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# Integrated Public Value Creation through Community Initiatives—Evidence from Dutch Water Management

Michael Duijn \* and Jitske Van Popering-Verkerk

Erasmus University Rotterdam, Department of Public Administration &amp; Sociology, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands; verkerk@essb.eur.nl

\* Correspondence: [duijn@essb.eur.nl](mailto:duijn@essb.eur.nl)

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**Abstract:** Governments are increasingly challenged by self-organizing community initiatives that seek to contribute to or even take the lead in public value creation. The reason for citizen-led instead of government-led public value creation is part of two larger governance trends. The first is the increased specialized, mission-oriented approach to large social challenges by government agencies. The second trend is the increased emphasis on accountability, productivity, and efficiency, following the New Public Management philosophy. As a response to these trends, community initiatives challenge the usual mechanisms, principles, and practices of government agencies. These initiatives are characterized by more integrated and inclusive approaches for dealing with societal problems. In turn, government agencies struggle with the way they can organize productive responses to the initiatives communities take in creating public value. In this study, we explore the rationales behind processes of public value creation in which communities take the lead. We explored these processes in Dutch water management. In this highly functionally specialized domain, we compared two cases in which communities take on leadership for integrated initiatives, including other societal functions and tasks adjacent to water management.

**Keywords:** community initiatives; public value creation; reflexive modernization

## 1. Introduction

Governments are increasingly challenged by self-organizing community initiatives that seek to contribute to or even take the lead in public value creation. Citizen-led public value creation is found in different domains, among which water and flood risk management. Examples are communities that initiate the construction of a sustainable sewage system, communities that develop recreational functions on dikes, and community members who maintain rural ditches. Studying these community initiatives in water management, it was surprising how public value creation by citizens fundamentally differs from governmental value creation. Communities showed commitment to public value creation in their environment and they were less silo-bound, more inclusive, and able to combine unforeseen functions within one initiative.

In this paper we seek to understand the way community initiatives contribute to public value creation. Different studies show the way initiatives emerge and their cooperation with public authorities (e.g., [Bovaird 2007](#); [Lowndes and Sullivan 2008](#); [Nederhand et al. 2016](#)). However, less attention is paid to the result of community initiatives in the sense of the integrated value they create. We are interested in the kind of public value that is created by community initiatives, but also whether this public value creation is legitimate and accessible for different types of citizens.

To understand the more integrated public value creation community initiatives tend to deliver, we start from two larger governance trends. The first trend is the increased specialized, mission-oriented approach to large social challenges by government agencies. The second is the increased emphasis

on accountability, productivity, and efficiency, following the omnipresent New Public Management philosophy. As a response to these trends, community initiatives challenge the usual mechanisms, principles, and practices of government agencies. After showing why and how community initiatives are part of, and a response to, larger governance trends (Section 2), we explore the characteristics of community-led public value creation. Therefore we start from four propositions about public value management (Stoker 2006) (Section 3). Next, we examine the emergence of water management initiatives in two Dutch regions, their purpose(s) and their relation with the designated government agency, and the regional water boards (Section 4); and confront these cases with the propositions of public value management (Section 5). This leads to reflections on the meaning of community initiatives in modern society and its implications for governments.

## 2. The Emergence of Community Initiatives

### 2.1. Community Initiatives Through the Lens of Reflexive Modernization

Today's policy problems are often described as 'ill structured' (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982), 'complex' (Teisman et al. 2009) or 'wicked' (Hisschemöller et al. 1998). This means that there are no self-evident approaches to solving them, as values and knowledge are often contested among actors involved. This means many societal problems cannot be defined unambiguously.

These complex problems have to be solved in a societal context that suffers from reflexive modernization (Beck 1994). Sociologist Ulrich Beck (Beck 1994) suggested reflexive modernization as a third stage of modern society after pre-modernity and simple modernity. Society is in this stage still an industrial society, but it is faced "essentially with problems resulting from techno-economic development itself" (Lash and Wynne 1992, p. 19, in Beck 1992). In this stage of reflexive modernization, the factors that lead to the modernization of society—a risk-averse welfare state in which people achieved more control over their personal life—start to negatively impact society itself. An ongoing process of rationalization and individualization, combined with a firm belief in technology, control, and progress, leads to fragmentation of society and the loss of social cohesion. According to Frissen (1999, p. 179) reflexive modernization refers to "the premises of modernity [that] end up in a tangle of unintended consequences, through which modernity gets to contradict itself". Modernization has advanced to such a level of complexity that it can no longer be comprehended or controlled.

Aiken (2000) argues that initiatives in the social economy only can be understood from the lens of reflexive modernization. In the stage of reflexive modernization, choices and decisions are made on new sites—i.e., places or situations—which are not part of the public or the private sector. On these new sites, actors are organizing themselves for societal purposes. These new sites are in the stage of simple modernization merely a phenomenon tolerated in the shadow of state and market. At this point, others argue that the dominant state and market discourse hinder community initiatives, for instance the debate on the way neoliberalism limit or even hinder voluntary community work (Eikenberry 2009; Ghose 2005). Aiken, on the contrary, argues that new local sites will arise despite of the state and market discourse, and people's actions at new sites will significantly change society. To emphasize this, Beck calls this sub-politics, the "shaping of society from below" (Aiken 2000, p. 8).

### 2.2. Governance and Public Service Delivery in an Era of Reflexive Modernization

Understanding governance in an era of reflexive modernization starts with acknowledging the ongoing trend of specialization which characterizes modern society or, in Beck's terminology, simple modernity. The continuing specialization resulted in a fragmented governance system with many specialized actors. In a fragmented system each organization and its (sub)units have their own demarcated tasks and responsibilities. The effect is that the system quickly loses its coherence by becoming overwhelmed by ever more prescriptive policy guidelines, accountability systems and auditing procedures.

In the 1980s, it was this fragmented governance system in which New Public Management (here after abbreviated to NPM) flourished. In NPM, problems are defined as logically as possible, solutions are tailored to these definitions, the implementation of measures follows the rules of project management (within time and budget), and the whole process is monitored through pre-set standards of accountability and legitimacy (Hood 1995). Under the flag of NPM public service delivery was 'rationalized'. It was aimed at 'the missing product' of service delivery, perceived from a producer's perspective, i.e., the service providing government agency. This was combined with a public management style in which public services were broken down in specialized services and 'products' for which the designated users of these services must apply and account for separately (Osborne 2010; Osborne et al. 2013; Nankervis 2005). Under NPM, citizens became clients of public services, while these services are still delivered by professionals (Bovaird 2007).

Kooiman (1999) argues that specialization in the fragmented governance system goes along with a growing need for reintegration. In a government structure which is strongly specialized and institutionalized, citizens feel ignored in addressing the integrated issues they are confronted with. For communities this is an important incentive to take initiative and organize themselves around an integrated issue. They celebrate the local expression of social problems and find new opportunities to deal with these problems on the edge of separated administrative domains (Jones and Ormston 2014; Lowndes and Sullivan 2008; Yang and Callahan 2007). In this way, service users (citizens, social entrepreneurs) cope with the fragmented service delivery by government agencies and their professionals through providing integrated services themselves. This goes beyond the much discussed and described coproduction of public services by government agencies and service users (Bovaird 2007; Radnor et al. 2014; Voorberg et al. 2015).

### 3. Integrated Public Value Creation

#### 3.1. Public Value Creation in an Era of Reflexive Modernization

The social trends we have described so far challenge the conventional ways that governments create public value. By initiating public service delivery from below, communities challenge public value creation and claim a position by defining and creating public value. Firstly, citizens define public value by challenging public service delivery. Bozeman (2007) and Moore (1995) argued that public value is, and should be, objective and measurable. However, social actors in community initiative develop their own, more contextually specific definitions of public value, related to the community they are part of and to the social goals they seek to attain. To put it even stronger, as Meynhardt (2009) argued, public value is intersubjective and is, thus, always defined by the deliberation of the actors involved.

Second, in addition to defining public value, community initiatives also claim a position as creator of public value. In the work of Moore (1995), public value creation is reserved for public professionals. In recent work of Crosby et al. (2017) this is criticized, advocating a collaborative perspective on public value creation, as public value governance arises "through dispersed efforts and distributed leadership in which much of the enabling work can be performed by agents without formal authority in the government system" (Crosby et al. 2017, p. 659).

#### 3.2. Integrated Public Value Creation by Community Initiatives

To be more precise about the way community initiatives create integrated public value in a fragmented governance system, we use the propositions of public value management described by Stoker. Stoker's (2006, p. 47) statement that "The governance of the public realm involves networks of deliberation and delivery in pursuit of public value", is elaborated in four propositions (Stoker 2006, pp. 47–49):

1. Public interventions are defined by the search for public value
2. There is a need to give more recognition to the legitimacy of a wide range of stakeholders

3. An open-minded, relationship approach to the procurement of services is framed by a commitment to a public service ethos
4. An adaptable and learning-based approach to the challenge of public service delivery is required.

By these four propositions, we can describe the public value creation by community initiatives and the way this differs from value creation by public authorities or professional (market) organizations.

### 3.2.1. The Search for Public Value

The public value of community initiatives is much discussed in the literature. [Bovaird and Loeffler \(2012\)](#), for example, concluded that initiatives by users of public services will mostly result in user value and less in social and environmental values. Others, like [Benington \(2009\)](#) and [Van Buuren \(2017\)](#) consider the value of community initiatives as complementary to public and private values. From the perspective of reflexive modernization we take a different position and hypothesize that community initiatives are a new social site of action in which values of different actors become reconnected. With the blurring boundaries between public, private, and community, also the values of actors become intertwined in the sense that realizing one value will impact the values of other actors. Community initiatives are thus new sites of collective action at these blurring boundaries. With the specific locus of community initiatives, multiple values are acknowledged and reconnected. The search for public value is herewith broadened beyond the democratic values of traditional government and the values of effectiveness and efficiency of the NPM-approach.

### 3.2.2. Legitimacy of a Wide Range of Stakeholders

Public value management is not only about realizing values, but also about the legitimacy of these values. The legitimacy of community initiatives is much criticized. Community initiatives imply a transfer of power, and therefore require a transfer of responsibility, accountability and legitimacy. The latter is not always successfully made and thus, authors argue, community initiatives lead to legitimacy problems (e.g., [Boonstra and Boelens 2011](#); [Bovaird 2007](#); [Chaskin 2003](#); [Edelenbos et al. 2018](#); [Jones and Ormston 2014](#)). These legitimacy problems are understandable if we look at them from a traditional democratic viewpoint. Public value management starts however from a different meaning of legitimacy. Legitimacy is about “the diverse bases of legitimacy” ([Stoker 2006](#), p. 47) and “goes beyond the formal legal mandate discussed above and touches on the less tangible but still powerful collective civic judgment that such authority overall is being used in the public interest” ([Skelcher 2005](#), p. 92). This view on legitimacy supports our argument that community initiatives will increase legitimacy. Through community initiatives, societal actors (such as local NGOs and collectives) and individuals in their community become part of the collective judgment of legitimacy. This judgment will be expressed in ways that differ from the usual practices of representative democracy because that they rest and rely more on personal ties and social capital in communities. These expressions of legitimacy do not so much implicate a transfer of legitimacy, as that they complement conventional democratic mechanisms to ensure legitimacy ([Connelly 2011](#)). As such community initiatives do not replace democratic legitimacy but serve as an add-on by emphasizing the relational rather than the formal function of legitimacy.

### 3.2.3. Open-Minded Relationship Approach

The third element of public value management, following [Stoker \(2006\)](#), is an open-minded relation between supplier and client of public services. This element of public value management is close to one of the most frequently mentioned advantages of coproduction and community initiatives, which is that the close relation between client and supplier will lead to improved public service delivery ([Bovaird 2007](#)). Community initiatives go beyond the relation between client and supplier in coproduction. By taking initiative to deliver public services, the service supplier is or becomes part of the relations between people in the community. And in this relationship, people are committed because

service delivery is embedded in and concerns their own place and community (Manzo and Perkins 2006). Some studies conclude that these relationships are insufficient and organizational resources are necessary especially to guarantee professional service delivery in the longer run (Bakker 2015). We follow Aiken (2000) by emphasizing that the public debate and collective actions do not result from top down institutionalized initiatives, but by bottom-up social relations. Nonetheless, in order to be sustainable over time, community initiatives tend to professionalize, whether through developing a business case or an organizational structure (Igalla and Meerkerk 2015).

#### 3.2.4. Adaptable and Learning-Based Approach

The final element of public value management is adaptability and learning. Capitalizing on local knowledge, community initiatives create public value from below. People in community initiatives experience themselves the effects of public service delivery on public value creation and changes in the environment which impact on public service delivery. To emphasize these local and adaptive qualities, initiatives are called self-organizing (Boonstra and Boelens 2011; Edelenbos et al. 2018; Nederhand et al. 2016) and adaptive (Bovaird 2007; Wagenaar 2007). In his study of citizen participation in low-income neighborhoods Wagenaar (2007) mentions another element, in addition to local knowledge, that is conduciveness to learning. Neighborhoods are complex systems with a variety of actors involved and this variety is of importance: "Increased variety in turn increases the number of potential solutions to whatever problem the system faces. Heterogeneity breeds creativity" (Wagenaar 2007, p. 42). Bil and Teisman (2017) argue that dealing with complexity necessitates increasing it in order to reach new solutions. Thus the blurring boundaries on which initiatives arise, resulted in local knowledge, but also spur the adaptive creativity to arrive at problem definitions and solutions that fit the complex issues society is confronted with.

## 4. Two Examples from Dutch Water Management

### 4.1. *The Role of Water Boards in Dutch Water Management*

In the Netherlands, government agencies are increasingly confronted with citizen initiatives. Next to municipalities and provinces, water boards also face initiatives of residents, landowners, and other inhabitants in their water management constituency. In the Netherlands, water boards are regional agencies whose boards are elected by all stakeholders in their catchment area. Dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century they represent the oldest form of democracy in the Netherlands. They have three well-defined responsibilities: flood protection, water quality management and water quantity management.

This clear task demarcation makes it difficult for water boards to do things that go beyond their core tasks. Their task orientation is visible in the efforts to legitimate their existence by focusing upon the best performance for the lowest price. Value for money is their adage. They strongly focus on the provision of public goods in a supply-oriented modus. Many water boards have adopted NPM mechanisms such as a strong cost management orientation, producer oriented service delivery, output budgeting, performance indicators, and sectorial work processes. Focusing on optimizing existing qualities seems to be more important than developing new work processes. Also the institutional context of the water boards makes it difficult to act beyond their primary tasks, as resources, including regulatory, are limited to the formal functions. In addition, Dutch water boards seem to be under continuous political scrutiny that threatens their very existence. The low turnout at the elections for the water boards and ideas at the national government to abolish them to reduce the administrative complexity of the public sector, are the underlying motives. Their response to this pressure is primarily to focus on provision of public goods in an efficient, supply-oriented way.

And yet, water boards are increasingly confronted with new challenges, such as climate change, sustainable area development, energy transition, and sustainable nature conservation that compel them to look beyond their traditional tasks and responsibilities. One would think that these new 'grand' challenges necessitate water boards to welcome any initiatives and opportunities for collaboration

with civil society. In the following section we describe two of these initiatives that attempt to cut through the functional, specialized tasks of the water boards, addressing precisely the earlier proposed hypothesis that initiatives are capable of reconnecting values, thus reversing the downside of reflexive modernization.

#### 4.2. *Methods to Study Two Cases in Dutch Water Management*

In the highly specialized domain of Dutch water management, we have compared two cases in which neighborhoods have taken on a leadership role in integrated initiatives, including other social functions and tasks next to water management. The exploration of these cases was part of a focus group in which we discuss several times community initiatives in water management. Members of this group are practitioners from six Dutch water boards and researchers who are interested in community initiatives in water management. With its mix of practitioners and academics, the focus group is like a so-called 'community of practice'. In the first months, the researchers interviewed officials and employees of the water boards. For each of the six water boards, we interviewed a civil servant, a manager, a governor, and two participants of community initiatives. The findings of the interviews were compared and discussed in the focus group. Subsequently, we visited the cases of the water boards with the group of practitioners and academics. During these visits, also governmental and community stakeholders joined the community. In these meetings, the focus group redesigned the governance processes in a way that citizens could take the lead. From the six water boards and their cases of community initiatives, we selected two for inclusion in this article: district Holtenbroek in Zwolle and district Groote Wielen in 's Hertogenbosch. The data collection for these case studies was organized through triangulation (Patton 1987; Tellis 1997), using document analysis, in-depth interviews, and a field visit as methods. In these cases citizen initiatives emerged that explored potential cross-functional connections with values outside water management.

#### 4.3. *Case Holtenbroek, Zwolle*

Zwolle is located in the province of Overijssel and is surrounded by the rivers Vecht, IJssel, and Zwartewater. Many dikes and levees keep the city safe from flooding. The national High Water Protection Program (HWPP) has recently set new safety standards to meet the expected impacts of climate change (more frequent high water discharge). The dike near the city district<sup>1</sup> Holtenbroek is one of the most urgent renovation projects. The water board Drents-Overijsselse Delta will take on the planning and implementation of the dike strengthening project together with Rijkswaterstaat, the regional agency of the Dutch ministry of Infrastructure and Public Works. This agency implements national water policy objectives for water quantity and quality management, as well as for water safety goals. It is expected that from 2020 onwards, the dike will no longer suffice to meet the new safety standards, due to the increased risk of failing on three aspects: height, width, and undermining (piping) the overall stability. Strengthening the dike will lead to an increased height of 80 cm, executed in the direction of the river Zwartewater, saving as much space in the land inward direction as possible.

Holtenbroek is one of Zwolle's larger city districts. It was built some 60 years ago and has now approximately 10,000 inhabitants and 5500 households, with 70% high-rise buildings and an over-representation of lower income households. Holtenbroek has a somewhat 'rough image'; it is the most multicultural and diverse neighborhood<sup>2</sup> of Zwolle. Some parts of the district are recently renovated, achieving a more commensurate proportion of tenants and private homeowners. Other parts are confronted with high influx of new residents and low social cohesion. The intended renovation of the dike along of the Holtenbroek district sparked the idea at the local welfare organization *Travers* to add new functions to the area, in combination with the renovation works. A city district manager

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<sup>1</sup> Geographically demarcated part of the city.

<sup>2</sup> Collection of citizens in a (part of a) city district.

of Travers took the initiative to invite residents to come up with ideas for adding new socio-cultural functions alongside the planned reconstruction of the dike in their city district. In co-production with Travers the residents succeeded in proposing additional socio-cultural functions, mirroring the specific needs of different target groups in Holtenbroek. A local landscape designer combined all ideas in one spatial map. The initiative was supported by the province of Overijssel and its nature conservation program. The spatial sketch combines and integrates all kinds of new functions for different residential groups. These functions have mainly to do with different values and ambitions for enhancing the quality of the living environment, e.g., through new forms of recreational use and improved accessibility. For example, new playgrounds often used by migrant mothers watching over their kids at play and safe walking routes for the elderly, some of which need extra care and attention. Also, they proposed new daytime activities around the city farm De Klooienberg for those recovering from (mental) illness or long-term unemployment.

However, the use of the area along the dike for different recreational and social functions—both in the area outside the dike as well as in the inland parts—appears to be complicated because different government organizations own and use parts of the area. Rijkswaterstaat owns the areas outside the dike, water board Drents-Overijsselse Delta is responsible for the dikes, the municipality owns the inland area and Travers rents parts of this area for the city farm. This complex land use situation is illustrated by Rijkswaterstaat's hesitation to allow the development of a small beach, a pier and a footpath on its premises. The water board is reluctant to grant permission for additional recreational use of the dike, apart from cycling or walking.

#### 4.4. Case Groote Wielen, 's Hertogenbosch

Groote Wielen is a new district of the city of 's Hertogenbosch, the capital of the southern province of North-Brabant in the Netherlands. The district is still under construction and by 2025 will have around 6500 houses. It currently has about 4300 houses and approximately 7500 residents. The district has considerable amounts of surface water (lake, ponds and small canals). Water plays a prominent role in the neighborhood. Rainwater is contained in the area and is circulated in the so-called 'living machine'. This means that rain water is not transported to the sewage system but is circulated through the surface water system. It is ecologically purified in a swampy area. In this way water offers an ecologically sound basis for plants and animals. The omnipresence of water in the district—including a lake of 40 acres—increases the neighborhood's environmental quality and sustainable character.

The initiators met each other at an academic course about sustainable development which inspired them to explore opportunities for enhancing sustainability in their own neighborhood. One of them was working as project consultant in the construction sector and the other was an innovation professional at a neighboring water board. After seeing television footage of a local ecological wastewater facility, they took the initiative to look into the potential for this in their own living environment. This so-called 'living machine' would consist of greenhouse-like containers through which wastewater is led and purified by the roots of the cultivated vegetation. After purification the cleaned wastewater will flow back into the district's water circulation system (the living machine), or into a canal, which is owned and maintained by Rijkswaterstaat. The initiators wanted to stimulate local and sustainable wastewater treatment, by putting its treatment within visible range of the users, their neighbors. With this plan, wastewater from at least 200 homes could be decoupled from the city's sewage system and led through the living machine. The initiators wanted to localize the facility in their own district, at a jointly managed urban farm, inhabiting several socio-cultural facilities such as day care for children and elderly, a biological pig farm, a meeting place, a farm shop and café, a music school, and a beekeeping farm.

The water board Aa and Maas owns and operates the main regional wastewater treatment facility, 20 km north of the city. Both initiators and the water board want to enhance awareness among local citizens for (waste) water management. The municipality has an ambivalent position. On the one hand it supports the socio-cultural functions at the city farm. The living machine could add new

possibilities for the execution of maintenance tasks by helping unemployed people who have difficulty entering the labor market again. On the other hand the municipality is responsible for collecting wastewater in the city's district through operating and maintaining a central sewage system that feeds into the regional wastewater treatment facility. The municipality controls the sewage system, keeping health hazards in check. Decoupling a large portion of Groote Wielen from the city's sewage systems necessitates additional investments; investments that the municipality is reluctant to make, certainly when it has less control over the health safety situation of the decoupled sewage system. Recently, the initiative was terminated because the initiators were less willing devote more time and stay involved, the municipality did not support it, denying to put money on the table and the water board decided it does not want to take over the initiative from the initiators.

#### 4.5. Summary of the Cases

Both cases are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of the cases.

Case → Characteristics ↓	's Hertogenbosch: Groote Wielen	Zwolle: Holtenbroek
Type of area	New urban area with modern one-family houses and large areas of open space and water. Built in consecutive stages.	Densely populated living area, built in the 1960s. Somewhat deprived in some locations. High-rise buildings as well as family houses.
Area boundaries	Area has a limited scale and is well demarcated.	Area is relatively small, surrounded by water, roads.
Spatial functions	Housing, recreational use of open space and water. Central shopping area with a health care center.	Housing, water-oriented businesses, recreational area, water-related nature development. Central shopping area, including community center and other social-cultural and health care services.
Social facilities	Schools, day care center, retail, sport and leisure facilities. Collective urban farm provides social services for different (vulnerable) target groups (children, elderly, long-term unemployed)	Schools (education), social services and day care, health care, retail. Collective urban farm provides social services for different (vulnerable) target groups (children, elderly, long-term unemployed)
Target groups	Diverse residential population.	Diverse residential population. Commuters (cyclists). Visitors from other city areas
Other (government) stakeholders	Municipality. Indirectly: Rijkswaterstaat.	Municipality, province, local social service organization. Indirectly: HWPP, Rijkswaterstaat.
Type of community initiative	Establishment of local ecological sewage system, on the premises of the city farm, with social and educational functions.	Multifunctional use of the area along the river dike, for different types of target groups.
Attitude of Water Board	Positive.	Hesitant.
Attitude of other agencies	Municipality is reluctant. RWS is expected to be reluctant as the initiative deviates from its core tasks.	Municipality is pro-active. Rijkswaterstaat is expected to be reluctant as the initiative deviates from its core tasks.
Current stage of the initiative	On hold. Initiators seem to be less involved, municipality does not support it, water board does not want to take over the initiative.	Pending. Area and dike redevelopment project is about to start. Social service agency is asked (by water board) to collaborate with the community initiative.

## 5. Discussion: Integrated Public Value Creation in Dutch Water Management

In the community initiatives in 's-Hertogenbosch and Zwolle, we explored the way they tried to create integrated public value. In this section we compare the public value creation of these initiatives, using [Stoker's \(2006\)](#) four propositions. A summary is given in the [Table 2](#). We will discuss our



findings based Stoker's propositions and provide some insightful quotes from stakeholders of both cases to illustrate how they have dealt with the struggles attached to these propositions.

**Table 2.** Public value creation in the two cases.

Case → Propositions ↓	's Hertogenbosch: Grote Wielen	Zwolle: Holtenbroek
Search for public value	Place-based technology which recombines water quality, environmental quality and the use of surface water	In reaction to potentially damaging sectoral dike reinforcement, recombination of flood safety with social functions of the dike
Legitimacy of a wide range of stakeholders	Place-based technology needs legitimization of place-based stakeholders. Stakeholders need to collaborate to for a successful initiative	Decision making by water board without considering the community initiative. In new set up, social service organization connects community and water board
Open-minded, relationship approach	Initiators seek partners that welcome the idea and move it forward. Both initiators and partners need to be open to unexpected combinations of functions to make the initiative work	Social service organization takes the initiative to activate local stakeholders to create additional value for the city district through the dike-strengthening project
Adaptable and learning-based approach	Technology is 'fixed'. Hardly room for new combinations. Only discussion about arguments, scale and location.	The initiators were well ahead of the formal procedures of the water board. The latter had to choose a so-called Preferable Project Alternative first before accommodating the initiative in the next project steps.

### 5.1. Search for Public Value

The examined community initiatives indicate a search for public value which differs from governmental public value creation. Citizens are able to attain public values that go well beyond the output of conventional public administration. An example is the multifunctional social purpose of the dike in Zwolle. It is self-evident for the community but until then unknown to the government. And the idea for the living machine in 's-Hertogenbosch combines water quality and sustainability as well as environmental quality for the people living in this city district. The recombination (Van der Heijden 2005) of public, private and societal interests is visible in the initiatives' intentions to bridge different societal and policy domains: the physical-spatial and the social domain (Ibid., p. 99) and, perhaps somewhat remotely, the economic domain. As such, recombination leads to alternative value patterns that are more inclusive and multi-focal. In both cases the initiators see the potential to create multifunctional and inclusive projects and to connect different ideas, interests, and actions in one initiative. The cases show that the capability of the initiators to envision a broader purpose of facilities, infrastructure and/or (urban) areas, is vital to create a broader value orientation. This is illustrated by the following elaborate quote of one of the living machine initiators:

"I facilitated the initial process, partially based on my expertise and profession. What are the most important values for the water board for instance, but also for the municipality, based on which decision makers could say "this is interesting, we should do this". We have defined a couple of themes [ . . . ] One of which was finance, but also social themes would be important, we thought. But these are always hard to grasp".

The initiators in both cases can be considered as (very) knowledgeable laypersons about the core of their initiative. The district manager of the welfare organization is well informed about the potential of the area for accommodating social and health care needs. The initiators of the living machine are well informed about construction and hydraulic works and the processes that support them.

What is striking in this integrated community view on public values is the combination of the spatial and social domain. In governments these domains are strictly separated in different departments; the silo-effect is augmented because the officials who work in these departments have different educational background. The ease with which communities make recombinations is an essential capacity in an era of reflexive modernization in which problems cut across administrative boundaries. Besides the combination of different domains, the communities also combine place, people, and technology. In Zwolle, for example, the residents know from experience the way that trees impact the dike construction. And in 's-Hertogenbosch people join each other in the neighborhood and develop a surface water system. These examples differ from governmental public value creation in which people and technology are often separated: engineers develop solutions and process managers organize stakeholder processes without tangible integration. Also, the location determines which government is responsible for specific, separate aspects of water management, making this a patchwork governmental interference at this location. Solutions, like the ecologically purification by the living machine, only arise by integrating place, people, and technology. The two cases illustrate the way communities see and create this combination.

### 5.2. Legitimacy of a Wide Range of Stakeholders

Both community initiatives show several problems related to legitimacy. These problems relate to the democratic deficit which arises from the gap between decision making at the community level and the working of conventional democratic institutions. In Zwolle, for instance, residents develop all kind of ideas for area development and advised the water board to choose for a small storm surge barrier instead of dike reinforcement. However the politicians of the water board chose for dike reinforcement because of its low costs, without considering the area development plans of the community. [Aiken \(2000\)](#) argues that the social economy creates a new site of legitimized decision making. In our two cases communities wanted to play a different role. Communities do not claim to be a new site of legitimate public value creation, but they claim maneuver room to develop new ideas themselves as an alternative site complementary to the democratic institutions. Connecting this complementary democratic legitimacy and community legitimacy turns out to be difficult. This is indicated by a policy advisor in 's-Hertogenbosch who questions the degree of representation of citizens in the initiative:

“It appears to me that it is almost always the same type of people that take initiative. It is almost always a group of (semi) professionals. Can we still call it then a community initiative? To what extent are they a representation of the entire neighborhood involved?”

In our cases this connection between democratic and community legitimacy, only arose when an intermediary organization is involved. That is, an organization that is familiar with the community as well as the various government agencies, and that translates the ideas and decisions between both arenas. In Zwolle the local welfare organization Travers functioned as a bridging organization and in 's-Hertogenbosch the initiative found a home in the city farm and the entrepreneurs behind it. As such an organization that is trusted by the community initiative as well as by the (local) authorities seems to be capable to overcome the divide between formal legitimacy based on representative democracy and relational legitimacy grounded in community efforts.

### 5.3. Open-Minded, Relationship Approach

The (more) integrated nature of many citizen initiatives thrives on as well as sustains an open-minded and relationship approach to (local) societal problems. Both cases show evidence of a complexity-embracing approach rather than a complexity-reducing approach ([Ashmos et al. 2000](#)) in organizing and implementing the initiative. The complexity-embracing approach contrasts with the commonly displayed complexity-reducing approach of many government agencies. Water boards are functionally organized and operating agencies, seeking to break down complex water managing tasks into manageable components. Water boards struggle with the question how to allow for civic initiatives

that intervene their functional and complexity-reducing conduct. As one of the board members of Aa and Maas indicated:

“[ . . . ] And this leads to the pitfall that our society has evolved to a state in which there is actually little room for advancing citizens’ initiatives. I find that regretful. Our time is too limited to get more involved, on the other hand, I have the feeling that civic society does not want to take responsibility anymore and leaves everything to government agencies. And this is not good”.

The CEO of Drents-Overijsselse Delta stipulates the organizational guidelines for accommodating civic initiatives:

“The General Board states that citizen initiatives need to fit the goals, tasks and resources as preconditions for active involvement of the water board. We can, however, assess the request to support civic initiatives with some flexibility, based on the desire to facilitate society”.

These separate components are subsequently supported and instrumentalized through budgets, expertise and organizational work processes and capacity. In both cases, the community and agency approach seem to clash, making it additionally difficult to find common ground in accommodating the values and interests behind the initiatives. [Thompson and Perry \(2006\)](#) refer to this as the mutuality dimension of collaboration.

#### 5.4. Adaptable and Learning-Based Approach

In both cases a goal seeking process is visible, both in substantive and relational respect, in pursuit of public value creation. Both the residents and the water boards are caught up in processes in which they learn to understand their underlying motives and try to find ways to relate to one another. They need to synchronize both substantive issues (what are we aiming for) and relational aspects (how do we communicate) in order to find a (potentially) productive collaborative approach. The fact that citizen initiatives are of relatively recent origin and not always very experienced, makes the synchronization process often difficult. Being able and willing to adapt their initial stance is often needed because the rationale to accommodate what is initially regarded as unwanted interference by residents and water boards, is not given, but must be developed. As the district manager of Zwolle mentions:

“Ideas and initiatives have to be assessed internally in our organization before being able to support them further. We need to assess whether these ideas are feasible. And this process applies also to the other public organizations that have a stake in the area”.

Learning to find common ground, both in substantial and relational respect, is of the essence here. This observation relates to [Ostrom’s \(1998\)](#) idea that collective action depends on trust, reciprocity, and reputation. It is not hard to imagine that these three key factors do not emerge at once, but need to be co-developed among parties involved, based on the willingness to adapt and the ability to learn.

## 6. Conclusions

Perhaps community initiatives are the vivid representation of Lash’s idea ([Lash 1994](#)) that the grand narratives which are the vehicle of modernity are no longer feasible because they cannot help us to understand the increasing, self-created, and self-perpetuating complexities. Instead “small narratives” ([Frissen 1999](#), pp. 264–65) rooted in communities are more suitable because they are still able to convey and communicate “shared meanings” that are the foundation of many community initiatives.

Community initiatives have an integrated, multifunctional perspective on the use of (urban) space and infrastructures. As such, initiatives are continuously making sense of their own living conditions by their active intervention in their own environment. Without the aim to take over all kind of public tasks, community initiatives organize themselves as complementary public value

creators. Government organizations, as the other public value creators, should be willing and capable of supporting initiatives by local residents and other users of the collective, civic space.

The ease with which communities engage in re-combination is an essential capacity in an era of reflexive modernization in which fragmentation and specialization continuously increase. However, this also clashes with the organizational practices and professional competencies of public agencies. It requires practices and competencies from public officials that focus on mutual understanding, flexibility, and interaction; practices and competencies that start from the principle that governance implies that legitimate and effective public value creation is distributed among public as well as private and community actors.

Reflexive modernization as starting point helps to recognize how community initiatives respond to the trend of specialization and to understand why it is hard for governments to deal with community initiatives. Community initiatives are however not a counter movement with the aim to change the world. Instead of a new site, as Aiken (2000) argues, our study shows how community initiatives represent an alternative site which is complementary to other sites of decision-making. At this alternative site, new solutions arise which are not possible by only state or market interventions. Community initiatives are thus an alternative and an essential site for dealing with societal problems and for the creation of integrated public value.

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