019, in which all the invited inhabitants were gathered to discuss and generate ideas to make the city center more hospitable. In one session, more than 250 ideas were generated by all the participants. Based on voluntarism, all the citizens were invited to continue working in small groups with the ideas generated during the first phase: this is the beginning of the second phase, the citizen forum. For 2 months, citizens are gathered to transform ideas into plans. To do so, citizens are completely free: there is an open-agenda, experts can be asked by citizens to intervene, and most importantly a 'power-free dialogue' is established between the citizens and the municipality. As mentioned by an organizer from the G1000 platform, the main objective is to let the citizens decide what is important for them and the means to achieve this goal is to establish a power-free dialogue. Lastly, the citizens' assembly gathered all the participants to assist to a presentation of the plans formulated during the citizens' forum. Together, all the participants choose the most important points and creates the citizens' decree. A monitoring group was formed the same day to make sure that the municipality respects the citizens' vision. The local entrepreneurs part of the G20 also presented their vision of the city center.

In November 2019, the final version combining the citizens' decree and the G20 vision was presented to the municipal council and 47 propositions were voted in favor. There is still a

monitoring group of 11 persons that make sure that the propositions are understood and respected by the municipality.

Output

According to a council member dedicated to citizen participation in Heerenveen, the "output [of the G1000Heerenveen] was higher than expected". Out of 51 proposals, 47 were voted in favor by the municipal council, which has been considered as a real success by all the stakeholders of the forum: the citizens, politicians, and members of the G1000. This forum resulted in a high impact of local citizens on environmental policy making, since almost 92% of the propositions formulated during the first and second phase of the G1000 method have been accepted by the municipal council. Moreover, the municipality of Heerenveen currently continues to use elements of the G1000 method in order to continue to "develop local democracy in the city" (Interviewee 6).

7. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

7.1. Similarities and differences in terms of input, throughput, and output

The four municipalities interviewed stated that including the citizens back into the local policy making process was the major reason for designing and including deliberative democracy practices in their cities. In the case of Heerenveen, the citizens themselves asked for more responsibility in decision-making by sending a letter to the municipality, as mentioned by a council member (Interviewee 6). For Besançon, it is the irrepressible conflict between the local actors and the municipality that triggered the creation of the citizen forum. By contrast, the idea of creating a citizen forum in Cachan and Steenwijkerland emerged from the municipalities themselves, which both decided to include their citizens in building the sustainable future of their cities. Even though all the cases share the aim of including citizens in the environmental decision-making process, the motivations to create an ECF differ per country and per case, showing that the input is highly contextual to each case-study.

The selection process of the participants differs per country, and two main strategies of selecting the participants were observed. In both French cases, various criteria were identified to create

a certain representativity such as age, gender, or education level. Besides, citizens that had a potential conflict of interest with the projects were removed from the list of participants whereas in the Netherlands, all the citizens drew by lot were invited to join the ECF. According to various interviewees, this method was used to include all points of views and interests in designing the sustainable future of the Dutch municipalities, even though some participants could have a conflict of interests (Interviewee 4; Interviewee 6). That implies that public officials were directly involved in the process as 'facilitators', but also local entrepreneurs that had projects to offer. The aim of this method was to obtain a diverse and representative panel of opinions from citizens by creating a power-free dialogue between all the participants. This difference in terms of selection process highlights a strong cultural difference in designing an ECF.

Another major difference consists in the number of meetings and sessions, which differs between all the municipalities. The G1000 platform consists in 3 phases, which respectively include several meetings during a large period of time. An interviewee from the municipality of Steenwijkerland stressed that the G1000 method was a long and expensive process that required a tremendous amount of work from all the participants (Interviewee 13). A citizen of Heerenveen also mentioned the time-consuming aspect of this method (Interviewee 7). For Besançon, only three sessions were organized by the external company Respublica, with the approval of the municipality. In Cachan, 11 sessions were organized by the council members dedicated to citizen participation, who were animating and guiding the citizens with the help of the architects from the CAUE. These variations of the number of sessions between the four ECFs shows that each municipal organization designed and planned differently its forum according to their budget, schedule, and availability of council members dedicated to citizen participation, as demonstrated in Table 4.

A remarkable similarity is that all the municipalities studied consider neutrality and transparency as two essential values of their citizen forums. To obtain neutrality, three different strategies were held by the municipal organization in charge of the forum. Concerning France, the municipality of Besançon decided to hire the company Respublica to bring neutrality in the process since the trust and dialogue between public officials and citizens was unconstructive. On the contrary, the municipality of Cachan entirely designed and implemented the citizen forum to create an institutionalized dialogue and include its citizens in the decision-making process. In the Netherlands, both the municipalities of Steenwijkerland and Heerenveen decided

to work in collaboration with the G1000 platform by signing a partnership agreement. This allowed the municipalities to take part in the different phases and to directly collaborate with their citizens on the sustainable future of their city centers. Basing this analysis on the participation framework described in Section 3.2., these three strategies resulted in to two different types of citizens involvement in local environmental policy making: cooperation in the Netherlands and consultation in France.

On the one hand, in the Netherlands, the G1000 method allowed complete freedom but also a high level of responsibility for the citizens in the agenda setting, discussions, and interventions of experts. The three consecutive phases organized by the G1000 platform successfully included all the participants in the decision-making process and allowed the municipality to effectively collaborate with its citizens to create the environmental future of their cities, corresponding to citizen participation as cooperation. This cooperative relationship between public officials and citizens resulted in a high impact of citizens on local environmental policy since in both cases, more than 60% of the citizens' proposals were accepted by the municipal council without any modification. Moreover, the G1000 method fostered citizen participation in the long run since a monitoring group was created after the G1000Heerenveen – and is still active – to help local authorities in implementing citizens' proposals. On the other hand, the French municipalities used citizen participation as consultation since they both, each in different ways, included their citizens in the decision-making process by adapting their initiatives to citizens' needs and learning about citizens' preferences. In both the cases of Cachan and Besançon, the design of the future neighborhoods was made in collaboration with the citizens, resulting in a medium impact of citizens on local environmental policy making. Indeed, both municipalities partially adapted their sustainable projects to local needs since they still had the power to modify the plans, as shown by the case of Besançon (ANNEX 5).

Even though all the cases shared the aim of including their citizens in local environmental decision making, this section demonstrates that the municipal organizations of the ECFs used different approaches concerning the input and throughput of the forums, resulting in two different outputs: cooperation and consultation relationships between citizens and public officials. These variations between the two countries can be explained considering the list of political and cultural variables identified in Sections 3.3 and 3.4., as I will elaborate in the next section.

7.2. Similarities and differences in terms of political and cultural factors

After comparing the cases in terms of input, throughput, and output, the following section analyzes these similarities and differences through the lens of the political and cultural factors identified in Sections 3.3 and 3.4. Moreover, two factors identified during data collection will also be considered: neutrality and motivation.

7.2.1 Political factors

Lack of legal framework

Interviewees from French and Dutch municipalities mentioned the lack of a specific legal framework concerning participatory practices. In the Netherlands, an interviewee mentioned the opportunity that this lack represents, since it allowed the organization to bring the G1000 arena to the political arena (Interviewee 4). A public official from Besançon stressed the difficulties this lack creates in designing and implementing a citizen forum, stating that literature was precious help but also mentioned the freedom this lack created. As a matter of fact, even though the OECD published a guide gathering common principles and good practices (OECD, 2020) which can be considered as an inspiration for SMCs, the French and Dutch municipalities are not officially bound by any law at the local, regional, or national level. This lack can result in a challenge for designing and implementing a forum, that is one of the reasons why various municipalities such as Besançon, Steenwijkerland, and Heerenven hired and collaborated with a specialized external company. This lack certainly explains the differences in terms of input, throughput, and output since each municipality had its own means to achieve its goal, resulting in strong differences in the selection process of the citizens or the number of meetings, as demonstrated in Table 4. Since the four municipal organizations were not bound by any legal constraint to design and implement a forum, they all defined themselves what an environmental citizen forum should entail, resulting in differences not only per country but also per case.

Equity

Concerning equity issues, the participant selection heavily relies on the approach chosen by the municipalities, creating a strong difference between the two countries as specified in section 7.1. The municipalities of Heerenveen and Steenwijkerland worked in a partnership relation with the G1000 platform, implying that they accepted its independent status and methodology.

Therefore, in both Dutch cases, all the participants were drew by lot based on electoral lists following the G1000 method. As mentioned previously, every person that received an invitation was welcome to join as a citizen, even though they had a direct or indirect link to the citizen forum. This method aims to not only acknowledging citizens' needs and expectations but also to reinstate ownership to the citizens. With its method, the G1000 platform aims to bring the political arena based on debates to a power-free arena using dialogue to communicate, that is why according to the G1000 platform, there is no need of equity and representativity in such a power-free arena (Interviewee 1). Nevertheless, a council member from Heerenveen mentioned the limitation of this method, stating that the representativity percentage of the population was low, especially because the "leader groups [the participants]" were highly educated" and they were missing young people (Interviewee 6). The French participants were randomly selected based on electoral lists according to specific criteria. In addition, citizens having a potential conflict of interests were removed from the list of participants in order to have a completely neutral panel of citizens. The objective of this method is to create a representative panel of the city that represents the interests of all. Nevertheless, the city of Cachan first asked citizens to register online if they were interested in participating, which also points at the limits of the forum representativity. A citizen from Cachan mentioned that participating in a citizen forum was the only deliberative practice he was missing since he already participated to neighborhood councils and other deliberative practices before (Interviewee 9), which highlights the limitation of having highly educated participants hence partial representativeness of the local inhabitants.

7.2.2 Cultural factors

Power distance

The power distance between the citizens and public officials mainly depends on the approach chosen by the municipality but also on the municipal organization's level of involvement during the process. Concerning Cachan, council members were present at every meeting to supervise while the municipalities of Steenwijkerland and Heerenveen went deeper by making public officials directly discussing with the different participants. In the case of Besançon, a council member mentioned that he had never seen the participants, which can be explained by the municipality's complete absence during the throughput phase. According to a council member, this was the best strategy to create a real citizen forum since otherwise the municipalities will always tend to instrumentalize its citizens (Interviewee 2). A similar argument was developed by a citizen of Cachan who also mentioned a "lobbying" from the municipality, in line with the

instrumentalization tendency mentioned by a council member from Besançon. He argued that it was sometimes difficult to reach a fruitful dialogue with public officials, stating that the municipality created a "positive lobbying" for the ECF (Interviewee 9). On the contrary, the approach chosen by the G1000 platform is to include all the members of the community, stating that equity issues should be forgotten. A council member who participated in the G1000Heerenveen mentioned that the citizens tend to rely on him at the beginning, but this quickly evolved in a collaborative relationship (Interviewee 6). A citizen from the same forum stated that there was no leader during the workshops and that all the members were equal (Interviewee 7), resulting in the power-free dialogue arena desired by the G1000 platform. Overall, the case studies demonstrate that the power distance between local authorities and citizens was lower in the Netherlands than in France since there was no hierarchy between public officials and citizens during the forums. This suggests that citizen forums having a lower power distance tend to have better results, as shown with the municipalities of Steenwijkerland and Heerenveen. The input, throughput, and output phases in the Netherlands were realized in complete collaboration with the citizens who set the agenda and discussed what was important to them. Therefore, it seems that Dutch citizens had a higher level of involvement during ECFs than the French citizens, resulting in a higher impact of citizens on local environmental policy making in the Netherlands.

Uncertainty avoidance

Concerning uncertainty avoidance, Besançon had a precise agenda setting decided by Respublica with the approval of the municipality, but both were flexible to citizens' needs. In the case of Cachan, it was also a semi-open agenda in the sense that the municipality was leading and setting the agenda of the sessions, but the citizens could still decide on which themes they could focus. A citizen mentioned that the municipality did an "excellent" job in leading the sessions and providing sufficient information with the CAUE so all the participants could have the same base of knowledge and participate to the debates (Interviewee 9). For Steenwijkerland and Heerenveen, the participants were setting the agenda themselves, discussing in small groups their own ideas. Overall, the uncertainty avoidance level was not an issue that was raised by the participants since they were not threatened by ambiguity and uncertainty when they accepted the invitation to join the forum organized by their municipality. Nevertheless, a participant of Cachan mentioned the uncertainty of the future, in the sense that he does not know what will happen once the municipality acknowledged the citizens' proposal (Interviewee 10).

Individualism

Even though the Netherlands and especially the region of Friesland have a historical tradition of consensus building (Interviewee 6), the French forums share similarities with the Dutch ones in consensus building. In both countries, designing and implementing a citizen forum created social cohesion between all the participants, reducing their individualistic level. Indeed, participating to a forum implies having a fruitful dialogue and achieve collective decision making within the participants, but also with the municipality. A member of the G1000 mentioned that before the forum, the participants were individuals but after the forum, they became real citizens. He argued that citizen forum and power free dialogue are the only way to bridge the gap between the lifeworld of citizens and the system world, referring to Habermas' theory. The interviewee explained that the system world is made of formal and institutionalized bodies while the lifeworld is about the citizens and stated that the two have very different dynamics that are drifting apart, that is why the G1000 organization connects them by creating a power-free dialogue (Interviewee 1). Similarly, a council member dedicated to citizen participation in Cachan also used the bridge metaphor, stating that the citizen forum was a process that went from individual to collective interest. This decrease in the individualistic level was also mentioned by various participants: some became friends while others discovered a passion for activism, which encouraged them to participate to other deliberative practices and to be more active in the political life of their municipalities (Interviewee 5; Interviewee 7; Interviewee 9; Interviewee 10).

7.2.3 Other factors

Neutrality

For all the cases, neutrality and transparency were considered as essential values and it is interesting to observe the different strategies held by the municipalities to achieve neutrality in practice. For instance, the municipality of Cachan achieved neutrality through a transparent dialogue with the citizens during the input, throughput, and output. For the municipality of Besançon, hiring the external organization Respublica and not participating to the forum was the best strategy to obtain neutrality. In the Dutch cases, neutrality was not a concern since the council members directly collaborated with local inhabitants. This difference is linked to the equity issues mentioned above, corresponding to a different approach chosen by the municipal organization or to the method used by the external organization that designed and implemented the ECF.

Motivation

A central challenge for all the municipalities was to avoid non-participation or abandon in the process. The selected cases did not provide any financial remedy to the participants and were purely based on voluntarism. Jacquet (2017) identified factors explaining the non-participation in Belgian mini-publics such as public meeting avoidance, which was mentioned by a council member of Besançon. Indeed, some participants of the citizen forum left the process because they were not feeling comfortable with public speaking even though small groups were created to discuss ideas. In the Netherlands, a citizen mentioned the time-consuming aspect of the G1000 method, stating that if she would have known beforehand, she would not have participated to the forum (Interviewee 7). A public official from Steenwijkerland also stressed the tremendous amount of work that the G1000 method required from all the participants (Interviewee 13). Overall, the motivation level was high since some participants interviewed mentioned that they were happy to be selected and they did not want to waste a "once in a lifetime" opportunity to contribute to local policy making (Interviewee 10). Besides, in the case of Heerenveen, some participants formed a monitoring group which is still active more than two years after the ECF, shedding light on the high level of motivation of the participants.

8. DISCUSSION

8.1 Internal and external validity

Even though the four case studies selected, the data collected through literature research, in-depth interviews, and text-analysis provided unique insights from French and Dutch ECFs, it is important to stress that the lack of interviews with citizens from Besançon and Steenwijkerland reduces the quality of the data collected for these cases and therefore the internal validity of the findings. In addition, since both Dutch cases collaborated with the same external organization – the G1000.nu platform – the representativeness of local environmental citizen forums in the Netherlands, hence the external validity of the results is reduced. Nevertheless, the G1000 organization works with numerous municipalities in the Netherlands, as the company Respublica who also worked on a national scale with the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, which still provide a solid external validity.

8.2 Remarkable findings

Findings demonstrate that there are two major axes to compare the factors influencing the input, throughput, and output of environmental citizen forums taking place in France and in the Netherlands.

The first fundamental difference stands in the political and cultural variables of each country, as specified in the Chapter 3, and demonstrated in Chapter 7. The results show that the two countries share similarities in terms of individualism and uncertainty avoidance, but the main difference stands in the power distance level. Indeed, the selected cases highlight a strong difference in the power distance level of the countries, resulting in two major outcomes of the citizen forums: the municipalities of Besançon and Cachan had a consultation relationship with their citizens while the municipalities of Heerenveen and Steenwijkerland had a cooperation relationship. In other words, the Dutch citizens were immersed into the political process and fully collaborated with their municipalities while the French citizens were only asked for preferences and were partially involved by their municipalities. This difference in terms of output demonstrates that there is a relationship between the power distance and the citizens' impact, since the Dutch cases having a lower power distance show a more fruitful relationship between citizens and public officials. Therefore, findings are aligned to Hofstede's 6-D theory and to the assumption that each country has specific cultural characteristics that affect the design, implementation, and outcome of the four forums selected. That implies that local environmental citizen forums are deliberative governance practices that are deeply contextual, hence that can hardly be applied from a country to another. Since findings demonstrate that political and cultural factors largely influence ECFs, local authorities should consider which type of citizen participation – instrumentalization, consultation, or cooperation – they want to foster and in turn, determine the power distance level desired to achieve it. In that sense, the lack of a legal framework provides a real opportunity for the municipalities that can design the whole process themselves or in collaboration with an external organization. This confirms the assumption made in Chapter 3, that even though political literature differs on this topic, the two countries share similarities concerning the absence of legislation for public participation.

The second axis of analysis can be found in analyzing the relationship between the municipal organization and – if it is the case – the external organization hired to organize and/or supervise the forum. As a matter of fact, there is a whole different approach between the case-studies in

France and in the Netherlands concerning the design, implementation, and outcomes of citizen forum that corresponds to the different approaches of the external organizations chosen by the municipal organizations. In the case of Cachan, there was no external organization, so it is the municipality and the SGP that fostered the input, throughput, and output of the citizen forum. However, in the cases of Besançon, Steenwijkerland and Heerenveen, the prominent roles of Respublica and the G1000 platform largely determined the output of the ECF. In the case of Besançon, it is the conflict with the local actors that influenced the input and triggered the creation of the ECF but is the external company Respublica that exerted a direct influence on the throughput and output since the municipality was almost absent during the ECF. For Heerenveen, local actors asked for more influence and largely contributed to the input, but it is the G1000 that supervised the entire throughput and output. In the case of Steenwijkerland, the G1000 platform entirely designed and implemented the citizen forum, also having a strong influence on the input, throughput, and output.

The various approaches used by external organizations resulted in different relationships with the municipal organization but also determined the power distance level of the ECFs selected. As demonstrated with the case of Besançon, the municipality and Respublica jointly designed the forum, but it is the external organization who was responsible for the whole throughput phase and was in direct contact with the participants. In both cases of Steenwijkerland and Heerenveen, since the G1000 was completely in charge as an independent party, the municipalities became participants of their own ECF. By creating a power-free dialogue between all the participants, the G1000 methodology achieved a low power distance between citizens and public officials. That means that these external organizations dealt with the 5 factors depicted in Figure 3 and detailed in the previous section: *equity*, *power distance*, *neutrality*, *individualism* and lastly, *uncertainty avoidance*. Therefore, findings demonstrate that the differences in terms of input, throughput, and output can not only be explained through a cultural and political lens but also through the approach chosen by the external organization in charge of the ECF. These two axes could potentially be interrelated since it could be harder for French municipalities to transfer all the decision-making power to an external organization, resulting in a cultural difference. Consequently, the relationship between municipalities and external organizations could be subject to further research, as well as the strategies and methods used by external organizations since in the selected cases these organizations had the authority to determine the power distance level between local authorities and their citizens.

8.3 Theoretical analysis

The high level of responsibility at the local level and the lack of a legal framework completely undermined the influence of higher government levels, in contrast with current literature. Even though local environmental policy making is considered embedded in a multi-level governance context in which there is horizontal and vertical coordination, there was no cooperation between the municipal organization and higher government levels concerning the input, throughput, or output of the ECF (European Committee of the Regions, 2017; OECD, 2009). Indeed, in the four selected cases, higher government levels did not play any role in the design, implementation, nor outcomes of the ECF since decisions related to the ECF were solely taken at the local scale by the municipal organization. The only municipality that might be considered 'accountable' to higher levels of government is the municipality of Besançon, which is still waiting for a court decision to start construction work, but this decision did not have any direct influence on the ECF. On the contrary, the cases highlight the importance of the local actors and of the municipal organization of the ECF, but also of a third party that played a crucial role in most selected cases: the external organization. This corresponds to a new multi-governance vision that involves a shift in power relations from central to local governments but also in power relations between the state and civil society (Di Gregorio et al., 2019). Environmental citizen forums correspond to this political shift since civil society and citizens want to be part of the decision-making process, as shown by the cases of Besançon and Heerenveen in which local actors fostered the creation of an ECF.

Data collected shows that this lack of coordination at the vertical and horizontal level is also due to a lack of a legal framework at the local, regional, or national level concerning public participation, as identified by Blondiaux (2005). Nevertheless, this lack can be seen positively by local authorities, which was not an argument developed by current political and legal theories which only stressed the confusion and dilemmas in implementing public participation initiatives. During various interviews, public officials and external organizations mentioned the opportunity this lack represents, since they are not legally bound to respect specific criteria or method in designing and implementing a citizen forum. As a matter of fact, this lack was perceived very positively by the interviewees, contrasting with current literature on the topic (Blondiaux, 2005; Hoppe, 2011). Therefore, it is important to mention that this lack does not create practical dilemmas for the municipalities, but instead it creates strong differences in the throughput since each municipality has its own definition of neutrality, equity, and legitimacy.

Since findings demonstrate that environmental citizen forums are largely impacted by cultural and political variables but also by external organizations, the creation of a local, regional, or national legal framework could reinforce the legitimacy of citizen forums within a country but could also create complications for the design and implementation.

Blondiaux also stresses that public participation can be used by local authorities as a label hiding different realities, in line with Yetano et al.'s argument developed in the participation framework (2010). Even though findings demonstrate that it did not happen in the municipalities selected, various interviewees mentioned the "positive lobbying" from the municipalities or the fact that public officials will always tend to "manipulate citizens' perception" (Interviewee 9; Interviewee 2). A council member that participated to the G1000 method also stressed that he could have used his facilitator role to manipulate citizens' vision, showing the great risk of creating a power-free arena. Findings are therefore aligned to current academic literature which studies the limitations of these external organizations such as Respublica or the G1000 platform. Michels (2017) points out the limited representation of forums while Caluwaerts & Reuchamps (2015) assess the internal legitimacy of the G1000 project in Belgium, showing limitations on the output and throughput legitimacy of the process. Nevertheless, even though findings shows that the methodology of the G1000 platform has limitations, this research also highlights the positive output on the Dutch citizen forums. By creating a power-free dialogue, it achieved high cooperation between all the participants even though it challenged the current academic definitions of legitimacy, equity, and representativeness with its pioneer approach.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to contribute to the citizen participation research to improve local decision making on environmental issues in small and medium sized cities. By identifying cultural and political variables influencing the design, implementation, and outcomes of environmental citizens forums in France and in the Netherlands, findings provide a unique cross-cultural analysis that can inspire local authorities or other local actors to set a citizen forum within their municipalities. To do so, four case-studies were selected and studied through the lens of the 6-D model developed by Hofstede, but also through a participation framework to evaluate

citizens' impact on local environmental policy making. The uncertainty avoidance and the individualism level of each country provided an interesting lens to the cross-cultural analysis, but it is certainly the power distance that has been a key element of this research. Findings tend to show a relationship between the power distance level and citizens' involvement in local environmental policy making. Indeed, Dutch cases were overall more successful than the French ones, resulting in a higher citizens' impact on local environmental policy making. This 'success' could be explained by the lower power distance between citizens and local authorities in the Netherlands. Indeed, the municipalities of Steenwijkerland and Heerevenveen, by following the G1000 method, successfully fostered citizens' influence by directly collaborating with them. As a result, local inhabitants, council members, but also local entrepreneurs jointly discussed and created the environmental future of their cities by establishing a power-free dialogue. Whereas in France, citizen participation was used as a consultation in order to learn about citizens' preferences and expectations hence to adapt the future sustainable neighborhoods to local needs. The municipality of Cachan entirely supervised the forum while the municipality of Besançon hired an external company to do so, but in both cases the institutionalized dialogue resulted in a medium impact of citizens in local environmental policymaking. This confirms that cultural and political variables have a role in the input, throughput, and output of the ECFs cases selected, but it also shows that external organizations can have a prominent role that can largely influence the outcome of the citizen forum.

This cross-cultural analysis highlights the cultural and political complexity of organizing an ECF but also the fact that the lack of a legal framework results in strong differences between the two countries but also within a same country. That is why these two different cultures could learn from their similarities and differences to achieve better outcomes concerning local environmental decision-making. French SMCs could try to introduce new ways of cooperation to reduce the power distance between citizens and local authorities. Indeed, by including public officials and other stakeholders in the process, local authorities could achieve a better acceptation of the proposals and therefore a broader support even in case of strong disagreement such as the case of Besançon. On the other hand, the Netherlands could be inspired by the French selection process to reinforce the internal legitimacy of the ECFs, that has been lively criticized in current literature. Nevertheless, the presence of public officials could always be subject to skepticism in theory and in practice, that is why both countries should find a level of municipal involvement that does not involve a risk of guidance or instrumentalization. Therefore, a next step for the citizen participation research could be the creation of a cross-

cultural framework based on political and cultural factors with the aim of achieving higher levels of cooperation between citizens and public officials to solve local environmental issues.

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ANNEX 1: List of interviewees

- Interviewee 1: member of the G1000.nu, personal interview, 2022, February 23.

- Interviewee 2: council member from Besançon, personal interview, 2022, February 25.

- Interviewee 3: public official from Besançon, personal interview, 2022, March 7.

- Interviewee 4: member of the G1000.nu, personal interview, 2022, March 8.

- Interviewee 5: council member from Cachan, personal interview, 2022, March 10.

- Interviewee 6: council member from Heerenveen, personal interview, 2022, March 18.

- Interviewee 7: citizen from Heerenveen, personal interview, 2022, March 18.

- Interviewee 8: public official from Steenwijkerland, personal interview, 2022, April 7.

- Interviewee 9: citizen from Cachan, personal interview, 2022, April 7.

- Interviewee 10: citizen from Cachan, personal interview, 2022, April 8.

- Interviewee 11: consultant from Respublica, personal interview, 2022, April 9.

- Interviewee 12: council member from Steenwijkerland, personal interview, 2022, April, 26.

- Interviewee 13: public official from Steenwijkerland, personal interview, 2022, May 3.

ANNEX 2: Example of questionnaire for public officials

General introduction

Presentation of myself and of the research. Asking for consent to register, confidentiality statement...

⇨   Name of the interviewee and function within the project.

MUNICIPAL ORGANIZATION
- Were there deliberative practices before?
- Are there council members specifically dedicated to citizen participation?
- Budget voted by the city council?
- Financial resources of the municipality for citizen participation => do you have local/regional/national subsidies?
- Did you collaborate with other governmental levels?
- Are you a membership of climate change issue network(s)?

DESIGN
What was your main reason for organizing a citizen forum in your municipality?
(Was the citizen forum a way to create a new dialogue between the city and its inhabitants? Climate issues? Socio-demographic issues?)
- What was the main objective of this citizen forum?
- How did you organize it?
- Have you been in contact with other local environmental NGOs?

- How did you select participants?
- What about equity and representativity issues?

- What were the major obstacles in designing this citizen forum?

IMPLEMENTATION
- Concerning the lead of the ECF, did you let all the responsibility to the external organization?
- How many meetings? Total description.

1. CULTURAL FACTOR
- Was there a specific agenda for every session?
- What was your personal objective?
- How did you achieve neutrality?

2. POLITICAL FACTOR
- How would you define your relationship with citizens?
- Did you participate in the forum?
- Were you at the discussions?
- Out of X propositions, X were accepted by the council. Are citizens' proposals taken into account by the municipality?
- Is there a monitoring group that still ensures that the municipality respects the citizen decree?

RESULT
- More generally, what is your opinion on this citizen forum?
- Presentation of the citizen participation framework. Which category do you consider? Did you have a cooperative, consultative, or instrumentalized relationship?
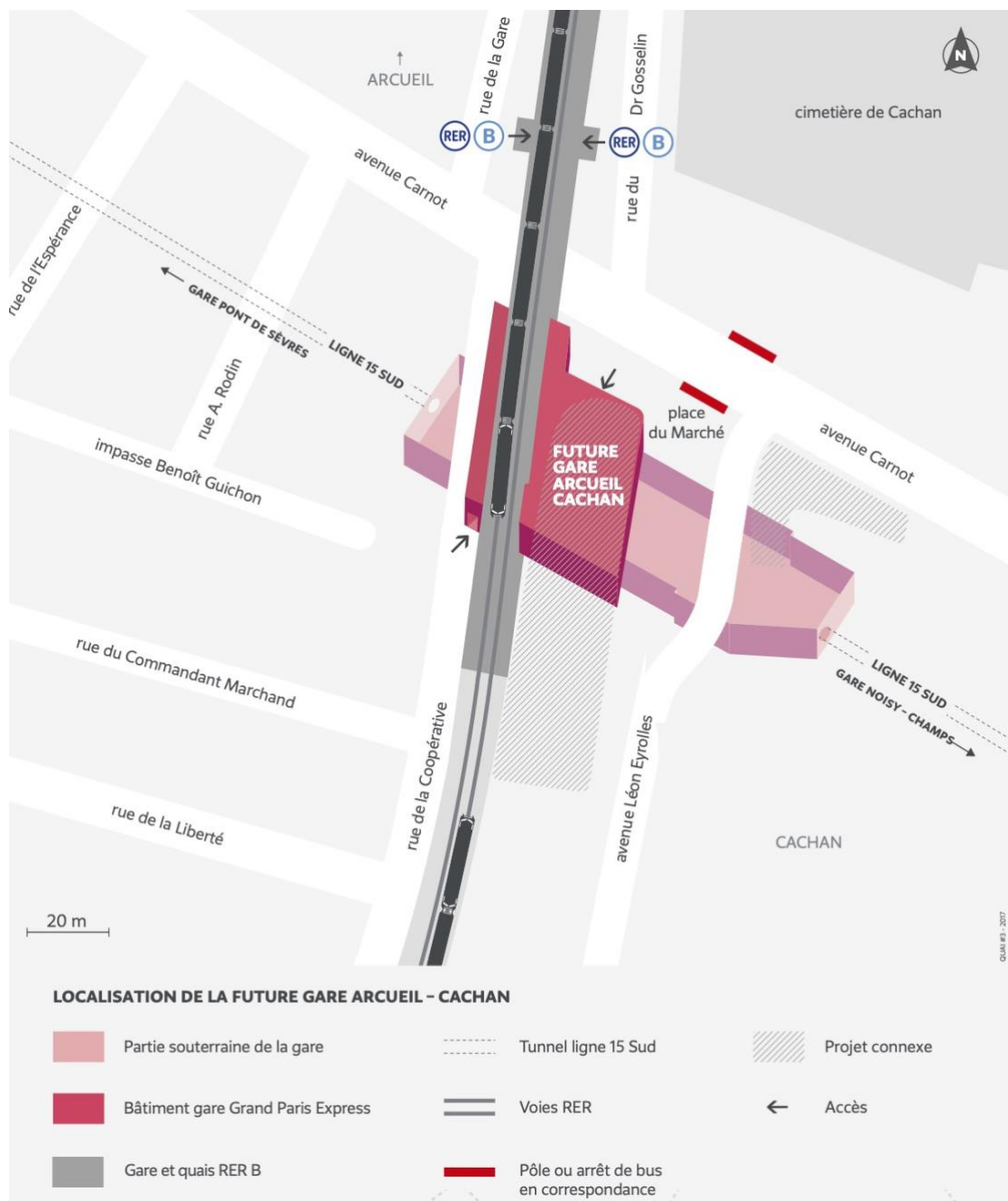- Did you include the citizens' proposals in the final project?

ANNEX 3: Presentation of the five different zones of the future sustainable neighborhood
Source: Municipality of Cachan

ANNEX 4: Localization of the future train station of Arcueil Cachan

Source: Municipality of Cachan

ANNEX 5: Initial, voted, and final projects
Source: Municipality of Besançon