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Getting ahead in depopulating areas -

How linking social capital is used for informal planning practices in Sweden and The Netherlands

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to critically examine patterns of linking social capital that emerge from the interaction between non-governmental and governmental planning agents. We address this issue by, first, identifying elements of informality in planning practices developed by rural communities facing a long-term demographic decline and, second, how these elements of informality are linked to formal planning practices at the level of local government. Our paper builds on the concept informality to contextualise the shift from formal to informal in planning practices, and on theories on linking social capital to highlight the strategies rural communities develop to get ahead. We follow a comparative case-study design, with in-depth qualitative analysis of informal planning practices in the Netherlands and in Sweden. Based on our empirical findings, we distinguish three patterns of linking social capital: minimal linking, functional linking and reactive linking. In communities where social capital is well developed, municipalities may rely on community initiatives. However, informal planning can be problematic in communities with low levels of social capital. To prevent planning vacuums and large inequalities between localities, we conclude with several options for the future of these communities.

Keywords: depopulation, informality, planning practices, social capital, community initiatives, local government

Highlights

- Linking social capital is increasingly part of development strategies for (depopulating) rural regions, performed by local communities and encouraged by (higher level) governments
- Based on the analysis of strategies communities develop for support, we introduce a typology of three patterns of linking social capital.
- Relying on community initiatives is problematic in communities with low levels of social capital.

- The risk of minimal reaching out by local governments is that certain localities become underdeveloped.

1. Introduction

Rural areas all over Europe face a situation of population decline (Hospers, 2013). Several studies demonstrate that a long-term population decline creates a variety of significant consequences for local governments and local communities. A decrease in population numbers entails a lower economic out-turn per inhabitant and lower levels of investment (Fjertorp, 2013, p. 28). Labour-related tax revenues tend to diminish in these municipalities, while there are limited possibilities to spread the costs of pre-schools, schools, and eldercare (Haase, Hospers, Pekelsma, & Rink, 2012, p. 12; Hollander, 2011, p. 132). Another clear consequence of shrinking regions is that the physical infrastructure becomes excessive. Buildings remain empty and business premises are difficult to rent out. Houses and building plots become difficult to sell. Schools with inadequate pupil bases may be closed, but the school buildings continue to generate costs if they cannot be sold or rented out to some other business. Furthermore, the need for education, health care, well-maintained roads and other public services continues to exist, though used by a smaller number of people.

Local communities are directly affected by population decline in the sense that the size and the composition of the community are altered. Several studies have emphasised that certain groups – singles, young people, women, highly educated, qualified and well-paid individuals – have a higher propensity to move to bigger cities. These circumstances – understood as processes of “selective out-migration” (Weck & Beißwenger, 2014, p. 4) – change the social capital structure in these localities.

However, local communities are also *indirectly* affected by depopulation in the sense that local governments often meet depopulation with a change in how welfare services such as pre-schools, schools, elder care, public transport and similar are localised. Furthermore, devolution of planning tasks - from state levels to local levels - is taking place in most European countries. In their turn, local governments cut back services they used to deliver, or leave these tasks to citizens. This process is also indicated as ‘double devolution’ (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2015). Double devolution does not only imply a shift from one tier of governance to another, but also a shift from formal to more informal planning practices. While higher level governments plan predominately in a top-down, formal way; non-governmental actors, like citizens, plan in a more spontaneous, ad-hoc, unregulated manner, building on their informal networks and everyday interactions (Meijer, Diaz-Varela, & Cardín-Pedrosa, 2015). In depopulating areas this process is increased due to financial and organisational challenges of population decline.

Depopulation in rural areas and its consequences for local governments and for local communities form the background for our research. Taking out from a comparative case study approach, we seek to broaden the understanding for how local governments and communities meet with the challenges following from a long term population decline. Our comparative case study consists of two rather comparable regions in Sweden (Östergötland) and The Netherlands (De Achterhoek), that are affected by depopulation. Sweden and The Netherlands are two counties that have long traditions in both

statutory planning and stakeholder involvement, but also developed diverging ways in dealing with community initiatives. Here, we have a particular interest in spatial planning practices performed by non-governmental actors (NGA's). Besides exploring how they plan, we will focus our analysis on the ways in which their activities relate to and interact with planning practices performed by governments. NGA's can indeed plan for themselves, in informal ways and autonomously from governmental parties. Yet, vertical interaction with formal structures and formal planning processes can form part of an informal planning strategy, performed by NGA's (Meijer et al., 2015). Community - government interactions can also be understood as an inevitable part of the planning process. Much has been written about these interactions (Booher & Innes, 2002; Cornwall, 2008; Eversole, 2012; Gallent, 2013). Nevertheless, planning initiated by NGA's and interactions that result from these bottom-up practices (instead of NGA's being invited to planning arena's by governments) still is a blind spot in spatial planning practice and research (Boonstra, 2016), particularly in rural areas marked by population decline (Hospers, 2014).

Depopulating rural regions form an interesting context for these types of planning practices for two reasons. *Firstly*, European municipalities experience difficulties developing spatial plans for depopulating areas (Syssner & Olausson, 2016). The future of these regions is referred to as insecure and problematic, and decision-making is complicated by considerably higher planning costs (Pallagst et al., 2009). In depopulating areas, it is much more costly to maintain an equal proximity to public facilities (like schools, health care, and public transport) as in other areas. These difficulties can lead to a vacuum in spatial planning for depopulation regions. Less income and fewer possibilities for economic and social development result in status where less formalised future plans are developed. In this vacuum, some governments decide to focus planning on more viable regions, leaving depopulating areas without future visions. Other local governments search for alternatives for developing spatial plans: they outsource planning tasks via the involvement of other (non-governmental) stakeholders (Hospers, 2013).

Secondly, not all citizens living and working in depopulation areas have a desire to out-migrate. Some of them experience a strong regional connection and responsibility for their local environment (Li, Westlund, Zheng, & Liu, in press). Like in other contexts citizens want to have an active voice and regain control over decision-making for their local environment (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2015). This makes that NGA's often are eager to take over planning tasks and develop initiatives that improve their living circumstances, especially in the context of the before-described planning vacuum (Beetz, Huning, & Plieninger, 2008; Meijer et al., 2015).

This paper is based on a comparative case study focusing on the interaction between planning practices performed by non-governmental and governmental actors in depopulating areas. In the course of our field-studies in Östergötland (Sweden) and De Achterhoek (The Netherlands), we observed different types of community - government interactions. Taking out from these observations, this paper aims to critically examine patterns of linking social capital that emerge from the interaction between non-governmental and governmental planning agents. At a more general level, we seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of the formation of linking social capital in depopulating areas.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: in section *two* we discuss our theoretical points of departure, based on theories on (linking) social capital in perspective of a shift in planning practices towards informality. In section *three*, we clarify our methods and the cases under study. In short, the empirical body of the paper is based on qualitative field research in two case study regions. We analysed planning practices performed by several local communities in two depopulating areas in Sweden and The Netherlands: Östergötland and De Achterhoek. The *fourth* section presents the findings of the research. Our observations and analysis of community-government interactions led to a typology of three interaction types: minimal linking, functional linking and reactive linking. The concept (linking) social capital is used to map how planning is practiced by communities, and how they interact with governments and vice versa. *Finally*, in our conclusions we critically reflect on community-government interactions and the significance of social capital, based on our empirical findings in both regions and the theoretical framework. We conclude with some recommendations for localities with low levels of social capital.

2. Theoretical and conceptual points of departure

This paper forms part of an overall ambition to understand the interaction between governmental and non-governmental planning practices in depopulating areas. In this endeavor, we first need to define what is to be understood as *planning* and the shift towards *informal planning* in this context and to what challenges the interactions between the various actors lead. Below, we draw on conceptualisations developed by amongst others Van Assche et. al. (2012), Altrock (2012) and Eversole (2012) to define this shift and outline the context of our research.

To examine the various patterns of linking social capital, we however also need a theoretical frame that helps us understand the motives for and benefits of using linking social capital. Here, this theoretical frame is based on previous writings about social capital (Putnam, 1995; Woolcock 2001; Gallent 2013).

2.1 A shift towards informality in planning

In this study we define spatial planning as decision-making aiming to coordinate different processes of spatial organisation (Van Assche & Verschraegen, 2008). (Spatial) planning practices refer to process of making and implementing those decisions. Spatial planning theories, to continue, have traditionally focused on the role of governments. In recent planning studies, however, there is a shift visible towards planning practices initiated from below, by civilians, entrepreneurs and NGO's (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2012). A significant amount of these studies are performed in the absence of formal planning procedures and regulations (Altrock, 2012; Roy, 2009; Watson, 2009).

The emergent interest in planning performed by others than governmental actors led to the introduction of the concept of informality in planning (Briassoulis, 1997; Roy, 2005). Informality focuses on planning practices that are unregulated, uncontrolled, spontaneous planning practices performed by any actor (with a large focus on bottom-up initiatives), based on personal contacts (social capital) and the (strategic) cultivation of actor networks (Meijer et al., 2015). The addition of informality to planning provides insight in how NGA's plan and how that differs from more formalised government-led planning practices. However, formal and informal planning are seldom practiced in isolation. Especially within the

context of existing, formalised planning traditions, interaction between NGA's and governments is inevitable (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2016). For realisation and exploitation of their projects non-governmental stakeholders often need additional subsidies or legal certainty (permissions etc.) provided by governments. Governments in their turn are more often approached by civic parties, or stimulate community participation for empowerment of local communities, to reduce bureaucracy and exchequer costs or to shift responsibilities from governments to individuals as part of neo-liberal discourse (Curry, 2012).

Still, the differences between formality and informality lead to challenges when both types of planning practices interfere. Eversole (2012, p. 9) outlines the barriers that community members need to overcome when they seek interaction for support and resources from governments:

“Bottom-up change need not – and most typically does not – happen on the institutional terrain of the formal institutions of development. [...] At the same time bottom-up change still needs formal institutional allies [...] to access resources that are not available in any other way. It is for this reason that community members still regularly journey onto the institutional terrain of government departments and development agencies. It is for this reason, also, that community members willingly learn their language, participate in their procedures, and acculturate themselves, bit by bit, to their institutions. These journeys into *foreign institutional terrain* are difficult but potentially valuable: those who can learn to translate their needs into the language of others may find valuable resources and support.” [Emphasis added]

For planning professionals, the increased partaking of communities in planning also leads to challenges. Previous studies have pointed out that with an increased interaction between formal and informal planning agents, governmental actors “*make significant changes to their modus operandi*” - by devolving authority to local communities and by “*‘nurturing’ communities in a number of respects*”(Curry, 2012, p. 246).

However, the inclusion of informal planning agents in formal planning processes takes place in a context where these agents have substantially different preconditions in terms of power, responsibilities, needs and resources. Both parties have to, increasingly, enter ‘foreign terrain’ and to develop different ‘modus operandi’. This creates a threshold that needs to be overcome by both parties (Curry, 2012; Eversole, 2012).

Previous research testifies of different strategies developed by both formal and informal planning agents to overcome these thresholds. Concepts like ‘invited participatory spaces’ or ‘deliberative rituals’ are used to describe situations in which this threshold can be resolved (Eversole, 2012; Forester, 1999). Yet, these concepts assume a number of preconditions (like ideal speech, authentic dialogue or power-neutral arenas) that must be met to level the differences between the stakeholders. In reality, local governments often do not have the capacity to create these ideal circumstances (Curry, 2012). Both governmental and non-governmental actors often found different ways to mediate their differences in practice.

One concept that could help to understand the efforts made by NGA's to overcome the threshold caused by the above-mentioned differences is 'linking social capital'. Linking social capital, or the formation of vertical ties between non-governmental and governmental actors, is derived from the broader concept of social capital (Gallent, 2013; Woolcock, 2001). In the next section, we will further conceptualise how various actors form ties internally and with external organisations.

2.2 Theories on social capital

How communities interact and develop informal and interpersonal ties to act collectively has been widely discussed under the umbrella 'Social Capital'. Here, we argue that this literature significantly helps to further understand the motifs for and benefits of various forms of interaction between governmental and non-governmental actors in depopulating areas.

Though social capital in general refers to informal networks that enable people to act collectively, the definitions of social capital are infinite. Theorists like Bourdieu (1986) focus on social capital as a resource: it determines the capacities of a community to act and mobilise other resources collectively. For others social capital primarily forms the fundament of a community and the development of rewarding relations between communities and state (Woolcock, 2001). Robert Putnam (2001) defines social capital as networks that enable cooperation. According to him, social capital is embodied in forms of social organisation such as civic groups and informal community networks. However, social capital is not a given. Weisinger and Salipante (2005) define three basic ingredients for the production of social capital: opportunity, motivation and ability. First, a network of ties is needed that creates opportunity for social capital. Secondly, actors must be motivated to use their ties for collective action. And thirdly actors must be able to perform activities: without time, resources and knowledge networks have no ability to develop social capital.

The changing composition of the population in depopulating areas affects the opportunity, motivation and ability that are needed for the production of social capital. Depopulation is sometimes believed to lead to "a loss of social and cultural resources at local level" (Hutter & Neumann, 2008, p1), and to make the locality perform less well in terms of the availability of 'abled' citizens. Localities hit by selective out-migration, according to Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, and Cunningham-Sabot (2012, p. 213), suffer from "a lack of entrepreneurship and low levels of innovation and intellectual engagement". Consequently, the opportunity and ability to develop social capital is decreasing in depopulating areas. In contrast however, some voices argue that if social capital is understood in terms of trust-based "networks of civic engagement" (Putnam, 2001), small towns and municipalities characterised by "a transparent overview of local actors" (Leetmaa, Kriszan, Nuga, & Burdack, 2015, p. 150) can be expected to perform well in this sense (Li et al. 2016). Though the number of inhabitants is decreasing in depopulating areas, the motivation for collective actions usually is not.

Social capital is a broad concept that is in generally divided into three forms: bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Originally, Putnam (2001) distinguished bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding refers to the strengthening of (homogenous) ties with likeminded people within a community, whereas bridging refers to the inclusion of other, more distanced (heterogeneous) minds. Woolcock (2001) identified a third form of ties that can be developed: linking social capital. Linking social capital

describes the ability of communities to engage vertically with external organisations, either to influence policies or to draw upon resources (Woolcock, 2001). Linking social capital is different from bonding and bridging social capital as it involves hierarchical relations between groups that have different power positions (Tisenkopfs, Lace, & Mierina, 2008). Woolcock (2001) explains this process as the effort of already well-connected groups to get ahead by seeking access to (sympathetic) key actors at a higher tier that do have access to resources and formal decision-making power. The capacity to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the community is a key function of linking social capital. However, 'unresponsive' or 'exploitative' linking can harm community development by blocking off other important possibilities in the network (Vervisch, 2011). In literature linking social capital is often described as an attribute of local communities: they reach out to higher tiers of e.g. governmental stakeholders. Gallent (2013) also pays attention to linking social capital (or 'reaching out' as he denotes it) out performed by governmental networks, like municipalities, to engage with stakeholders at local community level. According to Gallent (2013, p. 378) local governments reach out to communities amongst others: "to search for appreciable legitimacy of grass-roots support in order to promote (or be seen to promote) democracy or advance its own development goals". Nevertheless, linking social capital from a governmental perspective involves finding a careful balance between guarding strategic goals that affect the municipality as a whole and the paying in-dept attention to local experienced problems. Gallent (2013) concludes that intermediaries, external or internal to local government (such as NGO's or rural development managers), play a crucial role in overcoming the divide between communities and local governments.

Linking social capital is not apart from bonding or bridging social capital (Agger & Jensen, 2015). Different proportions of bonding, bridging and linking social capital create different outcomes as they complement or conflict each other. Both strong internally organised communities and communities with a strong external focus establish successful projects. Conversely the lack of both bonding and bridging social capital is associated with failure: the absence of realised planning initiatives (Tisenkopfs et al., 2008). The proportion of bonding or bridging capital affects the performance of linking social capital. The presence of strong bonding social capital can hamper linking to external organisations for support: the internal focus excludes the involvement of outsiders, but also make communities self-sufficient. Alternatively, weak bonding and strong bridging ties may create opportunities to link to other stakeholders with more diverse backgrounds, information, knowledge and resources. Therefore, strong bridging capital empowers actors to reach out to other (e.g. governmental) networks. However, these efforts are not always appreciated by the inner community and can lead to (further) fragmentation of weakly bonded communities (Holman & Rydin, 2013; Rydin & Pennington, 2000; Tisenkopfs et al., 2008). Nevertheless, in whatever proportions social capital occurs Rydin and Pennington (2000) conclude their work with stating that social capital is always dynamic: communities (and governments) change through time and so do their internal and external relations.

3. Methods

3.1 A case study comparison

This paper forms part of a larger, comparative case study focusing on the interaction between planning practices performed by non-governmental and governmental actors in depopulating areas in Sweden and the Netherlands. The data referred to in this paper was gathered in minor villages and settlements in De Achterhoek (the Netherlands) between September 2012 and May 2015; and Östergötland (Sweden) during September-October 2014. During this period eleven different examples of community planning practices were studied (see Figure 1, Table 2). For our analysis we were particularly interested in examples that were located in depopulating areas and were: initiated by a collective of non-governmental actors (communities), unregulated by formal planning, served a common interest and had a spatial impact/aimed at changing spatial organisation.

The national and regional contexts in which these planning practices took place provide both similarities and differences. Both Sweden and the Netherlands have strong planning traditions, where formal procedures and regulations for the spatial coordination of (future) land use and distribution of facilities have been developed since the beginning of the 20th century. Despite these strong formalised planning traditions, local communities in both cases still prove to be able to develop and to a large extent implement their own plans. In both cases, they however yet had to deal with regulations like land allocations plans, building permits and subsidy schemes designed by governments; which increases government-community interactions. In terms of geography, De Achterhoek and Östergötland provide some basic similarities; they are relatively comparable in size and have equal distances to metropolitan areas.

Our cases however also exhibit some important dissimilarities. All settlements included in our study have undergone a long-term demographic decline. In the Swedish case, this depopulation however takes place in a context of regional growth. In the Netherlands, the settlements under study are located to a region exhibiting an overall population decline. In terms of population density, the differences between our cases are palpable. Sweden has a population density of 21,9 inh./km² (2016), the Netherlands one of 408. The corresponding numbers for Östergötland and De Achterhoek are 41 versus 257 inh./km². This implicates that though population density is far higher in our Dutch case, the settlements visited there operate in a regional context that compared to the national average is regarded as a “rural”, shrinking and less densely populated. In the Swedish case, the conditions are the reverse.

By adopting a comparative approach and by acknowledging the differences and similarities in the two cases, we avoid simplification in our analysis, and reduce the risk of both false particularisation (i.e. the belief that all cases are unique) and false universalism (i.e. the belief that all cases are similar) (Sartori 1991). By adopting a comparative approach, we also increase the capacity to generate or complement theory (Ragin 1987). Before further describing the methods for data gathering and analysis, we will introduce the regional contextual dynamics of our cases below.

[Table 1 Regional and municipal statistics De Achterhoek and Östergötland. Based on: (Bureau Economisch Onderzoek Gelderland, 2016; CBS, 2015; Statistics Sweden, 2016)]

	De Achterhoek	Östergötland
<i>Number of municipalities</i>	8	13
<i>Avg. surface per municipality (km²)</i>	152	812
<i>Inhabitants per municipality</i>	37,212	33,066 ¹
<i>Avg. municipal budget (per citizen in €)</i>	2,510	6,347
<i>Population density (per km²)</i>	257	41
<i>Projected population change (2010-2040)</i>	-8 %	+ 12 % ²

3.1.1 Östergötland

As in many other Western-European countries, spatial planning in Sweden was established at the beginning of the 20th century. Until the end of WWII, Swedish society was predominantly rural in which individual peasants participated in local (spatial) decision-making. Together the male peasants within a rural community (*byalag*) discussed the allocation of collective resources and construction works like roads or mills (Erixon, 1978). Nowadays this structure of *byalag* is still visible in many villages. The importance of local decision-making led to a great autonomy for municipalities during the establishment of the modern, democratic state early 20th century (Lundström, Fredriksson, & Witzel, 2013). While in other countries spatial planning developed into a system consisting of different tiers, with plans made at municipal, regional and national level, in Sweden the planning domain was restricted to the municipal level. This means that all municipalities hold a monopoly for practicing spatial planning, and have the mandate to make their own priorities in the field of planning. The monopoly is however limited by national legislation requiring local planning to take into account both general, societal interests and individual ones. The national planning act also defines some central requirements on the planning process and the requirement of public consultation for new spatial developments (Lundström et al., 2013). Today, communicative planning is strongly embedded in Swedish spatial planning. Consultation of citizens is either, in its most traditional form, organised in large public meetings or in more interactive settings, like workshops, focus groups or open house events (Wänström, 2013).

The settlements and villages under study here are all located in Östergötland, a region in the South-Eastern part of Sweden. The region consists of 13 municipalities out of which 8 demonstrate a long-term demographic decline (1976 – 2016). Population change varies largely over time and at local levels, and as a whole, the region still experience population growth. While the city centres of the larger municipalities attract new inhabitants and industries, rural areas in growing as well as in shrinking municipalities are all depopulating steadily in Östergötland (Statistics Sweden, 2016). Though every municipality deals with this phenomenon in different ways, in most rural areas a decline of public

¹ The variation between municipalities in Sweden is large. In Östergötland the smallest municipality counts 3400 inhabitants, while the biggest has 150.000.

² Also here the variation is large: the municipalities with larger cities are growing, the other half of the municipalities (and all rural areas) shrinks. <http://befolkningsprognoser.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ForvBefUtvNyaRegioner.jpg>

facilities and economic development is visible. Often this is compensated by a centralisation of these functions in central towns. At a local level several communities initiated their own public facilities, to fill the vacuum left by governments and social and economic developments. Below we will discuss into more detail the properties of these planning practices performed by NGA's; how they interact with other stakeholders and what opportunities, threads and expectations are related to planning practices performed by NGA's.

3.1.2 De Achterhoek

Planning in the Netherlands was established as a policy domain around the same time as Swedish Planning. Unlike the Swedish planning system, Dutch spatial planning developed into a system of different planning tiers: plans are hierarchically developed at national, provincial and municipal level. Since a decade, Dutch planning undergoes a devolution of planning responsibilities. Municipalities receive more responsibilities from higher tiers, but in their turn also outsource tasks to the level of citizen participation: the so-called double devolution (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2015). This development is marked by the King's speech of 2013, in which the '*participatiesamenleving*' was announced: the participatory society, a society in which citizens actively take responsibility for social wellbeing and other collective, sometimes formerly governmental, tasks.

The Dutch part of our study was performed in villages and settlements located to De Achterhoek, i.e. a region situated in the Eastern part of the Netherlands. It is a rural region, with many villages, hamlets and a few medium-sized cities: Doetinchem and Winterswijk. The economy is driven by small (manufacturing) industries, distribution services and agriculture. Since a few years the number of inhabitants as well as the regional economy, stopped growing. For the coming decades demographic change is forecasted: depopulation, ageing and selective outmigration of young people (Provincie Gelderland, 2013; Verwest & van Dam, 2010). So in addition to before mentioned national tendencies, the situation in this specific region is driven to the extreme because of the demographic decline. For local and regional policy-makers it was clear that an early recognition of the tendency towards demographic decline was the wisest thing to do. As they learned from experiences in other shrinking regions there was no use to try to turn this trend. In De Achterhoek, municipalities experiment with outsourcing their tasks to local communities. At the same time, communities actively make and implement plans to maintain livability via informal decision-making. Community members who choose to stay are committed to undertake action for preservation and maintenance of facilities in their community (Melis, 2011).

Sweden

The Netherlands

Legend:

- ★ field visit location
- ▭ study area
- urban area/settlements
- ▭ municipal boundaries
- A1 main infrastructure
- ▭ waterways

[Figure 1: map of the visited community initiatives in study regions De Achterhoek and Östergötland]

3.2 Data gathering

The data that this paper refers to was gathered through a qualitative field study (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). This method was chosen as the proper method to identify the actors' behavior in the decision making processes oriented to spatial planning. In both regions examples of community planning practices have been selected via snowball sampling in order to trace hard to reach research populations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Planning practices performed by NGA's often have no official status: they are initiated by volunteers and mainly represented through informal networks. In total five examples in de Achterhoek and six in Östergötland have been visited and the main initiators of the performed planning practices were interviewed. During these interviews, questions have been asked concerning the incentive for starting the project, the process of decision-making, inclusion and exclusion of community members, reaching out to other stakeholders (development of linking social capital), ways of dealing with formal planning and their experiences with depopulation. In addition, the project locations of community planning practices, have been visited with the interviewees (Pink & Morgan, 2013; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). These field visits provided more insight in the impact of the community planning practices (the change of landscape and land use function in relation to the surrounding spatial organisation of territory) and proved to be a good method to access more detailed information. In table 2 all visited initiatives and their planning activities are summarised.

Table 2 Location and planning activities of visited community initiatives in Östergötland and De Achterhoek

Name organisation	Place	Planning activities
SWEDEN (ÖSTERGÖTLAND)		
Grytgöl IK	Grytgöl	Football field/ sports accommodation Community centre Playground Outdoor hockey rink Library/ cultural centre Hostel
Godegård Byalag	Godegård	Midget golf Community centre/ library Plans to reinstall train platform
Waldemarsvik IF	Waldemarsvik	Indoor ice hockey rink
Bestorp Byalag	Bestorp	Swimming site (open water) Heritage/narrative route Car sharing Prevent school closure
Kuddby IK	Kuddby	Sports accommodation/ indoor football hall
Tjällmo Byalag Tjällmo Hembygdsförening	Tjällmo	Community centre Recreation route Local heritage museum
THE NETHERLANDS (DE ACHTERHOEK)		
Beltrums Belang	Winterswijk	Village plan Community centre/ library
't Haarhoes	Noordijk	Community centre/ library Indoor sports accommodation Village plan
BS22	Groenlo	Support other citizen initiatives (non-governmental)

		network organisation)
DAR Rietmolen	Rietmolen	Indoor and outdoor sports accommodation Community centre/ library
Brede Maatschappelijke voorziening Mariënvelde	Mariënvelde	Multi-functional care accommodation Indoor sports accommodation Community centre

Furthermore, via interviews with the initiators, other involved stakeholders have been mapped. These stakeholders include municipalities, NGO's and funding organisations like LEADER: the EU fund for rural development. Representatives of these stakeholder organisations have been interviewed to gain an insight in the interaction between governmental and non-governmental planning practices. In total eight additional semi-structured interviews were held in De Achterhoek, and ten in Östergötland. The additional interviews with municipalities, NGO's and other organisations were aimed at mapping the general attitude of governments towards community initiatives, formal planning regulations concerned with community interactions (and how they were put into practice), facilitation of community initiatives, support schemes and how depopulation influenced policy-making. Taken together, 29 organisations (community initiatives, municipalities and other stakeholder organisations) have been interviewed in both countries. Next to the interviews also policy documents, websites and newspaper articles have been reviewed.

All data gathered in the two case regions was analysed following Yanow's Interpretive (Policy) Analysis (Yanow, 2000, 2013). First, a qualitative content analysis was conducted in which recurring concepts, ideas and opinions about informal planning practices and interactions with other actors were identified in both case study regions. Based on this first inductive analysis the found practices have been analysed with the ambition to identify patterns of linking social capital that emerge from the interaction between non-governmental and governmental planning agents.

4. Results

Our examination led to a division into three main categories of linking social capital. These categories are based on the intensity of interactions and varying intentions to demand or deliver support. These variations depend on the extent into which NGA's developed informal planning practices autonomously, their relation to the formal planning domain and the capacity and willingness from local governments to stimulated community initiatives. In the coming sections, the observed categories of linking social capital are discussed under the headers minimal linking, functional linking and reactive linking (see figure 2 for an overview of our three categories). In short, *minimal linking* entails minimal interaction between NGA's and local governments. NGA's perform their initiatives rather autonomously while local governments strategically focus on the development of urban areas, instead of hard to reach depopulating rural areas. *Functional linking* is performed when NGA's have specific needs that demand support from local governments: an extra financial contribution or assistance in dealing with formal planning constraints. Local governments facilitate these requests. In the case of *reactive linking*, local governments act in a pro-active way: they design policies outsource specific tasks towards NGA's. NGA's in their turn, can use these opportunities to incorporate these tasks into their own project agenda.

[Figure 2: three types of linking social capital and the roles of (non)-governmental agents]

As social capital is a dynamic concept (Rydin & Pennington, 2000), it should be stressed that these categories are ideal typical representations and thus neither exclusive nor permanent. An overflow from one type to another is possible. After a period of minimal linking a demand for more support can arise from NGA's, due to changing contexts or the out-migration of capable community members. Especially in small rural communities out or in-migration can have significant impact on sources of social capital and the possibilities to develop community initiatives (Tisenkopfs et al., 2008). In section 3.4 we will further discuss what the dynamics of linking social capital involve, after we have exemplified the three categories of linking social capital in the coming sections.

4.1 Minimal linking

The first interaction type we observed covers all cases of minimal vertical integration. Within this first type, both community and government remain rather autonomous. There is little interaction between the municipality and local community: communities develop initiatives independently or even take over formerly governmental tasks, but do not express any urge to demand support from governments. Most village boards exist for a long time and developed strong internal ties over time. In peripheral, long-term depopulating areas, communities often have a tradition of taking care of their own needs and of developing initiatives without governmental intervention. Therefore, in such areas, most NGA's in first place develop their projects rather autonomously. Some of them remain largely independent from governmental resources.

Remarkably, sports associations often form the basis for autonomous community initiatives that practice minimal linking strategies. In Grytgöl (Sweden), Grytgöl IK (*idrottsklubb* or sports club) is the central organisation, incorporating the function of *byalag* as well. Since the 1940's Grytgöl IK runs a soccer accommodation, which over the years has expanded to a multi-purpose terrain and led to the development of other (non-sports related) activities. Elsewhere in Östergötland, the communities of Kuddby and Valdemarsvik have developed respectively a sports accommodation (including a self-built indoor soccer hall) and indoor ice-hockey hall. In De Achterhoek, in Rietmolen, Beltrum and Mariënveld, sports associations are important partners for the village board and form an important resource for volunteers. These sports associations have a very strong local representation: almost every

household in the neighborhood is a member and for newcomers, membership is one of the easiest ways to gain access to a local community. In the village Rietmolen several associations put their heads together and realised a sports accommodation at the edge of the village. Now this sports accommodation also hosts a community centre and a library. A community member explains how these associations form large resources of social capital:

“Together we know everyone in the village. And if something is the matter, it is a matter that affects all of us. People in nearby cities know our story, but do not understand how we can gather so many volunteers. [...] Everything here is done by volunteers. To run the sports canteen we have a yearly pool of 140 volunteers. Here we can get it done, because it is experienced as gezellig (enjoyable/entertaining).”

(Community member of Rietmolen, NL)

Sports clubs and other associations facilitate autonomous and informal decision-making: they provide an institutionalised basis for networks of trust, shared interests and norms and values. Therefore sports associations form a platform for both bonding and bridging social capital (Agger & Jensen, 2015). Then again, not being a member excludes neighbors from the local community.

In Tjällmo (Östergötland) the association for local history (*hembygdsförening*) does a lot of work. They restore and maintain several historical buildings voluntarily, projects that never belonged to the formal domain in the municipality of Linköping. Though their contribution is generally received positively by the wider community, some rather had these initiatives conducted by other formal organisations. The owner of an inn in Tjällmo explains why she finds it difficult to depend as an entrepreneur on touristic attractions provided by volunteers, based on informal arrangements:

“My worries is always the continuity [of the maintenance of the historical buildings], ‘cause you’re so dependent on that there are volunteers [...] But what happens when these people disappear or when they get too old to do it. That’s the worry, cause it’s also a risk for me: that I sell something that is not done by the community. To be dependent on that is a little shaky [laughs]. It would have been easier if it was the municipality owning it and was in charge of the upkeep. Then I would be feeling a little bit more save you know.”

(Owner of Tjällmo Gästgifvaregård (inn) in Tjällmo, SE)

This experience is amplified by the strong internal focus of the *hembygdsförening* and *byalag*, consisting of a retired group of life-long inhabitants of Tjällmo. Though they claim their meetings are open to all neighbors, hardly any other community member makes use of this possibility. The homogenous nature of these two (intertwined) organisations on the one hand provides strong bonding capital and explains the success of their projects. However, unintentionally their formalised decision-making structure and internal focus excludes other community members to participate in their practices. Another problem is that contacts with the municipality and NGO’s are channeled through the *byalag*. Poor bridging and linking capacities prevent an effective representation of overall needs and experienced problems at municipal level.

Autonomous communities that demand little support from governments are not only the result of their own internal focus. Minimal interaction is stimulated by local governments that have withdrawn themselves from rural areas and focus on the development of larger cities within their boundaries. This policy-making strategy is mainly observed in Sweden, where rural areas are vast and sparsely populated. Also, municipalities are much larger in surface (see table 1), while the number of planning tasks is extensive. Finspång (Östergötland) is such a rural, peripheral municipality. In this municipality, all larger facilities (sports, swimming pools, secondary schools) are concentrated in the city Finspång, which is now slowly growing again. An additional network of public transport discloses these facilities for the other villages. Two policy-makers from Finspång motivate their centralisation policy:

"It is a strategical decision to concentrate investment in the [central] city of Finspång. Here there are possibilities for growth; you cannot spend a lot of money where people don't want to live."

"So maybe people in small places have to be more active, take more responsibility for both economics and facilities; if that is how these place should survive..." Another policy-maker adds:
"and I guess they can do cheaper then we can..."

(Policy-makers of Finspång, SE)

The village Grytgöl is part of the municipality of Finspång. Though they have a committee that keeps contact with the municipality, most projects are realised independent from municipal policies:

"We have made every issue, every question and every activity a responsibility of the club [Grytgöl IK], so it is some kind of mini-municipality. Concerning the municipality of Finspång, I think they like us, because they always said that nothing is impossible in Grytgöl: they can take care of everything. Some other villages might be a little bit irritated, so to say. Perhaps they think we are doing too much. But if we don't do all things, no one else will do it for us."

(Board member of Grytgöl IK, SE)

Though internally strong connected communities are often praised, Granovetter (1973) merits the 'strength of weak ties'. According to him weak ties provide opportunity to vertically engage with other organisations. As can be observed in the above examples, especially in the case of strong bonding social capital communities find it difficult or unnecessary to apply for support outside of their local community. The communities of Grytgöl and Tjällmo have such an inward focus. The danger of an autonomous, inward focused community is that the needs of different minded or social weak are not represented in the community initiatives. As communication is often channeled through one or two contact persons, these needs are also not represented at municipal level. Another danger is that individual (vertically) strong connected and powerful community members are confirmed in their power positions. More loosely connected communities are more flexible and opportunistic in linking to governmental organisations, resulting in rewarding and functional interactions and more diverse initiatives.

To conclude this section, it is important to note that the observed linking is minimal and not absent, in the sense that general regulations still apply and provide some necessity for vertical interaction. A journey towards the municipal office is inevitable, when it comes to applying for exemption (from the

land allocation plan). Also, do most (Swedish and Dutch) communities with a village board receive a basic financial contribution from the municipality.

4.2 Functional linking

In most cases, communities still need support from external governmental organisations. Even in cases where the incentives for developing an initiative belong to the community, communities may realise that they still need functional (or pragmatic) support for realisation of their ideas. This support can be financial, but also concerning formal planning procedures or even for mediation. To access support individual community members often use their personal connections within governmental organisations. They use their linking capacity to contact the civil servants or politicians they already know or had good experiences with before. Here, we interpret this as a functional linking of planning practices.

More than in Sweden, Dutch communities experience formal planning procedures as constraints. In Sweden, only national legislation applies to rural areas, additional land allocation plans are solely made for larger built up areas. In the Netherlands, land allocation plans cover the total surface of a municipality. For new community projects, the land allocation plan often needs to be adjusted by the municipal board. Preparing an application to make these changes demands in-depth knowledge about formal spatial planning. Therefore, Dutch NGA's often develop linking social capital in an early stage of their projects, to avoid unexpected problems concerning formal planning constraints. A member of the village board (*raad van overleg*) in Beltrum, a village in De Achterhoek, explains what he expects from reaching out to local government:

"We expect from the municipality as a partner, to inform us about the possibilities concerning planning procedures, and to explore other ways to still realise our initiative. [...] We tackled a lot of issues as soon as we heard the municipality was renewing the land allocation plan; we requested an enlargement of the building zone and the possibility to accommodate offices"

(Village board member Beltrum, NL)

Nevertheless, communities often find it difficult to find a 'listening ear' at municipal level for their requests. In general, it takes time to realise a more productive relationship. This does not only depend on formal opportunities created within the bureaucracies of municipalities: subsidy schemes or the formation of rural development offices. Mostly it is the establishment of informal relationships that makes the difference: a fixed contact person that can be approached easily and is willing to provide access to other sources of expertise and funding. A board member from Godegård (Östergötland) highlights the importance of such connections:

"... we always have to nag about support we want for our community. There really needs to be worked on the communication with the local groups and within the municipality. But there are small changes; recently we received a new Business Development Officer, he is from the municipality and has a good contact with us [...] he can't change everything immediately, but he understands our situation very well."

(Byalag member from Godegård, SE)

The quality and necessity of communities reaching out to municipalities and vice versa, depends on opportunity, motivation and capacity of *all* involved parties. About half of the municipalities within the study regions appointed a specific officer to facilitate these interactions: a rural development manager. Nevertheless, these interactions are predominantly demand driven and limited to the functional needs of communities, and do not involve a policy scheme. In both Östergötland and De Achterhoek functional linking prevails as an interaction type.

One significant example of functional linking is found in Linköping (Östergötland), where the municipality opened a formal unit (*landsbygdsgruppen*) that deals with rural development and citizen involvement. The rural development officer (*landbygdsmentorn*) holds contact with all *byalagets* in the rural areas. For her the *byalag* is an essential hub for effective development of linking social capital:

“First of all it is important to find out who wants it [...] We don’t want it to be a private person, but an organisation that represents the village. But still, it can be really tricky: is it a strong byalag that wants this and maybe no-one else in the village...”

(Rural development officer of Linköping, SE)

The rural development officer of Linköping emphasises that local initiatives are very important for the municipality, but it is impossible for the municipality to maintain all facilities in the countryside. In the long run, choices have to be made between maintaining the school or the football club, even if every community wants to keep them both.

“I think that is the kind of choices that the municipality makes. We have to take an overall economic responsibility, and we expect that from the community to some extent as well. Otherwise it is very easy for people living in one area to want something, if they don’t have to make an effort. If we support an initiative, we want an effort from them as well. And that does not have to be money, not at all [and refers to an example where citizens collected signatures in favor of their own zip code area].”

(Rural development officer of Linköping, SE)

The counter side of a demand-drive functional approach is that not all communities receive equal support. Keeping in touch with less active village boards or communities without a formal organisation demands a lot of effort, while most municipalities only have the capacity to support pro-active communities. Stimulating linking social capital within initiative poor communities is problematic: ‘we cannot keep on pulling a dead horse’ a Dutch municipal rural development officer remarks. For the time being, most effort is invested in communities with advanced initiatives and that are formally organised as a village board.

4.3 Reactive linking

In some cases, the interaction exceeds the basic needs or demands from communities. In De Achterhoek we found some cases wherein governments proactively approach communities and stimulate them to take over specific tasks. Doing so, they designed policy schemes with desired outcomes and preconditions for receiving support. Though communities still are free to choose if they want to join, community initiatives have now become part of a local government policy as well. Instead of passive

outsourcing, like in the first two cases, governmental tasks are actively outsourced to local communities. These actions change, in a more profound way, the role of government and communities and how they interact with each other. Here, we interpret this linking as reactive, i.e. a more persistent linking.

Dutch governments have already a long experience with involving non-governmental stakeholders in their policy-making (like public private partnerships) (Louw, van der Krabben, & Priemus, 2003). Therefore allocating citizen initiatives in municipal policy-making is not as groundbreaking as in Sweden. Berkelland is one of the progressive municipalities in this respect. After the municipal elections in 2011 the municipal board started a radical policy change, aimed at modernisation of the old notion of 'noaberschap'. In a news article the alderman responsible for this policy change clarifies the outline of his policy change (Muskee, 2011):

"In the past the municipality financed everything, but costs increased every year. [...] 'Noaberschap' was already present, but now it will take a new dimension, because we have run out of budget. Moreover, people want to take responsibility and shape their living environment themselves."

(Alderman of Berkelland, NL)

In practice, this policy change means that the public funding of facilities is replaced with a subsidy request system: a community can now request a subsidy to take over the local library. They ought to arrange a location and staff themselves. In line with the earlier described paradigm-shifts at national level, other municipalities in De Achterhoek followed Berkellands policy change and reach out to communities proactively. However most of them in a less radical manner. They did not make policy arrangements to take over specific tasks. Nevertheless, all municipalities invite citizens to file applications for citizen initiatives and set up web portals or forms for this purpose. The province Gelderland has set up a similar subsidy system. A legal entity, like a village board, is in general a necessity for larger subsidy requests (over € 5000). The founders of BS22, an initiative in Groenlo that functions as a workshop for other citizens to realise together their ideas for 'a better and more beautiful community', explain what this threshold to formalise themselves meant for them:

"We never wanted to formalise our organisation, we felt better to remain an informal and a fluid hub for initiatives. At a certain moment we applied for a subsidy for citizen initiatives. As citizens with an initiative, we thought this would be a perfect opportunity for us to start a project. However, it appeared to be impossible, without setting up a foundation. It was the blackest day of our history as an initiative"

(Board member BS22, NL)

Now, being a foundation proves to have other advantages for BS22, as well. Their work largely overlaps with the common goals the municipality aspires for social welfare. Currently, the foundation receives a compensation for the hours volunteers invested in realizing these goals. It also means that the work of this citizen initiative and the municipality becomes more intertwined.

As argued above, these reactive interactions fundamentally change the role of government and community and how they interact with each other. Though the interaction has become more structured towards formal governmental planning practices, communities still have the agency to shape initiatives to their insights and needs. They use the provided financial compensation to co-develop other desired initiatives (a library that can also function as meeting place for instance). The phenomenon of reactive interaction is further exemplified in another study by van Dam, Duineveld, and During (2015) that elaborates on government-shaped citizen initiatives in the Netherlands.

4.4 The dynamics of linking social capital

As stated in the introduction of this section, above mentioned categories of linking social capital are not exclusive, nor permanent. Not only is an overflow from one type to another is possible, NGA's often develop more than one project (see table 2), and are likely develop diverse strategies for different projects. Where some projects can be realised with minimal support from municipalities, another project might involve an intensive interaction between municipalities and communities. It is also possible that strategies are interpreted differently by involved stakeholders. Sometimes intentions for the formation of linking social capital are ambiguous or differ among involved stakeholders. A reactive strategy from governments can result in functional linking experienced by NGA's: they take out from the policy scheme what is useful for them. Otherwise, demands from NGA's are not always met by municipalities when politicians and policy-makers continue a minimal linking strategy. In those cases, developing linking social capital demands a lot of capacity from NGA's, while little opportunity is provided to employ linking social capital. Especially less active and organised communities are at risk to be excluded from support for community initiatives, when only minimal support is provided by local governments. These communities are also at risk when local governments follow a more reactive strategy: outsourced planning tasks are generally taken over by already active communities with a strong network of ties. As we argued in section 3.2, rural development officers in their turn experience difficulties to reach out to these communities as well.

5. Conclusion

This paper set out to critically examine the patterns of linking social capital that emerge from the interaction between non-governmental and governmental planning agents. Based on our observations, we can conclude that NGA's in both Sweden and the Netherlands actively undertake initiatives to consolidate their village live: they build meeting places or take over governmental tasks. The experienced effects of population decline form the background for undertaking collective action. Though the nature of the initiatives is rather similar in both cases, there are variations visible in how NGA's and governmental organisations interact. The performance of linking social capital can take different forms and is not always experienced as necessity. On the other hand, pro-active linking can provide an added value for all involved stakeholders.

Our examination of the demand for support from NGA's and attitude of local governments towards community initiatives resulted in a division of linking social capital into three categories: minimal linking, functional linking and reactive linking. Our identification of different intensities and aims for linking social capital provides a more detailed understanding of the variations in which linking social

capital is practiced. This understanding is important as linking social capital is increasingly part of development strategies for (depopulating) rural regions, performed by NGA's and encouraged by higher level governments.

Based our observations and with reference to the categorisation offered above, we conclude with three major remarks. *First*, our typology demonstrates that communities develop diverse adaptive strategies to achieve their goals. In the context of a shift towards more informal planning practices, bonding, bridging and linking social capital seem to play an increasingly important role. For the formal planning system this implies that, at least in communities where social capital is well-developed, municipalities may rely on community initiatives and the informal planning practices to replace formal planning tasks. In the light of such a development, further studies will however be needed to elucidate how internal power structures within communities and villages both effect and are affected by a shift towards informality in planning. Who are the informal planning agents? How do they gain legitimacy, and what informal power structures do they operate in? And even more urgent; who are not regarded legitimate informal planning agents, and who are excluded from informal power structures in villages and communities?

Second, it should be stressed that linking social capital not only is an attribute of communities. If productive interactions are to be established, governmental actors also need to be equipped with the opportunity, motivation and ability to partake. Here, our study suggests that for local governments, one way of creating these opportunities is the appointment of rural development officers. Particularly, these officials could be equipped to build ties with local communities and support NGA's in their planning ambitions. Yet, future research would need to examine more closely the links between a consistent formal rural development policy on the one hand, and the emergence of community initiatives on the other hand.

Third, we can conclude that social capital internal to the communities is of importance for what linking patterns they develop. This implies that the social capital provided through the linking of informal and formal planning may be unequally distributed between communities. In the long run this may foster an inefficient and discriminatory spatial distribution of public services. It may also lead to a lack of formal-informal planning opportunities in settlements already weak on social capital. For the formal planning system, this calls for further strategies on how to increase the capability and motivation for the linking of social capital – among formal and informal planning agents alike. Our observations indicate that this could be obtained through training and via frontline workers, like rural development officers referred to above. Here, further studies will be needed to explore how a planning system increasingly based on informality and community initiatives affect social and spatial cohesion. How are resources distributed between localities with low or high levels of social capital respectively, and how can we understand these processes of distribution more in detail?

In conclusion, our paper has shown that non-governmental actors, like communities, successfully develop and demand support to realise planning initiatives. In this way, they prevent a planning vacuum that is likely to arise in depopulating areas. However, not all communities are able to do so. Communities with low levels of social capital are at risk of becoming underdeveloped, especially if local

governments continue actively or passively outsourcing planning tasks. It remains to be seen if and how the long term effects of increased devolution and population change can be mitigated in such localities.

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