Green Citizen Initiatives: *Participating together?*

Exploring participation in GCI and the effects on social health

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INTRODUCTION

- Urban green space & health
- Citizens with a lower socioeconomic status (SES)
- **Green Citizen initiatives**

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Main question: "How does participation in GCI in the Dutch cities of Arnhem & Nijmegen influence the social health of participants?"

- SQ1: How does participation in GCI take place?
- SQ2: What does involvement bring participants regarding social health?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Participation ladder in green initiatives
- Measuring social health using Keyes' dimensions of social well-being (Keyes, 1998)

Setting: Green citizen initiatives in Arnhem & Nijmegen situated in lower SES neighbourhoods (N=8).

SQ1: How does participation in GCI look like?

Who participates in GCI?

Factors affecting participation: Age, gender, employability, SES

How do they participate?

Frequency, Length, Roles in GCI

Level of participation

Decide, self-organisation, influence, finance, volunteering, user/consumer (Salverda & Dam, 2008)

SQ2: What does involvement bring participants regarding social health?

Measuring Social health (Keyes, 1998)

- Social integration
- Social acceptance
- Social contribution
- Social actualization
- Social coherence

Main RQ: *"How does participation in (urban) Green Citizen Initiatives in the Dutch cities Arnhem & Nijmegen influence the social health of participants?"*

METHODS

QUESTIONNAIRE (N= 98)

- Tested by language ambassodors + Pre-tested
- **Topics:** living environment participants, physical-, mental- and perceived health, demographic questions, participation in the initiative
- SPSS, descriptive analysis

INTERVIEWS (N=16)

- **Topics:** participation in the initative, meaning, community & organizational assets, future involvement in GCI.
- On location: 12, by telephone: 4
- Average time: 20 minutes
- Coding, thematically described

SETTING: TWO EXAMPLES OF GREEN CITIZEN INITIATIVES

Stadslandbouw Mooieweg

Arnhem, Urban agriculture, "green initiative"

De Groene Schakel

Nijmegen, Van Tuin tot Bord, Community centre

Results: *Research Sample*

Average age: 55

Gender: 70% female, 29% male

Place of birth: Majority Dutch (88%)

Participants of 8 different GCI in Arnhem & Nijmegen
N = 98

Educational level: Higher educated (52%), MBO/VBMO 31%, lower educated (17%)

Occupation: largely non-workers (80%)

Economic indicators: not indicating lower SES

Results: what does participation in GCI look like?

- Length and frequency of participation
- Activities in GCI
- Roles in the initiative:
  - Initiator
  - Coordinator
  - Volunteer
  - User/ Consumer

Results: what does involvement bring participants regarding social health?

- Themes categorized underneath Keyes dimensions of Social health (1998).
- Extra category created

Social integration
Quality of someone's **relation to the community and society** (Keyes, 1998). The way people feel like they **belong to a certain community** (Keyes, 1998)

Feeling part of the initiative

Being part of society (again)

"It gives you a certain rhythm, because I am looking for a job at the moment, so I have a lot of time left.. and it is good for structure"

Feeling home in the neighbourhood

Doing something useful for society

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"I currently don't work, my husband works, and then you just want to feel useful... I can't just sit at home and only do the household and some crafting. You want to mean something more, for society"

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Feeling useful

"That I do something useful, not only for me, but also for others in society here"

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Social contribution
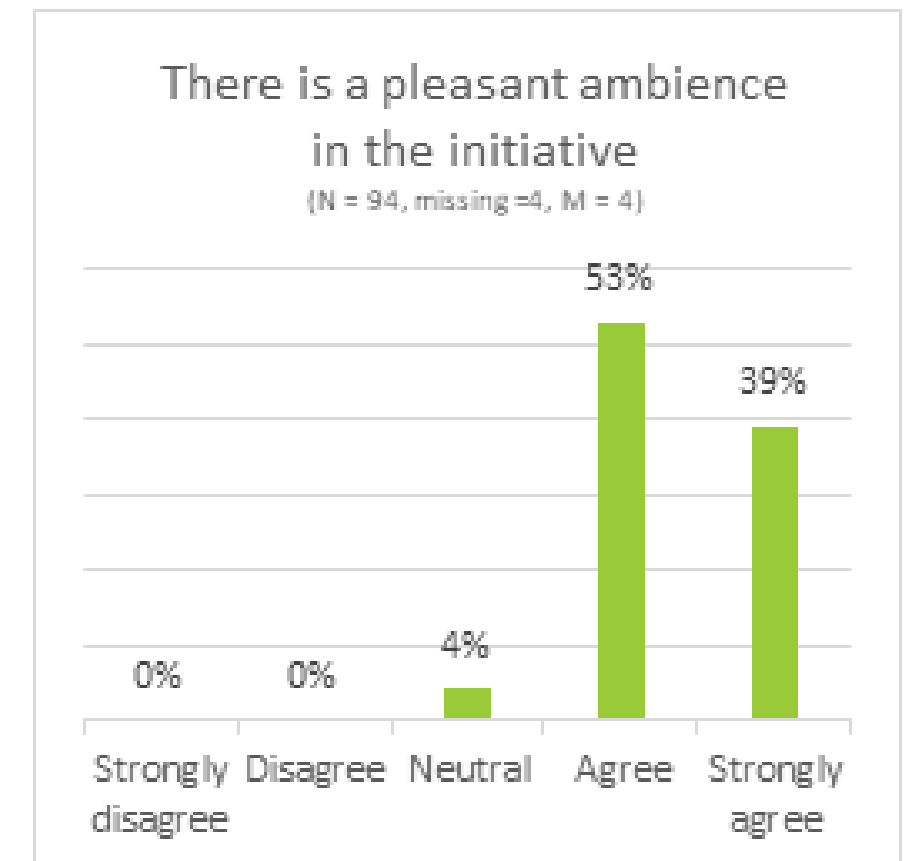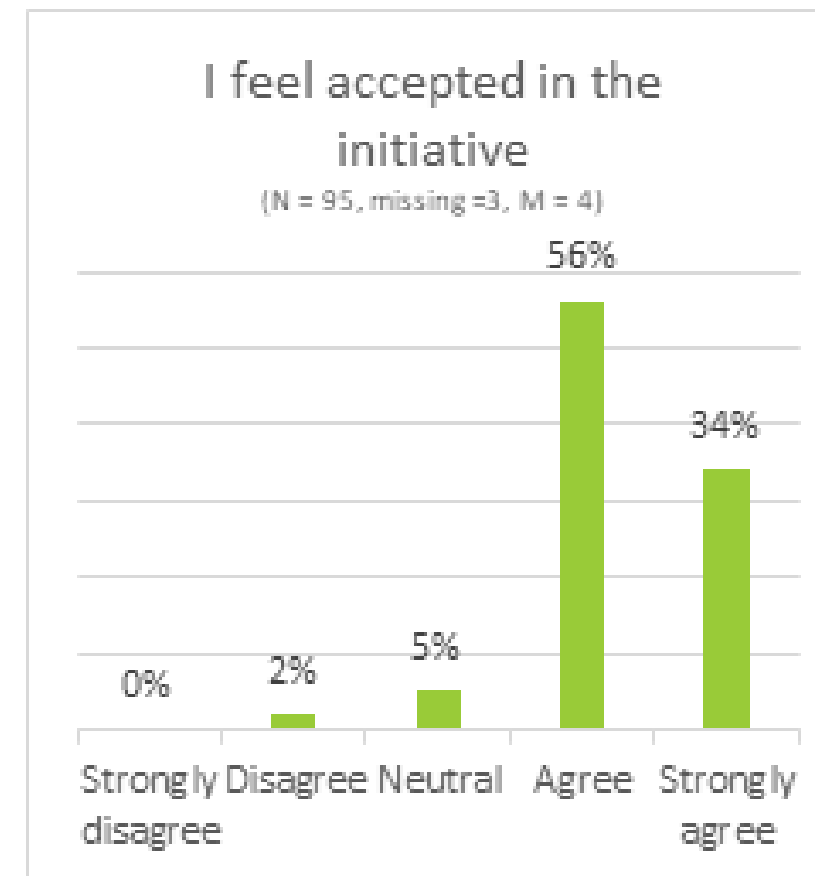The evaluation that you are **valuable** as a member of society (Keyes, 1998)

Being accepted by others

"Everybody can just be themselves, and is welcome" [...] "I feel home here, and appreciated because who I am and what I do"

To feel welcome and "home"

I feel accepted in the initiative
(N = 95, missing =3, M = 4)

Strongly disagree 0% · Disagree 2% · Neutral 5% · Agree 56% · Strongly agree 34%

There is a pleasant ambience in the initiative
(N = 94, missing =4, M = 4)

Strongly disagree 0% · Disagree 0% · Neutral 4% · Agree 53% · Strongly agree 39%

Social acceptance

The feeling that others are **capable of kindness, and in general, feeling comfortable with others** (Keyes, 1998)

Social actualization

- Perception of society having potential, realized through citizens or institutions
- Feeling potential for personal growth and development (Keyes, 1998)

Stimulation, challenges and learning in GCI

Learning practical skills

Harvesting, using machines, sewing and knowledge about plants..

Social learning

·"Here you don't just learn with plants, but you really learn a lot: making contact,.. making plans.. There is a possibility that you get here that gives a push forward, a push to you to make everything in a good way"

Social coherence

- Referring to a **meaningful and coherent** viewing of the world, and a concern for knowing about the world

Not found back

Other: *Social contact* within *the initiative*

Meeting new people

- "Normally I was just working, I went to work, went home, cooking, you know those routine things. Now I also have this as an extra place to go and meet more people"

Building a social network

- "You just know each other"

Helping each other

DISCUSSION

- Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
- Higher / lower participation levels
- Using Keyes' to measure social health

CONCLUSIONS

- Positive image!
- Suggestion for further research
- Including citizens with lower SES?