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Exclusivity of citizens' initiatives: Fuel for collective action?

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ABSTRACT

Self-organized citizens' initiatives are a form of collective action and contribute to society through the production of public goods and services. Traditional collective action theory predicts that such initiatives are near impossible because of the persistent problems of free-riding. Citizens' initiatives however do exist and function properly, and their numbers seem to be increasing in countries such as the Netherlands. This article argues that free-riding problems can be overcome when some form of exclusivity is arranged in citizens' initiatives. We assume that citizens' initiatives use active and/or passive strategies to limit free-riding behaviour. Using three illustrative cases, our research shows that position rules, boundary rules, and authority rules are used in a subtle and often implicit way to differentiate the level of influence and authority between the more and the less committed members, enabling collective action. Such rules, though advantageous, may be paradoxical to the goals of the citizens' initiatives and can undermine the virtues associated with them.

KEYWORDS

citizens' initiatives; collective action; public goods; exclusivity; boundary rules

Introduction: The Unlikeliness of Citizens' Initiatives

Increasingly these days, citizens are either assumed and even expected to take initiatives in developing public and social policies, or they are invited by local governments to join in decision making, participate in activities, or solve social problems (Bailey, 2012; Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Dekker & Uslaner, 2003; Healey, 2015; Lowndes et al., 2001; Steffek et al., 2007; Van de Wijdeven, 2012). Different labels are used to describe and study active citizens and their organizations, such as community enterprises (Bailey, 2012), civil society enterprises (Healey, 2015), self-organization (Nederhand et al., 2016; Uitermark, 2015), or citizens' initiatives (Bakker et al., 2012; Van Dam et al., 2015). Whether citizens' initiatives are mundane expressions (Hurenkamp et al., 2006, p. 25), durable ambitions (Igalla & van Meerkerk, 2015), or results of a retracting government (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013), an increase has been noted both in practice and in academic scholarship (see for example the systematic review of Igalla et al., in press). The United Kingdom's 'Big Society' (Corbett & Walker, 2012; Kisby, 2010) and the Dutch 'Participation Society' are illustrative examples of how citizens' initiatives are part of a political ideal where active citizens

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take responsibility for and create value in public life (Fenger & Broekema, 2019; Uitermark, 2015).

Citizens' initiatives are forms of collective action: they produce a public good (a community policing initiative or a neighbourhood care project) or use a collective good (crops from an urban garden). A problem prevalent among citizens' initiatives is therefore how to overcome the problem of collective action (Ostrom, 1990, p. 27). The collective action problem is based on the assumption that individuals are selfish and mainly focus on short-term benefits (Hardin, 1968; Ostrom et al., 1999, p. 279). Self-interested individuals thus tend to free-ride: they withhold their resources, hope that the contributions of others are sufficient to produce the goods, and prefer to receive benefits from the goods without contributing to their production (Frohlich & Oppenheimer, 1970, p. 105). Or they take too much from the common good, resulting in depletion. Ostrom et al. (1994, p. 301) concluded that despite the problem of collective action, there are many communities that successfully organize common-pool resources (CPRs). They argue that boundary rules, authority rules, active forms of monitoring and sanctioning, and an absence of 'grim trigger' strategies – sanctions aimed at retaliation – are necessary conditions for sustainably managing CPRs.

Boundary rules have proven to be a powerful mechanism to counter the problem of free-riding (Ostrom et al., 1994) as they specify who is allowed to enter or leave the collective action situation. Boundary rules thus determine who is allowed to join and who is not (ibid., p. 41). Moreover, boundary rules are the inception of other rules. Authority rules – rules that determine who is allowed to do certain activities – function on the presupposition that one knows who is involved and who is not. The same applies to monitoring and sanctioning. Boundary rules are thus, by definition, a measure of exclusivity. As Ostrom and her colleagues (1994) found boundary rules in all instances of successful CPRs, there is reason to expect that this could also be the case for citizens' initiatives. In other words, we can expect that citizens' initiatives tend towards exclusivity by defining and using boundary rules to enable collective action. Yet, while increasing attention is paid to citizens' initiatives, the role of boundary rules and exclusivity specifically applied to citizens' initiatives remains an underexposed research area. This underexposure seems paradoxical since citizens' initiatives are becoming increasingly significant in today's society. The proven importance of exclusivity within CPRs and the increase of citizens' initiatives in society give rise to the question of what the role of boundary rules is in the emergence and functioning of citizens' initiatives. This leads us to the following research question: How does exclusivity by boundary rules influence the ability of citizen's initiatives to overcome problems of collective action?

The answer to this question not only fills an important gap when it comes to our understanding of the functioning of community-based initiatives. It is also highly relevant for policy-makers and politicians struggling with the problem often mentioned in the public debate about these initiatives: the problem of exclusion (Adger, 2003; Bowles & Gintis, 2002, pp. F247–F248; Healey, 2015, p. 117). As citizens' initiatives tend to be homogenous, the 'outsiders' – often more vulnerable and less homogenous – are disadvantaged when it comes to exclusion. By understanding the dynamics that lead to exclusivity, we can also think about possible measures to mitigate the undesirable consequences of exclusion.

In this article, we first discuss the issue of collective action in citizens' initiatives. We then elaborate on the role of exclusivity for collective action in citizens' initiatives.

Next, we discuss the drivers and mechanisms for exclusion in more detail. After that, three empirical examples are presented to illustrate and refine the arguments in this article. Finally, in conclusion, the implications of exclusivity for citizens' initiatives are discussed.

A Theoretical Argument: The Tendency Towards Exclusivity

Mancur Olson's (1965) '*The Logic of Collective Action*' and Garett Hardin's (1968) '*Tragedy of the Commons*' both represents a rational perspective on group behaviour. The rational individual, or the homo economicus (Brennan & Buchanan, 2008), concludes that taking more than one is supposed to increases positive utility. Accordingly, as every individual's sensible course is to take more, the goods in question are depleted. Rational theoretical expectations 'allows a very rich way of analysing what will happen in a specific strategic context', and its main assumption, rationality, is generally considered a strong predictor (Axelrod, 2000, pp. 131–132). It is, however, at odds with the idea that individuals with a shared goal should voluntarily act together to realize their goal (Ostrom, 1990, p. 5).

Connecting citizen's initiatives to this rational theoretical expectation leads to the prediction that they should not be able to exist. But there is overwhelming evidence that citizens' initiatives exist and that many of them are quite successful in organizing collective goods and services (Bollier & Helfrich, 2014; Healey, 2015; Hurenkamp et al., 2006). Collective action is sometimes possible and various theories explain this possibility differently. Face-to-face communication (Ostrom et al., 1994, pp. 198–199), strong institutions (Cook et al., 2005; Raymond, 2006), 'context' (Cárdenas & Ostrom, 2004; Hayo & Vollan, 2012; Ostrom, 2014), and rules (Dietz et al., 2003; Ostrom et al., 1994) are all associated with enhancing collective action. Olson (1965, p. 2) suggested that 'unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests'. There has to be a reassurance that individuals will not get 'suckered' by the free riders (Bowles, 2008, p. 1609; Wade, 1987, p. 10). In this article, we show the importance of one particular type of device to provide such a reassurance: exclusionary rules.

Four Types of Goods

To understand why there are collective action problems in general, it is necessary to establish what collective action is about. The analysis of collective action can have different subjects, for example, how social movements come about (Tilly, 1978) or if production of public goods is possible (Wade, 1987). In this article, the subject of collective action is the production of public goods or 'collective consumption goods'. The question is whether self-interested individuals voluntarily produce public goods when other individuals do not join in the production of those goods and yet still enjoy their benefits (Olson, 1965; Sandler, 1992). Four types of goods can be distinguished based on the principles of subtractability of use and the possibility of the exclusion of beneficiaries (Ostrom, 2005, p. 24). Subtractability (also referred to as rivalry) refers to situations in which one beneficiary's use of the public good limits the use by other beneficiaries. Exclusion is about the relative ease of excluding other beneficiaries. A distinction between low and high

Table 1. Types of goods.

		Subtractability: Low	Subtractability: High
Exclusion	Easy	**Toll goods/ club goods**	**Private goods**
	Difficult	**Public goods**	**Collective goods/common-pool resources**

subtractability and easiness or difficulty of exclusion can be visualized in a table, leading to the commonly known types of goods (Table 1):

This article focuses on the lower half of the table. Two problems are related to this part of the table: the appropriation problem and the production problem. The appropriation problem emerges because appropriators cannot easily be excluded. They virtually take 'all they want' and thereby limit others' use of the goods, and ultimately the goods are overused and destroyed (Ostrom, 1999, p. 498). Closely related is the production problem of public goods, which focuses on whether the creation of public goods is possible when no one has the incentive to contribute (Olson, 1965; Wade, 1987), As shown by Ostrom et al. (1994), collective action is not impossible, and its problems can be mitigated and dealt with by having adequate boundary rules, authority rules, and active forms of monitoring and sanctioning. Boundary rules were adopted in all of the organized CPRs that they studied (ibid., p. 302).

Boundary rules describe how participants enter or leave positions available for holding within a certain setting (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 41). Boundary rules affect the action arena by specifying how someone enters the arena in general, what the specific qualifications are for entering a certain position, e.g., a board member, and by specifying the conditions under which individuals can or have to leave a position. In an overview detailing more than a decade of research on CPRs, Ostrom (1999, p. 510) shows 27 boundary rules designated by case studies. Most of the CPRs in the case studies used multiple boundary rules in combinations (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 302). Applying a boundary rule to a public or common good changes the status of its non-exclusive characteristic, even if the rule is relatively 'small' or 'subtle': it turns a collective good a bit more into a private good, and a public good a bit more into a club good (see (Table 2).

One might argue that the adoption of boundary rules is contradictory for collective and public goods, as the characteristic feature of these goods is the difficulty of exclusion from them, whereas boundary rules are by definition exclusionary. Ostrom et al. (1994) and Wade (1987) have shown that the goods in question were certainly common-pool resources and that boundary rules were present in all of the examples that were seen as successful. Two explanations for this ostensible paradox are presented here. First, based on what Ostrom et al. (1994) found, the problem of collective action is the problem of exclusivity, which, although difficult to achieve (see also Olson, 1965, p. 14), is associated with success.

For the second explanation, two other rules, 'position rules' and 'authority rules', must be invoked. An example of position rules is a group of 'farmers who constitute an irrigation association [and] designate positions such as member, water distributor, [or] guard' (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 41). Where boundary rules specify how participants enter or leave

Table 2. Types of goods and deploying boundary rules.

		Subtractability: Low	Subtractability: High
Exclusion	Easy	**Toll goods/ club goods**	**Private goods**
	Difficult	**Public goods**	**Collective goods/common-pool resources**

Boundary rules ↑

available positions, position rules are defined as 'the various roles that individuals may hold' within a collective action setting (ibid), and authority rules 'specify which set of actions is assigned to which position' (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 42). Position and authority rules may be important in relation to public and collective goods because it may be impossible to withhold from the non-producers the good or stop over-appropriators through boundary rules. A dike, for example is non-exclusive in its protection once it is in place. The free rider still enjoys protection offered by the dike, but is refrained from any rights that relates to other positions: actions such as decision-making, grazing, or building on the dike. This relates to a solution that Olson (1965, pp. 133–134) had in mind to overcome collective action problems: tying other benefits to the production of public goods (Sandler, 1992, pp. 58–59).

Exclusivity may thus be an important asset for citizens' initiatives to enhance collective action, and it may be construed through the formulation of boundary rules, position rules, and authority rules. But how does this work? The next section focuses on the drivers and mechanisms through which exclusivity is created.

The Utility of Exclusivity

The question remains why exclusivity is favourable for the collective action of citizens' initiatives. Several theories on group activities and behaviour illuminate this question. 'Fairness preferences', characteristics such as altruism, inequity aversion, reciprocity, solidarity, and trust, are said to enhance cooperation in collective action situations (Falk et al., 2002; Fischbacher et al., 2001). Solidarity and trust, to take the latter ones, are generally stronger in 'tight' groups than in loose associations. Likewise, in smaller groups, it is more convenient to form strong bonds that enable reciprocity. In Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2001, p. 22), a distinction is made between bonding and bridging social capital. Without arguing that one or the other is worse or better, Putnam states that they both relate to different qualities. Bonding social capital reinforces exclusive identities and homogenous groups in that 'it constitutes a kind of sociological superglue', whereas bridging social capital crosses various social cleavages and 'provides a sociological WD-40' (ibid., p. 23). Small groups, characterized by bonding social capital rather than bridging social capital, enhance trust, 'undergirds specific reciprocity and mobiliz[es] social capital' (ibid., p. 22). A strong ingroup with considerable bonding social capital is characterized by having a high degree of trust which is seen as one of the benefits of group membership itself (e.g., Abrams et al., 2004, p. 138), and, furthermore, is seen as empowering group members in acting collectively (Kahan, 2003).

[1] Ostrom (1999, p. 526) formulated a strong recommendation to overcome the tragedy of the commons: it is important to 'include trustworthy participants' and thereby exclude non-trustworthy participants, the free riders. Ultimately, exclusion, through boundary and position rules, can effectuate this inclusion of trustworthy participants and thus drives the tendency towards exclusivity.

Another argument that possibly explains why exclusionary rules are advantageous is about organizing the group. Marwell and Ames (1979, p. 1339) question Olson's statements on the production of goods and group size, in which he stated that public as well as collective goods are produced because the interest of one member exceeds the costs of this same member. If this is the case, the individual 'carries' the production of the goods, even if others free ride on his/her contribution (Olson, 1965, p. 44; Wade, 1987, p. 15). The larger the group, however, the more the individual has to produce. Therefore, individuals likely have to provide more of the goods in larger groups for enough to be available so that the returning share is worth the investment. This driver, we label 'organizability', and it refers to how exclusive groups are more organizable than non-exclusive groups.

The last driver is based on the conclusion that monitoring and sanctioning are necessary to overcome collective action problems (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 314). When access conditions are specified and the group or good is exclusive, monitoring and sanctioning is more practical: one knows who to monitor and who not.

In sum, the benefit of rules that enhance exclusivity is, first of all, that trust fares well within well-defined groups (Abrams et al., 2004; North & Fiske, 2013; Putnam, 2001). Therefore, letting trust flourish, thereby enhancing cooperative collective action, means setting boundaries on entrance to the group. Second, it is relatively easier to include trustworthy individuals (Ostrom, 1999) and thus to repel free riders (Olson, 1965). Third, well-defined groups (see Tilly, 1978, pp. 1-10–1-12; see also Wade, 1987, p. 21) are associated with enhancing the organization of its collective action. And lastly, it is more practical to monitor and sanction in delineated settings than in open settings.

To conclude, exclusivity is beneficial to overcome collective action problems. Citizens' initiatives can become more exclusive in two ways: through active and through passive exclusivity (Sen, 2000, pp. 14–15). Active exclusivity becomes manifest through rules, such as boundary rules (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 302). Passive exclusivity by citizens' initiatives could be realized by constricting or by thickening the groups, which then develop through, for example, repeated interaction by participants. Passive exclusivity can also create conditions that make it harder to access the goods, discouraging 'untrustworthy participants'. The expectation in this article is that citizens' initiatives have rules of exclusivity that may either be passive or active in their form. Moreover, the rules are in place because of one (or more) of the drivers formulated earlier in this section. Two questions emerge based on the theory discussed here: first, are rules of exclusivity present in citizens' initiatives? and second, which drivers matter in the tendency towards exclusivity? In the next chapter, we explore these questions empirically.

How Exclusivity is Shaped: Results of Three Case Studies

In this section, we present three examples to explore the value of our theoretical arguments in real-life. As such, this effort can be understood as being situated between theory generating and theory testing (Gerring, 2006, p. 39). Because theory plays a major role in

this article, 'theory refinement' as defined in Dubois and Gadde's (2002) approach on systematic combining or 'a plausibility probe' (Levy, 2008, p. 3) are fitting labels to describe this research. The first aim of our empirical illustration is to find out whether citizens' initiatives have effectuated exclusivity and, if so, how it was done. The second aim is to establish why these initiatives have effectuated exclusivity.

Cases were selected by using MAEX[2] to search for initiatives in the researchers' geographical proximity to ensure access. The three cases occupy common domains of citizens' initiatives: liveability, solidarity, social cohesion, and public greens (Aalvanger & Beunen, 2014, p. 32; Hurenkamp et al., 2006, p. 20). The cases were all relatively recent, the oldest stemming from 2014, and located in the same neighbourhood, which is known as a disadvantaged neighbourhood, in the same Dutch city. The cases, however, differ in the precise activity they pursue, and thus the goods that they produce and appropriate vary. Furthermore, the cases all show some organizational presence as all of them have a webpage, have made the local news and blogs, and are present on popular social media. Most importantly, however, the cases differed in their results. One of the initiatives still exists but is no longer active, whereas the other two are active and one of them has recently even expanded its activities.

Semi-structured interviews (Gabrielian et al., 2008) were held with core group members of initiatives based on different themes. As exclusivity may manifest in subtle forms, we conducted the interviews following the protocol of first having the members tell their story about how the citizens' initiatives originated and what it means to be in the middle of the reality of these citizens' initiatives as opposed to observing them from afar (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 132–133; 2006, p. 223). The second theme was about the challenges that the initiatives faced and how they dealt with these challenges. Thirdly, respondents were asked to comment on 'how things were organised'. If the four drivers were not mentioned, a question was directly asked about them; e.g., 'to what extent is trust important for you and this initiative?' or 'how do you organise your core activities?' Interviews were transcribed, and any response relating to the four drivers or exclusivity is taken into account in this theory refinement.

Case Descriptions

The first case is a local 'food garden' that grows biological and sustainable produce. Physically, the initiative is composed of two gardens in a city park, one of which opened in 2015 and the other in 2017. The initiative is seen as successful because the garden regularly makes the news and has won multiple prizes, e.g., a prize for local initiatives contributing to 17 Sustainable Development Goals and an 'accessibility award'. Aside from gardening and producing crops, the initiative organizes other activities that are free for the 'gardeners' and are accessible for non-gardeners at a small fee, exemplifying the tying of benefits to the production of public goods (Sandler, 1992, pp. 58–59). In this specific case, the organization is structured by means of a core team, multiple coordinators that oversee the gardens, and local citizens that meet up and garden for a part of the day. Collective action problems for this initiative are twofold. The first problem is a production problem: how to make certain there are enough gardeners to weed, harvest, and do other chores. Appropriation of crops is the second problem: how to ensure that everyone takes what they are supposed to take.

The second case is an initiative that organizes free meals. With the commitment to reduce food waste and connecting citizens, they collect residual products from local stores and prepare meals with them. This citizens' initiative uses a concept that is present in another city as well, so the involved participants can benefit from knowledge of other like-minded initiatives. It is organized by having a core team that directs the activities, recruits volunteers, and collects food. Volunteers can register and prepare the meals, and local citizens can enjoy the meals. The initiative started at the beginning of 2018 after completing fundraisers, making the news, and organizing food pickup deals with local supermarkets, greengrocers and other partners. Collective action problems for this initiative are, again, twofold. The first problem is a production problem of having enough volunteers to pick up the food, cook, and clean the venue. There is also an appropriation problem by making sure that guests do not eat too much and do not take too many leftovers at the end of the day.

The third case is an initiative that aimed to address health and societal problems and to enhance social well-being (from here on called 'social initiative'). The initiative is no longer active. The participants of the initiative wanted to revitalize the discussion on how 'experiential experts' have trouble dealing with the workings and the procedures of local governments and agencies concerning social benefits and mental health. In the Dutch context, the concept 'experiential expert' is used to denote citizens' who have lived through certain conditions and 'know how it is'. The social initiative started as a group of neighbours helping each other, but later, over time, the initiative developed to the state as reflected upon in this research, characterized by a 'core group' that aimed to produce the goods of social well-being and to tackle social problems for their constituents. The main collective action problem, in this case, is a production problem: how to make sure that everyone in the group contributes their part so that the public goods are produced. This production problem was substantive for the initiative because keeping everyone in the core group committed seemed to be problematic. The goods that this initiative produces are, in terms of Wade (1987, p. 21), not clearly defined, which

Table 3. Case characteristics.

	Food garden	Free meals-initiative	Social initiative
Cases characteristics			
Age	2 years	0.5 years	4 years
Size total	Differs (30+)	Differs (30+)	Differs (30+)
Size core group	5	5	9
Made local news	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online presence	Yes	Yes	Yes
Registered at an online platform	Yes	Yes	Yes
Goal	Growing and distributing locally grown food	Cooking free meals, stopping food waste, getting people to eat together	Addressing social and (mental) health problems in relation to local agencies
Domain	Social cohesion, green, food	Social cohesion, food	Social cohesion, liveability
Interviewee	Coordinator	Core group member	Core group member
Collective action characteristics			
Type of good	Collective good	Collective good	Public good
Positions	Board (core group), coordinators, gardeners, consumers	Core group, volunteers, beneficiaries	Core group and 'the neighbours': local residents
Type of collective action problem	Appropriation and production problem	Appropriation and production problem	Production problem

Table 4. Cases, exclusivity and drivers.

	Food garden	Free meals	Social well-being initiative
Enhancing trust	• Through repeated presence, gardeners can develop relationships of trust	• Actively pursued by and in the core group. • Irrelevant for volunteers and beneficiaries	• Not particularly important
Organizability	• Core group and other position rules associated with different responsibilities and tasks • Organizing production was not seen as a problem. • Organizing appropriation based on the position 'gardener'	• Core group and other position rules associated with different responsibilities and tasks • Organizing production dealt with by the core group • Organizing appropriation dealt with by being able to control appropriation	• A core group was established that decided upon and organized certain activities. • Organizing the production of the good was seen as problematic
Monitoring and sanctioning	• Gardeners monitor and sanction each other. • Coordinators are like a night watch: able to intervene	• Monitoring within the core group, potential problems are dealt with internally • Core group is like a night watch: able to intervene	• Important consideration, not able to deal with it
Inclusion of trustworthy participants	• Creating and preserving a social balance without a majority	• Important for the core team: creating a trustworthy team. • Less important for the position volunteers • Less important for the position beneficiaries	• Creating a balance in the core team between experiential experts and individuals with necessary capacities

makes it theoretically more difficult to be exclusive. In Table 3, the relevant characteristics of the three cases are presented.

In the next sections, first, the different drivers, trust, organizability, monitoring and sanctioning, and the inclusion of trustworthy participants, are highlighted. We present how the four drivers push citizens' initiatives towards exclusivity. An overview of how the drivers influence exclusivity is shown in Table 4. We then proceed with an analysis of the exclusivity of citizens' initiatives.

Below in subsections, the cases are analysed per driver. After the four drivers have been discussed, two concluding sections first highlight how these citizens' initiatives are exclusive and then explore what drives them towards exclusivity.

Enhancing Trust

According to our interviewees, trust was not an important driver in the social initiative and the food garden as effectuating their goals did not necessarily require trust in the collective action situation. It turned out, however, that the gardeners in the food garden participated repeatedly, leading to a structuration of trust or bonding social capital. The repeated participation is not an active measure that creates exclusivity; however, such a passive enhancement of trust could also passively lead to exclusivity through constriction. In other words, it becomes difficult to join the already tight group of gardeners as an outsider. In the free meal initiative, trust was an important driver for the core group and functions as 'bonding social capital'. Trust was seen as important because a certain connection needed to be present in the core group so that they could rely on each other to organize their core activities. In contrast, enhancing trust on the level of volunteers or beneficiaries was not a driver mentioned in the interview.

Organizability

In the food garden, position rules to enhance organizability define four positions: the core team, the coordinators, the gardeners, and the consumers of the harvest. The coordinators have the obligation to put in extra effort when there are too few gardeners and when production is not sufficient. But this has not been put into practice because there is usually enough manpower. Authorities and positions are also used to deal with the appropriation problem, and this is explicitly mentioned: harvest is, in the first instance, for the gardeners 'who produce', and what is left is sold to consumers at a local store in the park. The question of when someone can be considered a gardener needs to be answered. In this case, a gardener is someone who 'regularly' helps in the garden and thus has the first right to appropriate the collective good. On a daily basis, it is the coordinator's authority to decide who is a gardener and who is not.

In the free meal initiative, position rules were in effect distinguishing between the core team, the volunteers, and the beneficiaries. There is however a production problem with regard to the volunteers – making sure that they produce enough meals – and also an appropriation problem with regard to the beneficiaries – making sure that they do not take too much food. The core team, acting in pairs, is often present in preparing meals, and is (if necessary) able to intervene and put in extra effort. As such, they could partly mitigate the production problem of volunteers. In terms of appropriation, food is served by members of the core group and the volunteers, thereby making it relatively easier to control appropriation. When, at the end of the dinner, there is a surplus of food, residents can take some home. But the organizers realized that this process is prone to over-appropriation, and, therefore, they do not allow residents to freely take all that they desire. Ultimately, authorities are divided in such a way that volunteers cook and may eat, beneficiaries only eat, and the core group members decide how the authorities of other positions are allocated. The core team is responsible for and in charge of all the activities.

The social initiative has a distinction between two positions: the original involved neighbours and the core group that was formed later. This initiative tried to solve the production problem by establishing a core group to produce the goods for the constituents/neighbours. In the interview, it was emphasized that that the relation between these different positions was absolutely equivalent. The core group, however, authorized itself for activities such as developing mission and goal statements or agenda-setting, whereas the 'non-core-group' did not have this authority. The core group authorized itself to more efficiently produce social well-being and tackle the social problems. But ultimately, this measure of creating different positions did not solve their production problem.

All the cases are characterized by a core team that directs activities or partially produces the goods. Having a core team increases organizability as it demarcates positions and the authorities and responsibilities of those positions. Setting a core team is thus a measure of exclusivity, not necessarily of the good itself, but of rights and competencies. Based on the cases included here, organizability is an important driver that fuels the striving for some form of exclusivity. Although the members of the core team are purposefully selected, there were, however, no explicit mention of actively excluding certain individuals.

Monitoring and Sanctioning

In the food garden, monitoring and sanctioning were relevant in relation to producing and appropriating the goods; for example, there have been times where people took full bags of harvest, over-appropriating the good. In such instances, the gardeners themselves intervene. Knowing who helped to produce during the daily activity also helps to keep tabs on who appropriates at the end of the day. Moreover, the loyal, frequent gardeners know that the garden needs some leftover harvest to sell and thus limit their appropriation. The coordinators themselves do not have to intervene in over-appropriation, although they have the authority to do so.

The core group in the free meal initiative dealt with monitoring and sanctioning in three ways. First, they regulated serving the meals and controlled the distribution of leftovers appropriated by residents. Leftovers after the meal were, in the beginning, laid out at the venue, but the core team noticed that people appropriated the goods disproportionally. Currently, the members of the core team distribute the leftover food amongst the beneficiaries; thus, they are now able to monitor appropriately. Secondly, within the core team itself, each member's function is supervised by the other members, thereby creating a form of light internal monitoring. If something goes wrong, the core group addresses the issue internally. Trust plays an important role within the core group, especially in relation to watching out for each other and addressing issues when necessary. Lastly, volunteers are instructed and monitored by the core group during the daily activities; nevertheless, even though the core group is able to sanction, no examples of sanctions were mentioned by the respondent.

In the social initiative, monitoring and sanctioning were not relevant in relation to who appropriates the goods. Monitoring was however an important consideration and a challenge within the core group. The social initiative needed enough effort by its core group members put into producing social well-being and tackling social problems. Specific responsibilities, authorities and actions of contributions were however ambiguous within the core group. Even though the core group knew whom to monitor and sanction, it had no established ways of doing so since authorities and actions were not clearly defined within the core group.

Inclusion of Trustworthy Participants

This last driver, the inclusion of trustworthy participants, is an important consideration in coming to collective action for the initiatives. In the food garden, including the right participants was of paramount importance. First of all, inclusion was a key ambition of the initiative. The coordinators saw inclusion as an important task: to make everyone feel at home in the garden. Secondly, a balance is important. An example was given where ten or more people of the same group, for example, refugees, could possible join the garden. However, while refugees are more than welcome, ten was too many as other gardeners would be 'snowed under'. It was important to the interviewee to be determined on this principle of balance: to show that certain groups, as cliques, are unable to claim the garden. Fulfilling the goals of the initiative and being inclusive were prime drivers, but this required a solid social balance, which means setting boundaries when the balance gets disturbed. The boundary rule here was a conditional one: limiting access to the garden to individuals if they form too large a subgroup in the garden. The coordinators effectuate this social balance between types of individuals.

This driver for regulating inclusion and exclusion was not so much explicit in the free meal initiative as compared to the others. But selecting the right participants was an important consideration for the core team. This driver was visible through the structure of the three positions: the core group selects the volunteers, possibly including or excluding certain individuals when deemed appropriate by the core group. The core team, consisting of five, was fixed at the time of this research. The boundary rule for the core group, in this case, restricts individuals from entering the core group, and, accordingly, no volunteers or consumers are present in the core team. On the other hand, everyone is welcome as a guest, so including or excluding from being a beneficiary is not relevant for free meal initiative.

In the social initiative, this driver mainly manifested in seeking 'a balance'. It was crucial that there were experiential experts – the heart of the story – and 'capable' citizens involved in the initiative. Even though including the right participants and a balance of types of participants were important considerations, there were no indications of actively excluding members. The development of this initiative is characterized by the realization of the initiator that to evolve and bring the initiative to the next level, knowledge and capacities were necessary. A core group was established by including certain types of participants to effectuate this evolvement and to create a balance between the experiential experts and citizens with certain organizational capacities. The boundary rule allowed individuals to enter if other members of the core group believed that they were able to contribute to the group.

Analysis: to what extent is there a tendency towards exclusivity?

Our cases show that a certain degree of exclusivity is indeed deemed necessary to organize citizen initiatives successfully. Interestingly, it is not the boundary rules that are used to realize this exclusivity, but it is the combination of position rules and authority rules that makes the structure of the initiative restrictive. Position rules allow a distinction between 'core members' and others and distribute roles and rights differently between groups. The core group directs the activities and stipulates what participants in other positions can do. They decide how the goods are produced and how they are appropriated. Appropriation of the goods is connected to positions such as volunteers and gardeners, and these rules strengthen 'successful' collective action: one can appropriate crops if one is a gardener and contributes to the production of the garden. The initiatives that are able to solve production and appropriation problems simultaneously with a smart combination of boundary, position and authority rules, such as the food garden and the free meal initiatives, were better able to organize their collective action. On the other hand, the social initiative aimed to produce a public good was not able to settle any other rules for other non-core groups. It might, therefore, be more difficult for citizens' initiatives to come to collective action when their initiative is concerned with non-excludable goods. In Table 5, the results of the empirical examples are presented.

Synthesis: what drives citizens' initiatives towards exclusivity?

We theoretically identified four drivers for exclusivity in citizens' initiatives. In our cases, some drivers were found to be stronger than others. Enhancing trust did not seem to be a prime driver for citizens' initiatives to become exclusive. It could be expected that trust increases within the core group or among the gardeners and volunteers by frequent participation. In contrast, organizability and including the right participants were stronger drivers. Participants for core groups were purposefully selected based on certain capacities or tasks. This shows that specific boundary rules for positions matter.

Table 5. Is there exclusivity? And what kind?

	Social initiative	Food garden	Free meal
Is there exclusivity?	**Yes:** the core group decided and directed the goals and the course of the initiative	**Yes:** the core group select coordinators who direct activities, guard the balance of the garden, and oversee production and appropriation of the (non-)gardeners **To some extent:** applicable to the gardeners through constriction	**Yes:** the core group directs the goals and the activities of the initiative, recruits and selects the volunteers and manages handing out and appropriation of the food
Type of exclusivity	**Active:** participants of the core group were purposefully selected	**Active:** participants of the core group and the coordinators were purposefully selected. **Passive:** the same gardeners repeatedly participate	**Active:** participants of the core group were purposefully selected

The core group itself is exclusive, and the core group influences the degree of exclusivity of other positions and activities. The core group is able to direct the activities: they set the goals, appoint coordinators with certain authorities, decide who the gardeners and the volunteers are, thereby making it easier to monitor and to help and, if necessary, to put in extra effort to produce the goods. Additionally, the core group is able to regulate appropriation by the other positions. Organizability and monitoring and sanctioning are related through the combination of position rules, boundary rules, and authority rules.

Inclusion of the right participants is an important consideration in the cases cited here. The social balance of the food garden is one such example in which the core group asks the coordinator to preserve this balance. Inclusion of the right participants also drives the composition of the core group in all cases. While participants are not kept out of the core group, certain individuals are actively selected and included based on their knowledge, skills, or experience. In sum, core groups allow citizens' initiatives to deal with their collective action problems.

Conclusion and Discussion

Citizens' initiatives are a form of collective action and are thereby subject to its challenges. In this article, we presented theoretical arguments that set out how exclusivity is a crucial instrument in overcoming collective action problems in citizens' initiatives. We argued that citizens' initiatives greatly benefit from boundary rules, position rules, and authority rules that have exclusive characteristics. By empirically illustrating our theoretical argument, we have learned three important lessons.

First, it should be noted that a tendency towards exclusivity is subtly and mostly manifested through position rules and authority rules. We expected to see general boundary rules (a hard divide between inclusion and exclusion) in citizens' initiatives, but surprisingly these are hardly used. All cases included were however characterized by having a core group or board which directs and steers most affairs, such as the authorities of other positions and which individuals can enter these positions. Accordingly, specific boundary rules regulating entrance to the available positions were present. The core group structure is, to some extent, similar to the conditions that Olson (1965) stated were necessary for collective action: having a coercive entity. For collective action of citizens' initiatives, this has multiple implications. On the one hand, a core group in itself is prone to collective

action challenges, as seen in the social initiative. On the other hand, a core group is an effective instrument to mitigate the collective action problems of other positions, for example, of volunteers or gardeners. Core groups can control access and appropriation while also increasing production by structuring activities or contributing themselves. From our results, we can conclude that to organize collective action, more subtle mechanisms instead of general boundary rules and strict exclusivity of the good (Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom et al., 1999) should be in place. Rather, it is about the selection of people for specific positions, the specific boundary rules for entering these positions, and the various authorities devoted to these positions within citizens' initiatives. The combination of boundary, position and authority rules enable citizens' initiatives to address appropriation and production problems simultaneously. For pure public goods, accomplishing this 'smart' combination seems more difficult.

Second, the tendency towards exclusivity is especially fuelled by the need to include trustworthy, reliable, or 'the right' participants. Monitoring and sanctioning are, contrary to theory (Ostrom et al., 1994), not directly influential on becoming exclusive. Having the right participants is mainly an issue for the people in positions that organize the goods and select, monitor, and sanction other positions. Core groups aim to increase organizability (Tilly, 1978; Wade, 1987) by differentiating positions and authorities. In this article, we show that finding the right participants is an active pursuit (Sen, 2000) for initiators and core group members and that selecting the participants is realized with the help of a combination of subtle, specific boundary rules: only the right participants can occupy certain positions.

Third, exclusivity has normative implications that put citizens' initiatives under tension. For example, Adger (2003) and Bowles and Gintis (2002) show that vulnerable groups are sometimes excluded from community processes. Considering the domains in which citizens' initiatives are active, such as social cohesion, liveability, and social care, exclusivity is on a balance between instrumental values and social virtues. Exclusivity may be beneficial for mitigating collective action problems, but it also may put vulnerable groups or citizens at disadvantaged positions. Reflecting on the core of this more normative question is outside the scope of this article, but it is important for practitioners and local politicians who struggle with dilemmas such as this. In the end, however, this article shows that the produced or the appropriated good is not strictly kept exclusive, and this mitigates the dilemmas of exclusivity as mentioned in the introduction. The results of this plausibility probe thus mitigate dilemmas of staying open, inclusive, and accessible – principles associated with some of the goals and virtues of the initiatives – while applying some form of exclusivity for functional purposes of collective action. Virtually everyone can appropriate the produced goods, but, ultimately, the core groups stay in control and determine the authorities for different positions and decide who occupies different positions. While this structure is not designed by the initiators a priori, we see the structure across all the cases: citizens' initiatives seem to develop this structure along their way. To overcome the problems of collective action, citizens' initiatives create positions associated with different influence and authorities. In other words, they divide power by invoking a hierarchical structure between their positions. This power divide requires a different public or political debate than the one posed earlier about the accessibility of the citizens' initiatives themselves or the goods. Debates should be about how the differences between the core group and the wider community are shaped, whether these

differences are problematic, and which measures are necessary to mitigate the negative side effects of such a differentiation.

We suggest future research aimed at exploring the association between positions and authorities. How are rights and duties 'divided' among positions? And which factors determine who gets a certain position (with certain authorities)? Is there equity amongst participants when it comes to the ability to obtain different positions, or are citizens' initiatives actually stratified? Studies that unravel the composition of positions and the relative differences in authorities could also illuminate dilemmas about equality and the internal democratic legitimacy within citizens' initiatives. Another avenue for future research is to determine whether boundary rules are used to make individuals leave certain positions (Ostrom et al., 1994, p. 41). Theoretically, boundary rules also prescribe how and when an individual leaves a position, but we did not find this particular use of boundary rules, nor did Ostrom and colleagues. A closer look into the governance of citizens' initiatives and the way in which informal and even implicit (configurations of) rules are used to enhance their organizability, is thus a promising way to understand why citizens initiatives succeed and at what price.

Notes

1. It should be noted that not all authors agree on the necessity of trust for collective action, see for example, Cooperation without trust? (Cook et al., 2005). As they define trust as 'to encapsulate our interest' trust is more a matter of sharing the same outcomes or interest. If one defines trust as 'expected reciprocity' (Ebenhöh & Pahl-Wostl, 2008; Ostrom, 2009), it is more a fairness preference not directly related to someone interested in the same outcome as oneself.
2. MAEX is a social ('Maatschappelijke') adaption on the AEX (the Dutch stock market index) and aims to make citizens' initiatives and social enterprises visible.

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