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# Citizen Initiatives in the Post-Welfare State

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**Abstract:** Recently we have seen the emergence of citizen-led community initiatives and civic enterprises, taking over governmental tasks in providing public services in various sectors, such as energy, care, landscape maintenance, and culture. This phenomenon can be explained by a renewed interest in community, place, and ‘local identity’; the erosion of the welfare state; the privatization of public services; a re-emergence of the social economy; and tensions between ‘bottom-up’ initiatives and the changing role of the state. The co-production of governments and initiatives can potentially result in a shift from government-led to community-led planning. This, however, raises questions about their innovative potential, the democratic consequences, and the potential roles of governments in enabling these societal dynamics. This article discusses these issues theoretically, illustrated with empirical examples from Portugal, the Netherlands, and Wales, in a context of uncertainty regarding the future of the traditional European welfare state.

**Keywords:** citizen initiatives; citizen-led initiatives; co-production; sustainable place-shaping

## 1. Introduction

Citizens getting together to take action in the public sphere is not a novel phenomenon. However, it can be argued that a resurgence of citizen-led initiatives—sparked by the decline of the traditional welfare state, a recent crisis of representative democracy, population decline (Meijer 2018), and a renewed interest in community, place, and ‘local identity’ (Horlings 2017)—is happening in 21st century Western Europe.

Self-organized collective initiatives are comprised of citizens who take responsibility to provide public goods, often taking over the role of governments or companies. They are often initiated independently from both state and market forces, sometimes in opposition to both (e.g., Van der Steen et al. 2011), although they can be supported by public and/or private funding, such as philanthropist donations (Tonkens and Duyvendak 2006 in Denters 2016; Patti and Polyak 2017). These initiatives can be focused on the neighbourhood, town/city, region, or even national or transnational levels, and they can be either sector-specific (e.g., food production, low-carbon energy production, housing, care, culture, education, etc.) or have a wider scope (e.g., Coy and Hedeon 2005; Denters et al. 2013).

Multiple terms are being used to refer to this trend, such as civic engagement, grassroots initiatives, community initiatives, civic initiatives, citizen-led development, the participative society, do-it-yourself democracy, etc. In this paper, we call these projects “citizen initiatives” (CIs) and define them as self-organised, citizen-led collective actions in which citizens themselves define the goals and how to achieve them, independent from governmental or other external organisations (e.g., Bakker et al. 2012;

Denters 2016; Edelenbos and van Meerkerk 2016). While some initiatives function as volunteer-driven networks, others develop into civic or social enterprises. Social enterprises are understood as ‘hybrid’ organisations as they tend to comprise an amalgamation of private, public, and non-profit organisation types (Doherty et al. 2014).

What is new in the first decades of the 21st century is the political and institutional support (e.g., by recent Dutch and British governments) for “active citizenship” (e.g., Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013). Discourses, such as the British “Big Society” or the Dutch Social Support Act, illustrate the promotion of a smaller, de-centralized government, supporting bottom-up governance approaches. These approaches aim to empower citizens and enable initiatives that can effectively support or replace governmental tasks or roles, while reducing public expenditure by withdrawing from the provision of some core public services. In the context of this policy paradigm, citizens are expected to rely less on their governments in areas, such as employment, health and social care, and finances (e.g., Borgi and Berkel 2007; Fuller et al. 2008; Perri 6 et al. 2010), and are encouraged to have a more active and voluntary role in the improvement of the safety, liveability, and social cohesion of their communities (e.g., Marinetto 2003; Newman 2011).

Although these initiatives are usually initiated outside traditional market and state structures, we argue that their action is always conditioned by systemic factors—both related to cultural aspects and the structure of the politico-administrative context of these initiatives—that might influence their performance and achievement of their goals. Moreover, the changing role of the state implies that spatial planning tasks are increasingly being devolved to lower levels of government, and from there to civic society (Davoudi and Madanipour 2015), leading to a potential shift from government-led to community-led planning (Meijer 2018) and/or the co-production of planning activities and services between the public and third sector. This new reality, however, raises questions about the democratic and economic consequences of this paradigm shift (e.g., Van der Steen et al. 2011).

Therefore, building on authors, such as Ostrom (1990, 2005, 2011), Lowndes et al. (2006), Ansell and Ansell and Gash (2007), Bakker et al. (2012), and Denters (2016), our aim in this paper is to contribute to the debate by discussing the influence of institutions on the success or failure of citizen initiatives. Further, we tentatively argue that this influence might vary territorially between different European Union (EU) countries.

Inspired by the models developed by these authors, and in order to understand and explain citizens’ engagement in initiatives and their success, we propose a conceptual model of CIs and their role in shaping more sustainable places, taking into consideration their arrangements with institutions, and incorporating elements derived from the concepts of sustainable place-shaping and social innovation.

Since this transition from top-down planning and provision of services to co-production does not seem to happen in the same way across countries that have distinct planning practices, politico-administrative structures, and cultural aspects, we argue for the importance of a comparative, cross-country study that incorporates place-related matters. Wierling et al. (2018), for example, affirm that although Western European citizen initiatives in the energy sector have been thoroughly studied over the past two decades, most research is carried out in individual countries, with only 11 publications going beyond the study of single countries. Additionally, a very significant part of this body of research focuses mostly in Anglo and Northern/Central European contexts, such as Denmark, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, with little focus on more Southern European or peripheral countries.

In the following sections, we will discuss how the co-production of governments and initiatives can potentially result in a shift from government-led towards community-led planning (Meijer 2018). We will elaborate on the innovative potential of CIs, their democratic consequences, and the potential roles of governments in enabling these societal dynamics (Van der Steen et al. 2011). While this paper focuses on theoretical aspects, introducing a model to analyse these initiatives, we will illustrate our argument with examples from empirical research carried out in Portugal, the Netherlands, and Wales

in 2017–2018. Although the three countries are currently members of the European Union, and thus share a significant amount of legislation, they have different institutional arrangements and particular cultural aspects that allow for a cross-country comparison.

This is particularly relevant in the case of Portugal, which is more commonly grouped with other Southern European countries, such as Spain, Italy, or Greece. The countries in which research has been carried out belong to three different categories of European welfare systems established by authors, [Esping-Andersen \(1990\)](#) and [Ferrera \(1996\)](#). The UK, along with Ireland, has an Anglo-Saxon welfare model, characterized by private forms of insurance, comparatively low benefits, and an increased demand for labour through liberalization and wage flexibility; the Netherlands fits into the ‘Bismarckian’ model along with other northern/central European countries, where the family is typically the main provider of welfare, albeit with governmental, contributory benefits tied to employment history (such as pensions and unemployment benefits); finally, Portugal’s system fits into what [Ferrera \(1996\)](#) calls the Southern social model, with a strong emphasis on the role of the family—often extended family—for the provision of care to young, old, and incapacitated members, and a strong job protection that favours full-time over part-time workers. Some authors (e.g., [Santos 1995](#)) have also argued that the ‘welfare society’ of Southern European countries seems to be stronger than the ‘welfare state’ in providing and caring for the citizens’ well-being, especially in times of economic crisis.

## 2. The Emergence of Citizen Initiatives

### 2.1. Top-Down Support for Citizen Participation and Engagement

Recent interest in “active citizenship” and the emergence of citizen-led initiatives can partly be explained by a simultaneous increase of citizens wanting to take responsibility for their surroundings and local communities, effectively, “taking matters in their own hands” ([Van der Steen et al. 2011](#)) and top-down, governmental stimulation and support for citizen participation. The motives for citizens to become more active in their communities and the reasons for institutions to support or empower citizens’ actions are manifold and often context- and place-specific, although this phenomenon seems to be transversal across many Western European contexts. In some Western European countries, a shrinking state sector combined with a decreasing number of welfare services has resulted in the rise of social enterprises ([Kerlin 2010](#); [Pathak and Muralidharan 2017](#)).

Pressures on traditional post-World War II welfare states, driven by factors, such as structural demographic change, societal changes, globalization, free movement of capital and labour, and polarization in the labour market (e.g., [Camdessus 1998](#); [Begg et al. 2015](#)), coupled with the effects of the recent economic crisis, caused an increase in the levels of social protection spending by EU-28 members, with [Eurostat \(2017\)](#) reporting a 18.5% growth in expenditure between 2008–2014. In 2014, two thirds of this expenditure were spent on old age pensions and sickness/healthcare benefits ([Eurostat 2017](#)). Increased life expectancy, low average fertility rates, and ever increasing old-age and total age dependency ratios<sup>1</sup>—in 2017, there were approximately two people of working age for every dependent person ([Eurostat 2018](#))—meaning that the current and projected demographic dynamics constitute an additional challenge to social security and national public health services. This potentially drives states to reduce public spending in areas that were traditionally the domain of central governments.

Discourses and policies aiming to empower citizens were championed by British and Dutch governments in the first decades of the 21st century, decentralizing and devolving some responsibilities to the local level (municipalities, civil society organisations, and citizens). In the Netherlands,

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<sup>1</sup> The old-age dependency ratio is defined by Eurostat as “the ratio of the number of elderly people at an age when they are generally economically inactive (aged 65+), compared to the number of people of working age” (aged 15–64); total age dependency ratios also include people aged 0–14.

the Social Support Act aims to “recalibrate responsibilities between central and local government, between government and citizens, and between citizens themselves” (Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013). Hajer (2011) coined the term “energetic society” to refer to a society composed of proactive citizens; in 2013, the king and the prime minister spoke of a “participative society” in their speeches. In Britain, the Big Society agenda promoted by the UK Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition in the beginning of the 2010s aimed to “turn government completely on its head” (Cameron 2010), promoting de-centralisation and bottom-up governance approaches.

Such policies are considered by some authors (e.g., Kisby 2010) as a justification for cutbacks on welfare spending and the privatisation of core state functions, claiming that the concept of active citizenship became “almost synonymous with decreasing citizen dependence on social services and other welfare arrangements” (Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013), while others have praised these agendas as a “third way of governance”, bringing the third sector to the table instead of simply transferring public services to private companies (e.g., Blond 2010).

## 2.2. Governmental and Political Triggers for Bottom-Up Citizen Participation

Other authors argue that recent governmental support for bottom-up, citizen-led forms of governance and the encouragement of citizen participation have also developed from a need to bridge the gap between citizens and government in an era of decreasing trust in governments (e.g., Edelenbos and van Meerkerk 2016) in order to restore trust and political legitimacy. Van der Steen et al. (2011, p. 320) remark that the Dutch “have grown increasingly cynical about politicians and about the political process as an efficient means to mediate between different values”; Wiersma (2014) says that political elites are increasingly being portrayed as “selfish and corrupt”.

As a result, and coupled with the public’s perception of some of the effects of globalization, of recent migration policies, and with a growing anti-EU sentiment amplified by the effects of the Eurozone debt crisis of the late 2000s, traditional mainstream and pro-EU centre-left and centre-right parties have undergone deep losses in recent elections across Europe, mostly to the benefit of anti-establishment, nationalist, and anti-EU integration parties. Thus, authors, such as Exadaktylos (2014), argue that citizen engagement stemming from the loss of political trust is at the core of this crisis of representative democracy, and that the quality of a mature liberal democracy can be enhanced by institutionalizing grassroots, bottom-up “informal ways of doing things”.

At the same time, and as a consequence of their detachment and lack of identification with the political and governmental establishment, citizens take public matters in their own hands (e.g., Van der Steen et al. 2011; Edelenbos and van Meerkerk 2016), engaging in the public sphere in additional ways other than the traditional representative democracy mechanism of electing representatives by taking action in spontaneous and self-organised ways. Some witness a paradigm change in the way citizens organize and act regarding public affairs (e.g., Stolle and Hooghe 2005; Van Meerkerk et al. 2013; Wagenaar and Healey 2015; Edelenbos and van Meerkerk 2016), with citizen-led initiatives being increasingly viewed as a response to small-scale local-based issues, empowering and educating citizens, and reducing their reliance on state bureaucracies (Bakker et al. 2012; Denters 2016).

The case of Portugal is very distinct from the UK and the Netherlands. Although the competences of municipalities have steadily expanded over the four decades that followed the establishment of the country’s 1976 constitution (Silva 2017), Portugal remains one of the most centralised countries in the European Union (e.g., Teles 2016). It lacks a regional tier of government and, although political discourses generally support decentralization and citizen participation, it is argued (e.g., Silva 2015, 2017) that, in practice, central government still keeps an important control role, constraining local decision-making by controlling municipalities’ sources of income and expenditure, and through the establishment of strict norms and regulations.

The centralizing nature of the Portuguese state, although frequent rhetorical references to decentralization do not necessarily translate to legislation, is reflected in the central government’s

expenditure in local government: Only 12.4% in 2016, ranking considerably below the EU-28 average of 22.5% and the figures for both the UK and the Netherlands (respectively, 23.9% and 31.4%). Local government expenditure in 2017 represents only 5.8% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), compared to the UK's 9.8% and the Netherlands' 13.4% (Eurostat 2018).

Low governmental expenditure in local government clusters Portugal with other Southern European countries, such as Greece or Spain—three of the EU countries that were hit harder by the impacts of the late 2000s economic and financial crisis. It underlines the substantial cultural and organisational (and budgetary) differences between Southern and Western European countries. At the same time, the crisis may have contributed to the emergence of some CIs in these countries (e.g., Castán Broto and Dewberry 2016), creating the right combination of circumstances for citizens to look for alternative ways to overcome difficult times and economic scarcity by engaging in collective and collaborative activities of service and infrastructure provision.

However, as we will see, the emergence of CIs across Europe cannot be explained only by factors that are related to the (un)changing role of government, by policies enacted at the national or supra-national level, or by governmental discourses and support towards municipalism, decentralization, active citizenship, and bottom-up governance approaches.

### 2.3. Non-Governmental, Personal Motives for Citizen-Led Action

Simultaneously, on the “citizen side”, we observe the re-emergence of the social economy and self-help, social innovation, and a renewed interest in community, place, and local identity (Moulaert et al. 2005; Horlings 2017). Not all initiatives emerge as a reaction to legislation changes, governmental action, or inaction. In fact, Van Van Dam et al. (2014) note that the different motivations for people to both establish and get involved in these initiatives find a parallel in what Giddens (1991) defines as “life politics”—individuals entwining their own political and social views and objectives with their lifestyle, connecting with people with similar mindsets in entities outside the realm of partisan politics, aiming at reaching certain societal goals.

Citizen action can be triggered out of dissatisfaction with dominant models (e.g., clean energy production as a response to climate change), out of citizens' needs (such as curating events in a town with limited cultural activities), or simply as an idealistic drive to improve the wellbeing of their communities and increase their self-sufficiency (e.g., Warbroek and Hoppe 2017).

There are plenty of individual motives for each citizen to enrol in civic action—including economic incentives. This is particularly relevant in the case of low-carbon energy production; the increased economic viability of such schemes, due to rapid technological advances, attractive feed-in tariffs, and subsidies, adds an economic motivation to initiate and take part in social enterprises (Oteman et al. 2014). Citizens are often able to make a business case for their social ambitions, establishing a social enterprise that is simultaneously profitable for themselves and capable of achieving societal change or a positive impact on their communities (de Jong 2016).

Zahra et al. (2009) split these social entrepreneurs in three categories: Social bricoleurs (focus on local needs), social engineers (focused on achieving long-term systemic change), and social constructivists (acting on identified market and/or government failures). Social bricoleurs act locally and are usually driven by an altruistic tendency to improve their own communities, while social engineers are often revolutionary and aim at tackling wider societal issues, usually against existing institutions.

On the other hand, social constructivists act in areas where they feel that companies, institutions, and civil society are not properly addressing certain social needs. This applies to the case of citizens who start their own initiatives as a reaction to budget cuts or the withdrawal of public entities from some roles that typically belonged to the central government or municipalities as described earlier. Although often these initiatives, especially those developed in opposition to state policy, do not seek to establish any links with existent institutions, it is common for citizen initiatives and



government to work together in order to achieve common goals—a partnership that can be loosely defined as “co-production”.

### 3. Citizen-Government Co-Production

It has been argued that the co-production of governments and citizen initiatives, when led by citizens and supported by state actors, can potentially result in a shift in planning practice from government-led to community-led planning (Meijer 2018). As Whitaker (1980) said, an immanent characteristic of societal change is the co-production of citizens and grassroots organizations, needed for the necessary individual changes in behaviour, to manage initiatives and projects more effectively, but also to create the dynamic that encourages transformative practices.

Elinor Ostrom (1996) has defined co-production as “the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not in the same organization”, with citizens playing an active role in the production of public goods and services. This creates synergy between what a government does and what citizens do (Ostrom 1996, p. 1079). Others have built on this definition, referring to co-production as the involvement of individual citizens or groups of citizens in public service delivery (Verschuere et al. 2012, cited in Nesti 2017). Albrechts (2012) adds that co-production implies “equal partnership” between the multiple partners. It shifts the balance of power, responsibility, and resources from professionals to individuals and collectives, engaged in shaping their own places (Albrechts 2012). Co-production between citizens and government is also seen as a gain in program efficiency, effectiveness (Marschall 2004), and quality of services (Nesti 2017). Although Marschall (2004) reviewed several studies conducted in the United States, Nesti (2017) shows that co-production can support efficiency in European cases as well.

Concurrently, for Cahn (2000), public agencies and citizens who co-produce a public good together may not share a common goal. For the author, who independently coined his own version of co-production, it is the interaction of the complementary aims of government and citizens—respectively, the production of the public good and the satisfaction of the community’s needs—that constitutes co-production. Co-production, thus, belongs to the upper rungs of Arnstein’s ladder of participation (Arnstein 1969), where the citizen has some degree of control over the process, and not a merely consultative role (e.g., Mitlin 2008).

The idea of co-production goes hand in hand with the concept of governance—as Rhodes (1996, pp. 562–63) puts it, “a change in the meaning of government ( . . . ) the new method by which society is governed”, acknowledging the involvement of non-governmental actors in governing societies and decision-making. Driessen et al. (2012) distinguish five different modes of governance (centralised, decentralised, public-private, interactive, and self-governance), with the first three being initiated by governmental institutions, and the latter two initiated by multiple actors, including governmental agencies (interactive governance), or exclusively by the private sector and/or civil society (self-governance). Although not all citizen initiatives intend to interact with public institutions, citizen initiatives, as we define them in this paper, fit into the latter mode of governance, as they are initiated by groups of self-organised citizens. In these cases, public institutions, if involved at all, are only expected to have, at most, a supporting/background role.

Co-production can be positioned within the communicative and collaborative planning approaches, advocated by scholars, such as Healey (1998) and Innes (2016). Collaborative and communicative planning emerged during the 1980s, inspired by Habermas’ idea about communicative rationality, and shifted the focus to argumentation, promoting the ideal of (stakeholder) collaboration. Collaboration is targeted towards the optimisation of interaction and participation based on transparency, cooperation, and trust (Horlings 2017). The goal is then to identify joint ideas and values, resulting in agreements about how to see and how to deal with the world that surrounds us. As such we can speak of an ‘agreed reality’ (De Roo et al. 2012, p. 8). Critical scholars have argued that communicative planning does not guarantee good results as such, arguing that it reduces the value

of expertise and is often misused by powerful groups that are seeking a formal justification for their decisions (see, for example, [De Roo and Silva 2010](#), cited in [Dobrucká 2016](#), p. 151).

[Healey \(1998\)](#) emphasized place quality as a policy focus, and recognizes the power of agency and the importance of practices on the ground. The way institutions and systems operate is not just embodied in individuals who have power over rules and resource, but also in our assumptions and daily discourses, routines, and practices, which may become institutionalized ([Healey 2003](#)).

Although communities and citizen initiatives can take the initiative and lead in planning processes, in practice, they also still need governments for resources, to get juridical permissions and licenses, and to embed their practices in formal procedures. As authors, like [Seyfang and Smith \(2007\)](#), argue, initiatives funded through governmental support schemes—especially common in community renewable energy cooperatives—risk being too dependent on governmental resources, and are fragile to abrupt political changes, policy shifts, or budget cuts. The short-term character of grant funding programmes means finding additional sources of funding may be necessary for the survival of the initiative. These time-consuming processes often require extensive bureaucracy requirements; it is suggested that “initiatives spend 90% of their time simply surviving, and only 10% developing the activity” ([Church 2005](#) and [Wakeman 2005](#) cited in [Seyfang and Smith 2007](#), p. 596).

Similarly, co-optation stemming from power imbalances between government and initiative can also compromise their independence. Alternative CIs that cooperate with existing institutions risk becoming more institutionalised, having their values moderated or toned down, losing community focus, and adapting their organisational structures (e.g., [Coy and Hedeén 2005](#)). In short, resource dependency and the risk of co-optation are two of the downsides of co-production that threaten and compromise the independence of an initiative in case of collaboration and co-production with governmental institutions.

We also argue that both the institutional contribution to the likelihood of success of these initiatives and the possibilities for co-production between citizens and government are not evenly distributed amongst countries in the European Union. Significant local and regional variations on governance, context- and place-specific public policies, and cultural factors still remain in place. To further assess this premise, it is important to understand the place-specific character of CIs and the arrangements linking between CIs and institutions. We draw here on theories and models from authors, such as [Ostrom \(1990, 2005, 2011\)](#); [Lowndes et al. \(2006\)](#); [Ansell and Gash \(2007\)](#); [Bakker et al. \(2012\)](#); and [Denters \(2016\)](#).

#### 4. Arrangements between CIs and Institutions: A Tentative Model

Based on models recently developed by [Bakker et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Denters \(2016\)](#), our proposed model further acknowledges the role of place and the impact of pre-existing local and global social conditions on the success or demise of CIs, and it includes elements derived from the concepts of sustainable place-shaping and social innovation in order to explore the potential of these arrangements for shaping places that are ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable.

[Bakker et al. \(2012\)](#) analytical framework for describing the processes by which institutions facilitate, empower, and enable citizen-led collective action initiatives is mostly based on Ostrom’s Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework ([Ostrom 1990](#); [Ostrom 2005](#); [Ostrom 2011](#))—built on rational choice theory and a systematic analysis of empirical cases—and on [Ansell and Gash \(2007\)](#)’s thorough review of collaborative governance<sup>2</sup> cases, through which the authors identified the main factors that impact the success of collaboration. In Bakker et al.’s model, citizens (acting collectively) and facilitators (institutions) are the central actors, who interact

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to clarify that collaborative governance arrangements, defined as “governing arrangement[s] where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process ( . . . )” ([Ansell and Gash 2007](#), p. 544), are fundamentally different from the governance arrangements we see in citizen initiatives, as these arrangements are initiated by state actors.

in “action arenas”, where the outcomes are ultimately produced (Ostrom 2005). Bakker et al. also incorporate Lowndes et al. (2006)’s CLEAR model that clusters factors aiming at explaining citizens’ civic participation: Their resources (time, money, and civic skills), their motives, their mobilisation, the existence of social networks that support participation, their trust in local government, and their perception of the likelihood of success of their action.

Denters (2016) builds on this framework, adapting it to assess the success and failure of civic actions. Besides exploring the motivations and resources of citizens (“aims and ambitions”, “contacts”, “talents and time”), the author’s ACTIE model is adapted to include non-“person oriented” systemic factors related to the culture and structure of the politico-administrative context in which initiatives operate: “Institutionalisation” (structural conditions for participation) and “empathy and expectations” (related to the cultural conditions for participation).

In addition to these already documented factors that influence citizens’ capacities, we argue that it is important to take into consideration the history of past collaboration (or its absence) between citizens and institutions, and physical, geographical, and geopolitical features of the territory in which the initiatives take place.

Furthermore, place is a central concept in our model to contextualize the arena in which citizen initiatives occur. Here, we acknowledge place as relational, as an “assemblage of relations reconfigured through processes of restructuring and continuously changing as a result of economic, institutional and cultural transformation” (Woods 2015; Horlings et al. 2018, p. 4) where places are understood as nodes in networks, so the outcome of relations that stretch beyond geographical boundaries, as points of intersection where the global and the local are integrated (Massey 2005). Key to the relational approach is place connectivity (Horlings 2018), which helps us to understand how practices, such as those of citizen initiatives, are geographically unbounded and embedded in the complexities of wider spatial connections. While it is argued that processes of globalization can lead to a uniformization of places, diminishing their distinctiveness, identity, significance, and sense of place (Escobar 2001; Massey 2005; Rankin 2009; Bell et al. 2010), it can also be said that these processes are uneven and play out differently in different places (Horlings 2018), resulting in “territories of difference” (Escobar 2008). As institutions have different sets of rules and structures in different European Union member states, it is also argued (Farole et al. 2011; Tomaney 2014) that similar institutional settings—such as rules and regulations that are common in the whole EU—work out in varied ways in different places.

Place is the arena where different actors, groups of citizens, and institutions interact. Places are both the arenas of negotiation (Horlings 2018) and the products of those interactions, which continuously re-shape places. In our model, we take into consideration and integrate the concept of sustainable place-shaping, referring to processes that connect people to places. This concept acknowledges that spatially differentiating structuring processes, sociocultural, political-economic, and economic, ultimately shape places. However, the agency of people, expressed by citizen initiatives, but also resourceful communities, forms of social entrepreneurship, grassroots innovation, and social movements, are capable of altering the web of relations and interconnected practices of which they are part of, not a defensive response, but as a pro-active power (Horlings 2016; Roep et al. 2015).

Citizen initiatives, as mentioned, can express transformative agency in fields, such as food, energy, and co-housing, changing a place according to their needs, ideas, and values, through a re-grounding of practices in place-specific assets and resources, a repositioning towards markets through the development of social economies and social services, and a re-appreciation of places, contributing to place-based development—if supported by collaborative modes of governance (Horlings and Roep 2015; Roep et al. 2015). Sustainable place-shaping is seen as a way of strengthening the participation, collaboration, collective agency, self-efficacy, and leadership of people who take action in places. According to these authors, these processes are central to a place-based approach to sustainable development.

Other authors have suggested that the practices of citizen initiatives offer potential for social innovation. Social innovation refers to “innovations that are social both in their ends in their



means” (Bureau of European Policy Advisers 2010) or “new ideas that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations” (European Commission 2011), adding value to markets, governments, and to society (European Commission 2014; Vasta and Figueiredo 2018). MacCallum et al. (2009) clarify that social innovation goes beyond the traditional technology-focused meaning of ‘innovation’, emphasising the knowledge and cultural assets of communities. Moulaert et al. (2013) argue that social innovations have the potential to enhance societies’ capacities to act, inspiring “social movements, associations, [and] bottom-up initiatives” to improve their communities. On the other hand, Bock (2012, 2016) has a more critical view of the concept, questioning if it merely means the hollowing out of the state and shifting of responsibilities to the individual or market agents, mirroring the already described criticism of governmental support for active citizenship.

Places are not just relevant as an arena of negotiation of interests, but also in the context of subjective processes of sense-making, as people perceive and experience place and attribute values to places (Horlings 2015a; Horlings 2015b). People have a ‘sense of place’ defined as the process by which individuals and groups derive meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings from a particular locality, based on human experience, thoughts, emotions, and social relationships (Chapin and Knapp 2015). Strong bonds between people and places tend to motivate environment-friendly behaviours, as people are more likely to protect places that are meaningful to them (Manzo and Perkins 2006; Horlings 2018). Attachment to place is a driver for initiatives to emerge and flourish.

We identify an overlap between what is defined in European policy as a social innovation activity, the abovementioned interpretations of the meaning of social innovation and our definition of citizen initiatives. Consequently, we have integrated social innovation in our PlaCI model<sup>3</sup>. The model of CIs and their role in shaping sustainable places through collaboration with institutions is synthesised in Figure 1.

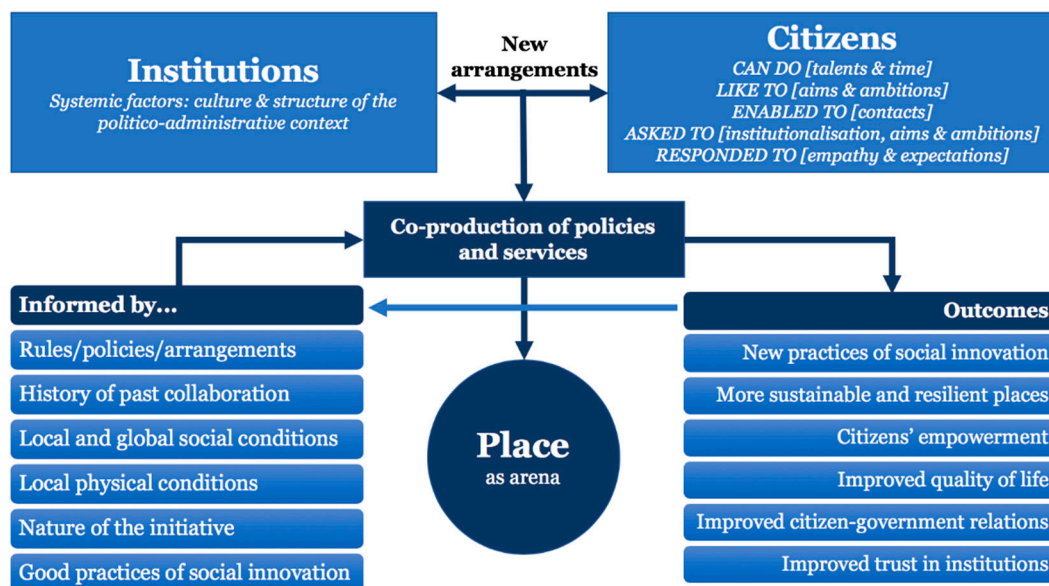


Figure 1. PlaCI: Conceptual model of citizen initiatives and their role in shaping sustainable places.

The PlaCI model emphasizes the conditions for citizen initiatives, in addition to the exogenous variables that influence the interactions between citizens and institutions already described by Bakker et al. and the systemic factors enunciated by Denter. It is a systems map that shows how citizen initiatives are informed and influenced by a range of factors, but also result in spatially varied

<sup>3</sup> PlaCI was named to highlight the importance of ‘place’ (Pla) in the relationship between citizen (C) and institution (I).

outcomes. As mentioned, in this paper, we focus the analysis on the factors related to the influence of institutions and the differences between the three countries. Future research will see a more detailed analysis of CIs in places via the proposed PlaCI model as a whole, with a focus on questions other than the influence of institutions and territorial differences.

With regard to influential conditions, the PlaCI model acknowledges both local and global economic and social conditions that might trigger or influence the determination of citizens to act and the kind of initiatives that surface in each place. This is especially relevant in countries where the effects of the recent European economic and financial crisis were most felt, such as Greece, Portugal, Spain, Cyprus, and Ireland; in ageing societies facing shortage of care facilities and staff; or in countries experiencing great institutional and social changes, such as Croatia (granted EU membership in 2013) or the United Kingdom (negotiating its withdrawal from the EU as of 2018).

It also takes into consideration the already mentioned varied transformations in Western Europe in terms of the roles that traditional institutions and civil society play in public life; acknowledging the spatial differences between places where those transformations have an impact, as well as the historic processes that have shaped these places. This includes the history of past collaboration (or lack thereof) between citizens and institutions, and the pre-existing rules and policies that might contribute to path dependency.

The outcomes of arrangements and interactions between citizens and institutions, if successful, may potentially result in the shaping of more sustainable and resilient places, the empowerment of citizens, new governance roles—leading to the restoration of citizens' declining trust in institutions—and an improvement of the quality of life among members of the communities. The outcomes are expected to influence and effectively change the preconditions that shape future interactions between citizens and institutions.

However, these hypotheses need to be tested in future research, although scholars have already elaborated some of these potential outcomes, for example, in the field of energy transition ([Arentsen and Bellekom 2014](#); [Timmerman 2017](#)) and liveable neighbourhoods and communities ([Marschall 2004](#)). In the next sections, we will provide some illustrations and preliminary findings of arrangements between citizen initiatives and institutions in Portugal, Wales, and the Netherlands.

## 5. Examples of Citizen Initiatives

In order to illustrate and discuss the arrangements between citizen initiatives and institutions, in this section, we showcase the examples of three citizen initiatives operating locally in the three countries, one per country. The initiatives were selected based on the fact that all three operate in the same sector—in this case, the production of renewable (wind and solar) energy, in order to allow for a more accurate comparison between the three different territorial contexts. The sector of renewables shows hundreds of initiatives in Europe, characterized by a combination of entrepreneurship and civic engagement. Data were gathered between March 2017 and July 2018 through a preliminary analysis of policy documents and other primary and secondary sources, and through detailed interviews with a representative of each of the three initiatives. The respondents were involved in the initiatives since their inception and were either contacted directly or selected via the contact persons of each initiative. Interviews were conducted in person, supported by a semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions related to the motivations for setting up the initiative, its history and timeline, and their interactions with other institutions. However, the scope of this article is limited to exploring the role of institutions, in the context of the specific national institutional differences between the three countries. The following descriptions of the initiatives, based on the information gathered in the interviews, will be related to our theoretical discussion.

### 5.1. *Coopérnico, Portugal*

Coopérnico is a green energy cooperative established in late 2013. The first of its kind in Portugal, it was founded in Lisbon by 16 people from diverse backgrounds and areas of activity, and it has

reached 1000 members in late May 2018. Established independently from governmental institutions, Coopérnico works with both state entities and non-profit institutions in several towns around the country, supported by a network of members who identify opportunities for collaboration. As of July 2018, members have funded 15 different projects.

Coopérnico aims to promote sustainable development through the investment in small-scale green energy projects—usually solar panels—that are installed in buildings owned by its partners, compensating the institutions with a yearly rent and the offer of energy efficiency services. In addition, after 15 years of operation, institutions, such as municipalities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are offered, at no cost, the ownership of the panels, allowing them to sell the energy that is generated. This partnership model guarantees environmental and economic benefits for all parties involved. It produces 100% renewable, clean energy, and allows for profit-sharing amongst small investors and small-scale, not-for-profit organisations and institutions. These organisations, often funded directly or indirectly by the state under tight budgets, usually have little to no capital to invest. These schemes help them secure additional funding from non-governmental sources.

The cooperative has not accepted any public funding or grants. The first Coopérnico projects were funded by other European green energy cooperatives, managed by likeminded citizens, whose capital was instrumental in developing, from scratch, a green energy cooperative in a country with relatively low levels of cooperativism outside the agricultural and pharmaceutical sectors, and where no other green energy cooperative existed before. After the initial loan was paid off, the projects were solely funded by the members of the cooperative, who invested in particular projects. It is also worth noting that this investment was further encouraged by the physical conditions of the country, as Portugal is the EU country with the highest potential for solar electricity generation, excluding the Mediterranean island nations of Malta and Cyprus (Šúri et al. 2007).

In this specific case, the collaboration with institutions is done at a micro scale on a project-by-project basis. Two of the 15 already funded projects were implemented in partnership with public entities (a municipality, Mangualde, and a public school in Oeiras, in the outskirts of Lisbon), and the other 13 were made possible through partnership with other cooperatives or third sector non-profit institutions. Cooperation with institutions is instrumental for Coopérnico, since the cooperative does not own property in which to install the solar PV units, and relies on the contracts established with their partner institutions to produce and sell the energy. On a national level, Coopérnico aims to become a stakeholder in wider conversations about energy, by meeting with secretaries of state, deputies, or the energy services' regulatory authority. The centralising tendencies of most decision-maker stakeholders, operating in an energy market traditionally dominated by one major player and regulated by a highly politicised public administration, are seen as a barrier for the growth and emergence of new players that promote a more decentralised energy production, distribution, and commercialization.

## 5.2. *Awel Aman Tawe/Egni, Wales, UK*

Awel Aman Tawe (AAT) is a community energy charity based in Cwmllynfell, a village located in a former coal mining area in the Upper Swansea Valleys, South Wales, southwest of the border of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Initiated by two citizens in 1998, the idea of AAT was to build a community wind farm project and to develop it as a community asset—with the profits going back into local community projects through the AAT charity—that could generate local training and employment opportunities, raise awareness about renewable energy, and reduce fossil fuel emissions.

The community windfarm was finally completed in February 2017, 17 years after AAT received its first grant. During its long planning journey, AAT's initiators went through multiple processes of negotiation with various stakeholders, including a public consultation that included a referendum, planning and common land consent applications, environmental impact assessments, and fundraising. Although the original plan involved building a five-turbine complex, they were only granted permission to build two turbines, on the grounds of visual impact.

During this long period, governmental incentives for investment in renewables decreased, creating an additional hurdle for the implementation of the project. In 2015, Green Investment Bank—created and owned by the UK government, until its privatisation in 2017—declined to finance the rest of the project amid concerns about the government’s withdrawal of subsidies for renewables. The last phase of the construction of the windfarm was ultimately financed in 2016 through a community share offer, which raised nearly £1 million, and through a £3.55 million Welsh Government loan that helped AAT meet a deadline and secure a higher level of income from governmental feed-in tariffs (FITs) that ensured the project’s financial viability.

As of July 2018, Awel’s share offer has raised just short of £3 million, and the two turbines installed on the wind farm are forecast to generate over 12000 MWh of clean energy per year, the equivalent of supplying over 2500 homes (Awel 2017). In 2014, AAT also launched Egni, the first Welsh solar PV cooperative, operating in roughly the same model as Coopérnico, having installed solar PV production systems in local community buildings.

The Welsh Government has not only supported the project through a capital loan, it has also provided technical support and advice through its Ynni’r Fro programme (2010–2015) of support to community scale renewable energy schemes and its successor, Local Energy Service (2016–). Incentives from the British government for small-scale renewable and low carbon electricity generation technologies, especially through the form of feed-in tariffs, are currently still in place, although being progressively cut, hindering future investments. In this case, the diminishing incentives from the central government and the institutional barriers to the construction of the wind farm were offset by the environmentally friendly policies of the Welsh government, who ultimately helped ensure the completion of the project.

### 5.3. Windpower Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Windpower Nijmegen is a citizen-owned energy cooperative that sets up sustainable and local energy projects. It was established in 2013 with the aim of building Windpark Nijmegen-Betuwe, a complex of wind turbines built along the A15 motorway, north of the city of Nijmegen.

The process for the construction of the wind park started in 2013 with the first wind speed measurements. In the following year, a positive environmental impact report and the approval of a new zoning plan by the municipality of Nijmegen allowed for the construction of the wind park. The park was successfully funded in 2015, with 95% of the windmills being owned by the cooperative, comprised by more than 1000 Nijmegen residents who have purchased shares (*windaandelen*). The remaining 5% of the shares are owned by Oost NL, an agency that took part in the last phase of the project preparation, co-financing the construction of the windmills. Additionally, the project was financed by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy through Stimulerend Duurzame Energieproductie (SDE+), their incentive scheme for sustainable energy production. Through this program, in its first 15 years of operation, SDE+ annually compensates Windpower Nijmegen for the difference between the cost price of the energy they produce and the price for which it is sold in the market (unprofitable component).

Completed in 2016, the four turbines produce enough energy to power 7100 households, with plans for a construction of a fifth turbine dependent on an agreement with a private landowner. The land in which three of the windmills are built belong to the Nijmegen municipality and are leased to the cooperative through a ground lease arrangement (*erfpachtvergoeding*), with the fourth having been built on private property. In the future, Windpower Nijmegen intends to build four more turbines in land owned by the municipality of Overbetuwe, and is also planning the construction of a solar park, Zonnepark de Griff. In 2017, the cooperative has signed an intention of agreement with the Nijmegen municipality for the prospective use of the land where the solar park will be built. It is expected that construction will start in the spring of 2019.

It is reasonable to say that the success story of Windpower Nijmegen was made possible by a strong institutional support for citizen-led initiatives and for the production of clean energy at various

levels of government. At the local level, the municipality of Nijmegen aims to be energy neutral by 2045, which has certainly helped the success of the initiative. On his foreword following the attribution to Nijmegen of the title of European Green Capital of 2018, by the European Commission, mayor Hubert Bruls makes the institutional support for third sector actors explicit by stating that “the involvement of citizens, social organizations, entrepreneurs, and research institutes is absolutely necessary to successfully implement change” and that the “symbiosis between an active municipality and a bottom up movement that stretches across all walks of life ensures that good intentions and empty promises do not bog down sustainable objectives” (Bruls 2017, p. 8).

This institutional support is also demonstrated at higher levels of government, as the regional agency, Oost NL—the East Netherlands Development Agency, dedicated at strengthening and stimulating the economy of the provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel—whose major shareholders include the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy and the two provinces, was also instrumental in the financing the construction of the wind park. Similarly, the ministry’s incentives scheme, SDE+, has also played an important role in its financial feasibility.

Table 1 provides a summary of the main features and differences between the institutional contexts in which the three initiatives operate, which and how are institutions involved, and the ways citizens are involved in the initiatives.

**Table 1.** Summary of main features of the three initiatives in terms of existing institutional framework, support, and arrangements.

Initiatives	Coopérnico, Portugal	Awel Aman Tawe/Egni, Wales, UK	Windpower Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Institutional national context	Recent financial crisis Low levels of cooperativism and active citizenship Centralism	Decentralisation, UK devolution of powers to national parliaments Phasing out of subsidies	Participative society Decentralisation Trend of do-it-yourself democracy
Institutions involved (and level)	Municipalities Non-profits	Community councils Welsh Government	Municipality Agency Oost NL Ministry of Economic Affairs & CP
Citizenship	Initiators Active new cooperative members Project-by-project share offers	Initiators Volunteer group Public consultation/Referendum Share offer	Initiators Wind shares
Institutional support/barriers	Symbiotic relationship with local partners Lack of supportive regional tier of government	Incentive scheme (Feed-in tariffs) Capital loans (WG) Technical support and advice (WG)	Zoning Plan Governmental funding opportunities Incentive scheme (SDE+)
Institutional arrangements	Offer of energetic efficiency services Lease arrangements with municipalities and non-profits	Delivery of local community projects through AAT charity Lease arrangements with municipalities and non-profits	Ground lease arrangement with municipality

## 6. Discussion

The three examples presented here illustrate that CIs do emerge in diverse contexts, with different institutional environments, diverse models of ‘welfare state’, and support. Portugal, the Netherlands, and the UK are, as well, in different stages regarding their relationship with the European Union. Although they are all currently members of the EU, sharing a significant amount of legislation and policy guidelines, the fact is that cultural, historical, and economic situations substantially differ and impact differently in the ways civil society and citizens organize and take the lead regarding particular issues. As Guasti (2016) demonstrates, the EU conditionally facilitates relevant changes in governance and restructuring ability, influencing policy choices and the performance of institutions in each member



state. Although the EU did not play a direct role in the emergence of any of the three initiatives analysed here, one may say that the diffusion of institutional models and financial instruments that favour civil society initiatives and citizens' engagement, together with new state-society relationships, contributed to that emergence (Guasti 2016).

A preliminary assessment of institutional and national differences in the support for citizen-led initiatives in the three countries makes clear that the Dutch initiative has benefitted from the most favourable local, regional, and national environments for the building of their wind park. However, it is also worth noting that plans for the construction of the wind park predated the establishment of Windpower Nijmegen. In 2012, the energy company, Eneco, reportedly withdrew from a possible deal with the municipality for the construction of a wind park in the same location where the Windpark Nijmegen-Betuwe is now situated. Here, citizen action did not replace the role of a public entity, but that of a private sector player. Nevertheless, the high level of citizen engagement, with over 1000 Nijmegen residents raising €2 million in a short amount of time, combined with attractive incentive schemes and institutional and financial support at all levels of government made the project possible. The completion of the wind park has also laid the foundations for an additional investment in a community owned solar park.

The examples show that regional entities were instrumental at enabling and financing the British and Dutch initiatives (respectively, the Welsh Government and the East Netherlands Development Agency). Welsh Government-sponsored environmentally friendly programmes seem to have been important in compensating for the rollback of subsidies for renewables at the broader national level. However, there is no equivalent autonomous entity in the Portuguese context, as the mainland territory of the country is not divided into autonomous regions with executive and financial autonomy, and its five regional CCDR (Commission for the Coordination and Regional Development) are decentralised agencies, mainly with administrative management purposes, of the national government with limited financial autonomy.

On the other hand, although the Portuguese institutional context seems to be less supportive and favourable to the emergence of citizen-led initiatives, the recent economic and financial crisis and the budget cuts following its economic adjustment programme have compelled institutions that traditionally rely on the central state budget (such as municipalities, universities, or third sector organisations) to look for additional sources of funding elsewhere. This may trigger the emergence of alternative and innovative forms of social organisation and provision, as well as public and institutional support for solutions that work, as the example of Coopérnico illustrates.

In the field of renewable energy, the EU made a commitment to implement an energy-efficient, low-carbon economy (e.g., Delicado et al. 2014). Specifically regarding 'Europe 2020', an increase of 20% of the share of energy produced from renewable sources was established and has been the main driver for investments in this type of energy across Europe (Delicado et al. 2014). Despite this common agenda, European countries have experienced different levels of success in fostering energy production from renewable sources. This is due to some aspects already mentioned, and to the fact that each member state has the flexibility to select technologies, sources, policy mechanisms, and instruments needed to achieve these goals (Peña et al. 2017).

As Delicado et al. (2014) state, several authors have looked into the main differences between countries in applying the EU agenda regarding renewable energies. Different planning regimes, diverse financial supporting schemes, distinct degrees of ownership of infrastructure and energy, and different levels of citizen engagement and participation are the main factors underlying those differences. As previously mentioned, Portugal is one of the most centralised countries in the EU (Teles 2016), with top-down approaches still dominant when it comes to public policies and public expenditure, especially in a context of scarce financial resources. Coopérnico, lacking government support and public funding, illustrates the increasingly evident dichotomy in Portugal between a centralising state intervention and more decentralised initiatives emerging from civil society, demonstrating, at the same time, citizens' efforts in providing services and infrastructures. This is in line, to a certain extent,

with the role and relevance of the 'welfare society' and informal networks in southern European countries and within the southern social model proposed by Ferrera (1996).

The two other examples show, albeit in a slightly different manner, closer interactions between CIs and governmental institutions. In fact, both in the Welsh and Dutch initiatives, the financial and technical support of the government at multiple levels were important aspects for the feasibility of the energy projects. To a certain extent, the support demonstrated by the Welsh government contradicts the liberal model in which the state intervention is supposed to be minimal in providing for citizens' needs and interests. On the other hand, this might also be seen as a way of empowering and making citizens responsible for their own welfare. In the Dutch initiative, the cooperation between the government and social organizations and associations, characteristic of the social democratic welfare state model, is quite evident from the Windpower Nijmegen example. However, it can be argued that unlike in the case of Coopérnico, the reliance of both initiatives on state funding, support schemes, institutional support, and subsidies makes their long-term economic viability potentially more fragile to abrupt changes in their local and national political landscape and energy policies.

The phenomenon of citizen initiatives should, however, not merely be considered positively, as it raises questions about the democratic consequences of these emerging phenomena. On the positive side, Lowndes et al. (2006) state that active citizens should not be regarded with suspicion, but rather be recognised as a key driver and value of democracy. Moreover, Bakker et al. (2012) argue that citizen initiatives are believed to empower and educate citizens and reduce their reliance on state bureaucracies. Citizen initiatives mobilise actors and active new forms of collaboration, which can enhance social capital. Higher levels of social capital within the community are more profitable for democratic institutions (Putnam (1993, 2000), in Lowndes et al. 2006). Democracy has moved towards a more participative interpretation. However, we also have to realize that commitment of local actors to their environment is constantly tested (Bussu and Bartels 2014). Furthermore, the handing over of responsibilities to citizen initiatives also has its downsides and risks.

Tonkens, for example, has pointed at the moral plea of governments to be 'a good citizen', without explaining what this might mean, warning about the risk of placing excessive workloads on citizens, especially in the care sector (Tonkens 2008; Tonkens 2014). The idea of relying on citizens' self-efficacy and their capabilities might be divisive in itself, potentially widening the rift between more resourceful individuals and more vulnerable groups, and manipulating citizens to achieve policy goals, increasing and deepening social inequalities. Another risk is that the participative society leaves less room for more critical or protesting citizens, transferring the responsibility to change their situation back to themselves (Verhoeven and Vrielink 2012). The potential substitution of state intervention by the initiatives of citizens could also contribute to governments' retreat in solving problems that, perhaps, should have been addressed by social and economic policies.

## 7. Conclusions

In this paper, we have contributed to the debate around the emergence and consolidation of CIs, building on authors, such as Ostrom (1990, 2005, 2011), Lowndes et al. (2006), Ansell and Gash (2007), Bakker et al. (2012), and Denters (2016). Particularly we have discussed—illustrating with three examples of initiatives from different EU countries and based on the tentative assumption of territorial variation—the influence of institutions on the success or failure of CIs. To this end, we have introduced a conceptual model, inspired by frameworks and models developed by the aforementioned authors, considering the interactions between CIs and institutions, and incorporating elements deriving from the notions of sustainable place-shaping and social innovation. The PlaCI model we propose includes factors that influence citizen initiatives and shows potential outcomes of their place-shaping practices, with a focus on the concept of place.

In addition to the theoretical aim of the paper to present an alternative model to analyse CIs, we have illustrated our argument with examples of initiatives resulting from research conducted in

Portugal, the Netherlands, and Wales in 2017–2018, in order to tentatively demonstrate the variations induced by different institutional arrangements and particular socioeconomic and cultural aspects.

While the analysis of citizen initiatives is often limited to a specific national context, this paper adds to the debate via a cross-country analysis, showing that CIs emerging in diverse contexts face different institutional environments, diverse models of ‘welfare state’, and support. Portugal, the Netherlands, and the UK are, as well, at different stages regarding their relationship with the European Union.

The described examples of citizen initiatives illustrate the relevance of the national institutional context, resulting in differences in institutional support and barriers in the three countries in the form of policies, finances, and technical support, as well as a variation in institutional arrangements. They especially point to the importance of lease arrangements to overcome financial barriers. Furthermore, the findings show the importance of the existence of a regional entity, bridging the local and the national level, that can effectively finance and support these initiatives. We have suggested that although in national contexts, such as Portugal, at first glance, the institutional context is less supportive for citizen initiatives, and this can trigger the emergence of alternative and innovative forms of social organisation and provision as the Coopérnico example illustrates.

Despite the increasing popularity of civic engagement in public services, we have questioned the democratic consequences of these phenomena and the tendency of government retreat in solving ‘wicked’ societal challenges, such as the energy transition. These issues require a more leading governmental role in raising awareness, agenda-setting, and mobilising actors.

This research has its limitations, especially in its empirical section, as the three initiatives have been explored on the macro and meso scale, but have not yet been investigated in depth via an exhaustive qualitative analysis. A fully fleshed out analysis will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of CIs across the three territorial contexts, not only with regard to their relations with governmental actors and the influence of politics and policy, but also a myriad of other aspects related to the creation and operation of an initiative. However, the examples illustrate the diverse arrangements and social innovation strategies that sustain CIs, evidencing the distinct interactions between citizens and the governmental institutions, the global and the local economic, social, and political contexts’ relationships, as well as the relevance of place as the arena where these initiatives and interactions are taking place. The exploratory analysis of the initiatives also indicates the relevance of place-specific and historical factors, aspects, which have been included in the proposed model. We suggest conducting follow-up research in the form of empirical in-depth qualitative analysis of each initiative through case study research, which will shed more light on the microscale under which conditions the explored institutional arrangements will result in co-production of policies and services and the suggested outcomes.

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