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## **Delineating Active Citizenship: The Subjectification of Citizens' Initiatives**

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**ABSTRACT** *Based on three case studies on citizens' initiatives in their local governance contexts, we analyse the process of subjectification as a performative effect of the dialectical relationship between governmental organizations and citizens' initiatives. We argue that discourses produced by governmental organizations on what it entails to be an active citizen have a performative effect on citizens' initiatives, which adapt themselves, anticipate on what is expected from them and act strategically towards these discourses. As a consequence, some people become 'good' citizens meeting the expectations of the governmental discourse. The process of subjectification shows that this not a unilateral act, but mutually activated by both governmental organizations and citizens' initiatives.*

**KEY WORDS:** Citizens' initiatives, governance, subjectification, performativity, Foucault

### **Introduction**

Western European governments, including the Dutch government, increasingly encourage active citizenship (Sørensen & Triantafillou, 2009). One of the main triggers for this trend is the decline of the welfare state, which has, according to some, reached its normative, practical and financial boundaries (Feixa, Pereira, & Juris, 2009; Yerkes & Van der Veen, 2011). The financial crisis and the related budget cuts in welfare services have further boosted the discourses of active citizenship. New, sometimes viewed as 'neo-liberal', governance modes have entered the arena of Dutch policy-making in which active citizenship and self-organization have become important concepts (Hajer, 2011; Tonkens, 2006; Verhoeven, 2009). For analyses of seemingly similar processes in the UK, see the studies by Lowndes and Pratchett (2011), Scott (2011), Smith (2010).

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The call for active citizens and related citizens' initiatives can be found in many of the recently published Dutch policy documents. The Coalition Agreement of the current Dutch cabinet, for example, highlights the benefits of citizens' initiatives for our society (Rutte & Samsom, 29 oktober 2012). In their policy document 'De Doe-democratie' ['The Do-democracy'], the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations states that 'the government has faith in social initiatives and is willing to contribute actively to the transitions to a do-democracy' (2013, p. 3). Other programmes and projects that advocate citizens' initiatives and less governmental involvement have also been launched, such as 'In actie met burgers' ['Into action with citizens'] at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (2008) and 'InitiatiefRijk' ['Enterprising'], a joint programme from the Ministries of Interior, of Infrastructure and of Economic Affairs (2011). Moreover, an interdepartmental expertise centre on active citizenship, the Centrum Publieksparticipatie, has been established.

Several Dutch governmental advisory institutes, such as the Council for Public Administration, believe active citizens will be increasingly important in the future. They proclaim citizens to be trustworthy, inventive and willing to be active and responsive members of society (AWT, 2012; RMO, 2013; Rob, 2012; WRR, 2012). The attention in mass media seems to invoke a further process of mushrooming of citizens' initiatives. Even for a topic like nature management, which was until recently entirely claimed by the State and its conservation institutes, a new policy has been issued that intends 'to bring nature back to where it belongs: in the middle of society, with ownership and citizens' responsibility as important building blocks' (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2013). And on the occasion of accession of the new Dutch King, citizens have been asked to submit their social initiatives to a so-called collection of 'Crown Apples' ([www.kroonappels.nl](http://www.kroonappels.nl)).

Because the active citizenship and citizens' initiatives discourses are relatively young and are still in development, one can only speculate about the (long-term) effects on the Dutch society and that of other Western European countries. These discourses might only produce some temporal excitement to veil the rapid decline of the welfare state (Scott, 2011). One could also argue that in the years to come, fundamental changes can be expected in the power relations between the state and its citizens (RMO, 2013). One could even imagine a do-it yourself society that would hardly need politicians and policies (Teubner, 2011). Despite the uncertainties and the relatively young life of the active citizen discourses, their appearance has already received some academic attention (Gaynor, 2011; Lowndes & Pratchett, 2011; Verhoeven, 2009). A part of this academic work analyses acts of resistance against governmental policies (Amoore, 2005; De Cock Buning, De Brauw, & Van Amstel, 2011; Duineveld & Van Assche, 2011; Roth & Warner, 2007; Watson, 2005). Other studies underscored the increased participation and power of citizens in government projects (Aarts & Leeuwis, 2010; Duineveld, van Dam, Doring, & Zande, 2010; Ignatieff, 1995; Salverda & Van Dam, 2008; Spies, 2013).

In this article we aim to contribute to these studies of active citizenship by focussing on the discursive mechanisms and underlying power techniques at play as well as their consequences for the potential activities of citizens' initiatives. We use the theories of Foucault (1994) and Butler (1997) on the process of subjectification because these enable us to analyse the interdependence of citizens' initiatives and state governance. The process of subjectification is conceptualized

as the performative effects of discourses on active citizenship in the dialectical relationship between governmental organizations and citizens' initiatives.

We studied the processes of subjectification in three case studies of citizens' initiatives. The first of which, *Lingewaard Natuurlijk* [Lingewaard Natural], is located between the cities of Arnhem and Nijmegen, where a group of people organized activities concerning education, landscape management and nature conservation. The second is located near the city of Enschede, where the initiators of *Grensbeleving Enschede* [Border Experience Enschede] tried to restore an old border patrol path between Germany and the Netherlands so people can re-experience the border. For our third case, we studied *Bewonersvereniging en actiecomité Horstermeerpolder* [residents' association and action committee Horstermeerpolder] in Horstermeer in the province of North Holland. Their aim was to represent the interests of the residents of the Horstermeer by developing their own alternative for the policy plans to raise the water level in their polder.

Next, we will outline our theoretical framework and related research methodology. Subsequently, we will describe the three citizens' initiatives in their local governance contexts, and then we will analyse discursive techniques in the process of subjectification. After the main conclusions, we will try to address the governance implications of our findings in the discussion.

## **Subjectification**

Following Foucault and many other governance scholars, we have a dynamic view on forms of governance and its inherent power technologies (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009; Flyvbjerg, Landman, & Schram, 2012; Pellizzoni, 2001; Rose & Miller, 1992). This implies that we do not assume a central role of the state, but we attribute importance to a plurality of discourses and organizations of within and beyond the state (Bevir, 2004; Foucault, 1979, 1994, 1998; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). Moreover, governance is understood as continuously shifting networks of both governmental and non-governmental agents and the embedded technologies of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1994, 2003). A considerable amount of the literature on power and governance processes and participation is about controlling or side lining power (Aarts & Leeuwis, 2010; Kuindersma, Arts, & Van der Zouwen, 2012). Following Foucault (1998), we see power as contingent and relational, as something that is exercised, not as something one possesses. Power is exercised by the whole of society (not only by governmental organizations) and is constantly shifting in a dynamic environment (Andersen, 2003).

Foucault has applied this broad perspective on power relations in this theory on subjectification. Subjectification (French: *subjectivation*) means examining the ways in which a person transforms him- or herself into a subject (Foucault, 1994). Subjects are constituted within governance and can be considered a result of governance practices. For Foucault, the word subject has two meanings: 'subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscious or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to' (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). In line with Foucault, Butler asserts that:

'subjectivation' ... denotes both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection—one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power, a subjection, which implies a radical

dependency. [...] Subjection is, literally, the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally acts on a given individual as a form of domination, but also activates or forms the subject. (Butler 1997, pp. 83–4)

So although the process of subjectification refers to the subject positions that actors move towards (and not so much break free from), the subject is seen as an actor who exercises power. With the concept of subjectification, in which we look at the process of 'becoming', we can see the inter-relational nature of the active citizenship discourse: a process both of delineation and internalization.

Following Foucault and Butler, we think discursive governance practices delineate subjects such as 'citizens', 'active' citizens, 'good' citizens and so on. New roles and concepts for 'citizens' emerge all the time and once created and internalized, they can have an impact on existing governance discourses and practices. To study the process of subjectification of citizens' initiatives in governance practices, we use the concepts of performativity (Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014) and self-transformation (Etzioni, 1968; Luhmann, 1995; Seidl, 2005). Performances refer broadly to events, acts, utterances or narratives produced by people, organizations or institutions. By performativity, we mean the process of making facts, things or subjects appear as true, as real (Beunen, Van Assche, & Duineveld, 2013; Bialasiewicz et al., 2007; Butler, 1997; Hajer, 2006; MacKenzie, Muniesa, & Siu, 2007; Rose, 2002; Turnhout, Van Bommel, & Aarts, 2010). Performativity is an effect of discourse, and every social reality is the result of performativity. This implies that we do not merely choose our identity, but are made to perform it, as much shaped by the views and comments of the people around us as by our own thinking and our thinking about what others are thinking. This, however, is a self-referential process and is related to the process of self-transformation in which images of the social context are produced in an internal discourse. The identity (self-image) and strategies of a citizens' initiative are adapted to the group's shared assumptions about what is considered important in the relevant social context (Luhmann, 1995, 2008; Seidl, 2005; Van Assche et al., 2014; Van Dam, Salverda, & During, 2014). Whether or not a performance becomes performative, has reality effects, produces new subjects, new roles and so on, also depends on the context: location, time, audience and so on. In one context, reports or stories can be interpreted as absolute truths and thus have immediate effects on the behaviour of people, while in another context, they might be considered irrelevant or gain the status of a myth (Bourdieu, 1991).

In short, it is within governance processes that actors are created as subjects. The moment a citizens' initiative internalizes the expectations of the governmental discourse (by considering itself and acting as the image produced by the governmental discourse), the process of subjectification changes relationships. It is within citizens' initiatives that this discursive interaction becomes performative and may have transformative effects.

## **Method**

This study was conducted using a qualitative method to provide a deep understanding of emerging discourses and the related social practices. As the practices, strategies and interactions of the citizens' initiatives are not always planned and

may evolve in an uncontrolled manner, a one-dimensional research approach is not suitable, so we opted for an iterative research approach (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Yanow, 2007).

We used a case study approach, opting for three cases. These cases are all citizens' initiatives, but differ in the way the initiatives 'fit into public policy', which lends them added interest in terms of the interaction between the initiatives and the governmental organizations. The objectives of Lingewaard Natural fit perfectly. Border Experience Enschede's objectives are 'neutral', and the aims and roles of their organization do not positively or negatively affect any policy or government body. The objectives of Residents association and action committee Horstermeerpolder are not in agreement with regional policy. The cases are in the domain of the green environment, nature and landscape since this research was part of contract-research projects of the landscape and nature department of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and WOT Nature and Environment.<sup>1</sup>

We used semi-structured interviews to gather our information. We interviewed 26 respondents in total; 5–6 in-depth interviews per case and 10 more casual conversations took place as well. For each case, we wanted to get an overview of the situation as a whole, we wanted to see how the citizens' initiatives had developed and we wanted to know what interactions there were between the citizens' initiatives and other parties. As a consequence, we interviewed representatives of all relevant parties per case: citizens heavily involved in the citizens' initiatives and citizens/inhabitants less involved; politicians and civil servants, both on the municipality and the provincial level; people working at relevant nature and landscape organizations; members of the historical society on the German side of the Enschede border; plus entrepreneurs and farmers. We talked about their daily activities, their involvement and their experiences and—depending on the respondent—about their interactions within the initiative and with the governmental or institutional bodies or with the citizens' initiatives. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed, for the casual conversations we took notes. To get an idea of the daily activities that went on, the researchers also spent time at the three different case locations. The data collected by the in-depth interviews formed the basis; the data collected through more casual conversations were additional to these interviews or sometimes served to 'check' on the information collected by the in-depth interviews. Secondary materials were studied, such as websites (policy) documents and scientific reports. For more information on the cases, see De Groot, Salverda, Donders, and Van Dam (2012) and Van Dam, Salverda, and Donders (2010, 2011, 2014).

### **Three Citizens' Initiatives**

Before we analyse the process of subjectification in greater detail, we now will describe three different citizens' initiatives and their governance contexts.

#### *Lingewaard Natural*

The initiative Lingewaard Natural came into existence in April 1994 and has since become ever more active. The initiative aims to contribute to 'a beautiful and diverse landscape, where life is good for humans and animals' and they stand for 'management and restoration of the natural beauty, the provision of new planting and anything else directly or indirectly in connection therewith'

([www.lingewaardnatuurlijk.nl](http://www.lingewaardnatuurlijk.nl)). Lingewaard Natural started after one of its current members published a small article in a local newspaper in which he expressed his desire to get more actively involved in the field of birds and nature in the Lingewaard area, between the cities of Arnhem and Nijmegen. As he recalls in our interview, his article did not remain unnoticed:

You write a small story about what you find important and what inspires you, and then several people react. In no time, there were 12–15 people sitting at my kitchen table. That group still exists and everything has expanded from here.

Over the years, Lingewaard Natural has increasingly broadened its scope and today, it organizes various activities concerning education, landscape management and nature conservation. They organize nature lessons for children at all the primary schools in Lingewaard, educate guides for field courses, organize excursions for adults, replant 1 km of hedges every year, count birds, put up nesting boxes for Screech Owls, etc. According to the initiators, but also to the municipality Lingewaard, their activities match perfectly with the local and regional policy: ‘You must have the same idea, the same movement, the same goal, and then you get somewhere. (. . .) We have an agency [referring to Lingewaard Natural] that can play a beautiful role in realizing our own goals’ (respondent municipality Lingewaard).

The initiative takes place within a larger area where there have been many spatial developments since the late 1990s, such as the development of Park Lingezege. Park Lingezege is meant as a green zone in the area between the cities Arnhem and Nijmegen where many new residential areas have been built. Although the initiators feel this makes the processes they are involved in complex and slow, they also perceive this governance context as full of opportunities. As the initiator puts it, they are operating in ‘the administrative violence around the realization of Park Lingezege’.

The initiative Lingewaard Natural comes across as being well aware of the institutional world around itself. By creating project plans and vision documents, the initiative’s members actively aim to address the formal governmental governance context (like the municipality, the province and park organization Lingezege) in which they operate. Moreover, they institutionalized themselves as a foundation to make it easier to function in the administrative environment, and to relate to and communicate with the institutional setting in which the foundation operates and tries to get all sorts of things done. Although this initiative institutionalized and professionalized its relations and communications with the wider governance context, the members deliberately choose to keep their own cooperation within the initiative and the contacts with the volunteers as informal as possible. Within the initiative, there is a core group of about 20 persons who do much of the work and there is a larger group of approximately 125–150 people who are occasionally active (Van Dam et al., 2010).

Lingewaard Natural has good relations and cooperates with several parties, and is actively lobbying and networking. The members manifest themselves as active and constructive, and consciously avoid appearing to be a resistance or pressure group, despite the fact they often disagree with the governance context, the decisions made, the opinions expressed and the tardiness of the policy processes. ‘We don’t want to be a protest group. Preferably we seek cooperation. In our eyes, this is working well, although we find the pace in



nature development a bit slow' (respondent Lingewaard Natural). In trying to realize their aims, they are persistent and sometimes exert some pressure.

Instead of protesting, they develop their own alternatives. An example is their recent plan to develop an agricultural nature park (to be a future part of Park Lingezen). The residents will manage 15 hectares of grassland, with the aim of protecting meadow birds and restoring their numbers. Several institutional parties support the plan, including Lingewaard Municipality, Staatsbosbeheer [the Dutch Forestry Commission], Dienst Landelijk Gebied [the Government Service for Land and Water Management] and park organization Lingezen. Those institutions got convinced because of the 'solidness' of the plan: it showed vision but also a good sense of reality, it had a detailed financial chapter etc. Those institutions wanted a separate foundation for the local residents to organize themselves, foundation Doornik Natuurakkers ([www.doorniknatuurakkers.nl](http://www.doorniknatuurakkers.nl)).

In this Lingewaard case, we see how the group of citizens reiterate traditional interdependencies with the local governments. These citizens looked for confirmation of their plans and manifested themselves as 'cooperative'. And the governmental organizations saw the initiative as a way to realize their policy. They had wishes and conditions; such as formal and detailed project plans and the establishment of a (extra) legal entity. The members of Lingewaard Natural regard these conditions as obligatory steps of cooperation to acquire subsidies and permissions.

#### *Border Experience Enschede*

The initiative Border Experience Enschede was constituted as a follow-up of an inventory of border stones by some members of Stichting Historische Sociëteit Enschede–Lonneker [the Historical Society Enschede–Lonneker Foundation]. The members discovered a small part of the old 'Commiezen' path, the path the border police used to patrol until 1995, when the active control of the Dutch-German Borders ceased. The members envisioned this old path to be turned into a trail and they wanted to restore the path so people could experience the national border again, so they could be introduced to the phenomenon of border stones, and walk through beautiful and forgotten nature areas. A secondary advantage would be that the path could then be restored and extended to where it had completely disappeared.

The simplicity of the idea proved to be in stark contrast to the complexity of its realization. It turned out to be very difficult to obtain public access to border stones on private land, which made it necessary to involve all kinds of organizations that somehow had formal power in the area or possible means for the realization of a trail. The members manifested themselves proactively, as initiators with a plan, and used their connections with others parties. As one respondent of the Border Experience Enschede told us: 'You have to try all kinds of things at different points in time and see where you end up.' This has led to a constellation of parties on both sides of the border, each adding their own conditions. Enschede Municipality wanted an international cooperation out of this, so the German cities Ahaus and Gronau were asked to participate. Ahaus highly valued a focus on education, so the plan was adjusted to make it into a children's experience as well. Gronau wanted to involve the Dutch municipality Lossler, or at least to extend the path to the so-called 'three countries border stone', the



Drielandensteen. Some years earlier, they had tried to do a project around this 'special' stone, but it had failed, and now they saw a second change.

In the end, under the influence of the limited cooperation of landowners and the conditions of various institutional parties that became involved, an alternative route was developed: a border experience route in the form of a thematic cycle route that meanders across the border, for which you can obtain information and investigative missions through SMS and audio (Van Dam et al., 2011). They decided to develop a longer route, to enable people to visit a fair amount of publicly accessible border stones, and to meet the wishes of the institutional partners involved. Evaluating the cooperation with these institutional partners, the initiators say: 'We do have the feeling that some things are out of our hands, but it still is our "baby". Our partners don't do anything behind our back, so that is going well' (respondent Border Experience Enschede).

This initiative to keep the historic border elements in the social memory of the region ran into regulations and political conditions. Each governmental organization that got involved saw options to realize their own wishes or to tie up loose ends in their policies. The initiators felt they had to honour the conditions; otherwise the idea of a border experience would not be executed.

#### *Residents Association and Action Committee Horstermeerpolder*

The Horstermeerpolder is a reclaimed natural lake in the vicinity of Amsterdam. The regional authority, the Province of North Holland, intends to raise the water level and convert large parts of the polder into wetlands. These plans, dating from the 1990s, are supposed to solve the drought problem in the surrounding areas, help nature develop and provide water storage. The residents of the Horstermeerpolder do not believe that these plans are feasible. According to the most recent plan (plan Kienhuizen), the 'middle' of the polder, where most homes and buildings are located, will remain dry. The middle of the polder, however, is also the lowest point of the polder and water generally runs from high to low. The residents fear their homes to be at risk and they also wonder whether the plan will resolve the drought problem in the surrounding areas, since the intention is to leave the lowest point of the polder dry. Moreover, they find converting land into wetlands unacceptable because according to them it does not suit the people living in the polder, the scenery and the buildings nor will it lead to the desired recreation. With the history of the area in mind, they feel obliged to properly maintain the area; and find it morally wrong to let the polder 'deteriorate', when some of their ancestors have even lost their lives reclaiming this land.

The residents' association Horstermeerpolder 'looks after the interests of the citizens of the Horstermeerpolder in the broadest sense possible'. The association has 300 members and has been active since the original plans came to light, at the beginning of the 1990s. The action committee Horstermeerpolder has become active more recently. Both groups are in favour of the protection and development of nature in the area, but not in the form of the wetlands as planned by the regional authority and nature organization. Instead of the proposed wetlands they want to create nature with more possibilities for recreation. Most importantly, they want to make sure the buildings in the polder stay dry. Both groups want an adaption of the plans of the province of North Holland, but have different strategies to achieve this. The residents' association has been trying to participate in the policy processes; they wanted to be able to influence the plans for their polder through

official channels: 'We, the residents' association, are of the opinion that we have to go through the official channels. We believe that we should get people on our side through administrative consultation.' They developed an alternative plan, called plan WeideMeren, meeting the province's conditions concerning the polder, but this plan was ignored. They presented all kinds of arguments, putting forward 'objective arguments', whereas they had many 'experience' arguments (arguments based on their personal experience with working the land and with the behaviour of the institutions) and 'moral' arguments (arguments based on their view on nature that all nature is man-made and therefore should be maintained and based on the history of their grandparents reclaiming land). But since moral arguments and arguments based on personal experience have the connotation of 'emotional, angry citizens', they do not put these arguments forward and mainly use 'objective' arguments (De Groot et al., 2012). They want to be taken seriously, and try to do that by making a strong case 'content wise': they make use of scientific reports, use the help of other organizations that are experts in the fields and they make use of a scientific icon in the field of water management. Moreover, they try to 'upscale' their argumentation beyond their own local interest, by pointing out that the plans will not be a solution for the drought problems in the surrounding areas (De Groot et al., 2012). For a long time (at least a decade), they tried to participate in the institutional trajectory, but in the end, they felt the institutional partners were just not taking them seriously.

At a certain point, the residents of Horstermeer felt that they were not heard and that the residents' association could not make a difference 'through talking and politics'. Interestingly, in other studies, personal arguments (Aarts & te Molder, 1998; Neuvel & Aarts, 2004) appeared to be more convincing and effective in comparison to objective arguments. And in a certain way, you see this phenomenon with the establishment of an action committee in 2008. This committee followed a different path and successfully tried to publicize and influence the situation in the Horstermeerpolder by generating media attention. Moreover, the action committee functioned as a way to relieve frustration and anger: 'To let those institutions know how fed up we are, ask them what in god's name they were doing. Enough is enough; we are not to be trifled with. It ends here' (respondent action committee). They declared their own republic, the Republic Horstermeerpolder, wrote their own law and anthem for the Horstermeerpolder, organized marches, etc. They succeeded in getting a lot of media attention and the institutional actors got nervous. It is not clear yet what the future holds for the Horstermeer, although there are signs that the residents will get their way.

Here, we see a residents' association that tries to connect with the governmental organizations, without letting go of their objectives and an action committee that tries to impress through media attention. The involved governmental actors ignore the unwelcome message, and try to marginalize the ideas, plans and activities of both the residents' association and the action committee.

### **Subjectification of Citizens' Initiatives**

In the three case studies presented above, different interactions and dependencies between governmental and non-governmental organizations came to the fore and each of these relations produced different actors and different roles for these actors. We will point out several techniques in the process of subjectification, resulting from the performativity effects of the identification of politically justified

objectives, the identification of formalized organizational forms and not in my backyard (NIMBY) qualification and/or argumentation.

### *Reproducing Politically Justified Objectives*

The cases show that governmental actors use the discursive technique of governing politically justified objectives: they prefer to deal with those citizens' initiatives that have objectives that correspond to those in their policies. They only support those initiatives that act according their own governmental policy plans and further their own policy. In the case of Lingewaard Natural, the municipality thinks the initiative is important because they have a mutual interest and the initiative is seen as an agency that realizes policy goals. The initiator uses a technique of anticipation and adaptation: he studies the relevant issues in landscape and nature policy and takes up on that. He is of the opinion that their initiative literally tries to realize the policy objectives.

Also in the case of Border Experience Enschede, the institutional organizations are dominant, by adding various conditions that would make the project more interesting and relevant for political actors. The initiators deploy adaptation as a discursive technique. They adapt to those conditions and objectives, resulting in changes to the original plan: the idea of a walking trail on the former border was replaced by the idea of a longer cycle route, meandering across the border between the Netherlands and Germany. The discourse on politically justified objectives has proven to be performative in this case as well; and as a result, the involved people increasingly became the citizens the local government expected them to be.

In the case of the Horstermeerpolder, however, the citizens' initiatives and the institutional organizations do not have the same opinion about the plans for the area, in other words, they do not share the same objectives and no attempts were taken to adapt their policies and objectives, rhetorically nor in practice. Here we observe that the involved governmental organizations were not enthusiastic about this citizens' initiative, which was not in line with the policy to be implemented. The initiative felt ignored and bullied, which moved them further away from becoming a 'good' citizen.

### *Formalization for Increasing Interdependency with the Governance Context*

The second technique in which the dominance of the governmental discourse expresses itself is the formalization of the organization form. Governmental organizations express their preference for those initiatives that operate in an organizational form that feels 'sound' and 'familiar'. Support or permission tends to be given only to well-organized initiatives that, for example, write project plans and that have established legal entities; and not to loosely organized platforms, which often do not have a clear and uniform plan, let alone a written project plan (Van Dam et al., 2014). Citizens' initiatives react with a technique of adaptation: they adapt themselves to the wishes and images of governmental institutions and play along. Citizens' initiatives that want to or have to cooperate with institutional partners institutionalize themselves in foundations or associations. Lingewaard Natural is formally a foundation and operates as a formal institution in its relations to other institutional partners. The initiators of Border Experience Enschede work from the Historical Society Enschede–Lonneker Foundation; and the residents of the Horstermeer that wanted to participate in the

policy process also established a legal entity: an association. The action committee in the Horstermeer, whose objective it was to make the institutional actors nervous, did not form a legal entity. Interestingly, we observed the initiatives operating formally when dealing with formal organizations and on the other hand operating informally, when dealing with fellow residents and volunteers. In all three cases, the cooperation within the initiative, with fellow residents and with people who are occasionally involved is kept informal. As the initiator of Linge-waard Natural puts it:

I find informal organisations very important. ( . . . ) To maintain a positive atmosphere in an organisation is an art in itself. I tend to formalise things, and sometimes you need to, but this can easily result in negative energy. People start discussing what needs to be formalised and what doesn't, and before you know it you're only talking about abstractions and not about the plans you have for children or for planting trees for instance. I always try to think carefully and have many conversations, looking into each other's eyes, not to have too many meetings, writing everything down, taking notes all the time.

The initiators manifest and frame themselves differently and also act differently when dealing with different actors, and this quote demonstrates the performative power of the organizational discourse: it may even cause dilemmas and potential conflicts within a citizens' initiative (Salverda, Slangen, Kruit, Weijsschede, & Mulder, 2009).

#### *Avoiding the NIMBY Label*

The third technique revealing the dominance of the governmental discourse is the avoidance of marginalization, whereby citizens' initiatives are counteracted with NIMBY arguments. Although nowadays the initiatives are usually not called NIMBYists openly, the NIMBY-argumentation still lives on in many Dutch administrations (Duineveld et al., 2010). With the Dutch planning system, citizens who disagreed with the governmental decisions were always at risk of being 'accused' of being 'just a civilian', of being 'emotional', of 'only having their personal interest in mind' and of only looking at problems from a local perspective, not seeing the bigger picture (Burningham, 2000; Phil, 2006). Governmental organizations on the contrary, claim to have the rational expertise, to rely on reason, to have the public interest in mind and to rise above the local level (Gibson, 2005; Schively, 2007; Wolsink, 2007).

The longstanding tradition of the formal planning system to frame those who disagree as NIMBYs has a performative effect on the self-representation and presentation of citizens' initiatives. The fear of being seen as NIMBYs and being belittled as such is very present with citizens' initiatives. From our interviews, it became clear that citizens were very much aware that it is not wise to present their actions as being in their own interests, having witnessed the way they can be cast aside as NIMBYs (Van der Arend, 2007). In dealing with this marginalization technique, citizens' initiatives have completely mastered the technique of anticipation and of framing themselves constructively: they position themselves as initiators instead of protesters and formulate their activities 'strategically'. What sets out as citizens' protest or as an initiative filling the gap of governmental organizations responsibilities is often converted into an initiative, an alternative or

at least as something positive. Many of the activities and strategies of citizens' initiatives have to do with being taken seriously and avoiding the possibility that governmental organizations might call them NIMBYs or use NIMBY-argumentation against them.

Both Lingewaard Natural and Border Experience Enschede deliberately manifest themselves as proactive and 'constructive' instead of reactionary and negative. Being positive became part of their identity and they act likewise. In the Horstermeer, where the ideas of the governmental organizations and residents do not correspond, the residents' association tried hard to stay well away of the NIMBY-corner by anticipating on the possible NIMBY-argumentation: the use of officially recognized experts, they emphasize being rational by using mainly 'objective' argumentation and they bring their argumentation to a scale above their own local interest. One might say that because this residents' association did not adapt their objectives, they were still ignored and bullied. The residents noticed that—despite all their efforts—they were not taken serious. As a consequence, an action committee was established, revolting against the plans of the province by declaring the Republic Horstermeer. A way of protesting that stresses the committee's autonomy and helps to elude the performativity of the NIMBY discourse.

## Conclusion

In the three study cases, a process of subjectification is observed in which discursively constituted subjects arise (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1994). We notice how citizens' initiatives are shaped by the (perceived) expectations, wishes and actions of the governance context. The governmental discourses, with their embedded expectations on the role and functioning of non-state actors like citizens' initiatives, have performative effects on the production of citizens' initiatives and citizens. In the practice of citizens' initiatives, the initiatives are both made subject and subject themselves to Dutch governmental organizations. We see processes of self-referentiality and self-transformation (Luhmann, 1995, 2008; Seidl, 2005) in which citizens' initiatives internalize the assumptions about what is considered important to the relevant governmental organizations. The cases show that this process has implications for the support or disregard of the initiatives.

The three case studies provide us with clear examples of how the citizens' initiatives are constituted as subjects. We have demonstrated this process of subjectification to run along three performative discourses, in which discursive techniques of both governmental organizations and those of citizens take place:

- (1) Identification of politically justified objectives: governmental organizations prefer to collaborate with and support only those citizens' initiatives that have corresponding objectives. Citizens' initiatives tend to incorporate policy objectives in their project in advance, to ensure a positive relationship with those who govern.
- (2) Identification of formalized organization form: governmental organizations prefer to deal with and facilitate those initiatives that operate in an organizational form they recognize as 'sound' and 'familiar'. Certain formalizations of the initiatives, certain ways of organizing can be recognized by the logics of the governmental discourse, and therefore, they can make a difference

(Seidl & Becker, 2006), others cannot. Citizens' initiatives appropriate this, but keep their informal organization alive when they are amongst themselves, because this fits with the trust between the initiators and the notion of doing things together.

- (3) NIMBY qualification and/or argumentation: the governmental organizations apply the technique of marginalization, of counteracting citizens' initiatives with NIMBY arguments. In our cases, the 'good' citizen responds to this discourse by stressing their constructive and positive position, and by emphasizing operating rational and serving the needs of a wider community.

Despite the increasing emphasis given to citizens' initiatives by Dutch governmental organizations in their policies and reports, the legacies of older governmental discourses pertain. The process of subjectification shows us that the 'old' government-thinking is not only present at governmental organizations but is also reproduced within citizens' initiatives (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1994). We observed new 'teamwork' between citizens' initiatives and governmental organizations in which there is a mutual reproduction of government-thinking. What seems to be an escape from the 'old' governance discourse is paradoxically, reproducing this very same discourse.

The citizens' initiatives can be seen as cases in which good citizenship is delineated (Jones, Pykett, & Whitehead, 2013). The 'good' citizen is proactive, incorporates governmental objectives in his actions, is capable of setting up a reliable organization resembling or at least being suitable to those of the government, relies on reason and formal expert judgement and incorporates the interests of a wider community. With the birth of the 'good' citizen, also the 'bad' citizen comes to life as a subject: the citizen who sticks to his own objectives, organization form, manifestation and/or inherent argumentation.

Looking at the attitude of citizens' initiatives in the process of subjectification, particularly the 'good' citizens, one can label them as obedient, docile and submissive, but also as cunning and strategic. The latter can be substantiated by realizing that the citizens' initiatives also exercise power and deploy various strategies of internalization at different stages.

Within the context of an emerging 'Do-Democracy', the normative delineation of good citizenship changes. Dutch governmental organizations have a vision of ideal citizens: they develop their own ideas and take initiative, sometimes evolving into social entrepreneurship and social innovation. Also there are notions on dealing with citizens' initiatives adequately: stimulating them, facilitating them and giving them 'space'. On paper this all looks fine, but looking at the techniques applied to the practice of citizens' initiatives, they act quite hierarchically and manipulatively. They fail to cut off the king's head (metaphorically speaking, of course) (Foucault, 2003), resulting in a gap between 'optimistic' rhetoric and everyday practice.

We have shown the difficulties that come with changing ideas of citizenship. A new morality emerges in which the discourse of individual values and norms is being replaced, supplemented or mixed with action-oriented discourse. This discourse requires competences such as being active, social, rational and well-organized. It seems that the citizens of the Do-Democracy have to combine the virtues of a citizen and a civil servant at the same time. In our analysis, we have used the theory of subjectification (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1994) to analyse the moral dispositions towards citizens' initiatives. Our combination



with the theory of self-transformation (Luhmann, 1995; Seidl, 2005) accounts for the self-referential process of translating the citizenship instructions into actions of the citizens' initiatives. The action-oriented discourse and discussion on 'good' citizens' initiatives have performative effects on (the expectations about) 'good' citizenship of individual citizens. Moreover, the distinction between the public and the private domain is blurring and cannot be used un-problematically to distinguish the selfish (bad) from the altruist (good) citizen. This is one of the reasons why this action-oriented approach towards the citizenship discourse requires more scientific work.

The dialectical relationship between the governmental expectations and initiators strategically or pragmatically using these expectations can be interpreted as quite negative, but can also be seen as a—necessary—step in the direction of a more citizen-driven society (provided we opt for that). In terms of Butler (1997), subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction in production. However, if the development towards a more citizen-driven society is to be successful, the individuality of citizens' initiatives, for example, in ideals and objectives, in organization and course of action, should be given more respect and the idea of citizens' initiatives as executing/operational organs for policy must be cast aside. There should be fewer restrictions and more opportunities. The challenge for governmental organizations is to become more open to citizens, even if they do not always behave the way the government expects them to. We believe this could also build the confidence citizens have in the way our democracy is organized, and the bodies operating in this system. Furthermore, we learned that aspects governmental organizations value, such as 'formalization', do not necessarily lead to the aspired objectives. As Mintzberg puts it (1994): 'three decades of experience with strategic planning have taught us about the need to loosen up the process of strategy making rather than trying to seal it off by arbitrary formalisation'.

## Note

1. WOT Nature and Environment supports the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs in the implementation of rules and regulations on the policy field of nature and environment.

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