

What can be gained from Citizen Participation?

Exploring the impact of participation in sustainability focused citizen initiatives on self-development, and how it is facilitated by the inner organisational context

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Preface

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Abstract

Over the last decades, the public's interest in associative forms of democratic activity has increased, especially in the area of sustainability. One form, how this interest is expressed, is found in citizen-induced initiatives. As the name suggests, citizen-induced initiatives are launched by community members themselves and are aimed at channeling members' efforts to address common concerns of the community. Additionally, participation gives members the opportunity to individually develop in multiple ways. However, limited empirical research has been conducted on how participation in citizen-induced initiatives contributes to personal growth and development, and how organisational characteristics and internal dynamics influence this relationship, so far. To answer these questions, this study presents the findings of 13 semi-structured telephone interviews with volunteers of food and sustainability themed initiatives. By employing systematic inductive analysis, five unique developmental dimensions and five organisational context dimensions are identified. From among these, this study recognizes organisational design to be highly impactful on personal development. In general, skill acquisition and professional capability development as well as psychological development are found to be the developmental dimensions most affected by the initiative's organisational context.

Keywords: Citizen-induced initiative, Sustainability, Participation, Developmental approach, Personal development, Organisational context

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, the role of traditional democratic institutions has been under growing scrutiny. One reason for this, is governments' increasing dependence on networks of economic and social actors in dealing with complex wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) and providing effective public services (Denters, Van Heffen, Huisman & Klok, 2013). These governance networks often transcend national-legislative boundaries and are thus hard to control for "the vertically organized institutions of representative democracy" (Klijn & Koppenjan 2016, p.207). Although many citizens are satisfied with their current arrangements as pure consumers of public services, some citizens are aware of the state's waning capabilities and respond by organising themselves in interest groups, associations and other forms of self-organised initiatives to address public issues (Hirst, 2002). Thus, citizens' roles in public service provision underwent a shift from passive policy consumers, to partially proactive co-producers of public services (Gofen, 2015). One increasingly popular way of how citizens organise their efforts can be found in citizen-induced initiatives (Denters, 2016). These initiatives are kick-started by citizens themselves, who prefer to organise without overly tight governmental control. One field of interest, which involves many citizen-induced initiatives, concerns environmental sustainability in general and alternative food systems in particular (Norberg-Hodge, 2016).

These bottom-up projects have had a substantial role in developing the formation of alternative food practices, which may include farmers markets, community gardens, local food co-operatives and campaigning efforts (Norberg-Hodge, 2016). They further invest time and resources in implementing broader social and ecological sustainability values, with the aim to go beyond merely broadening the range of choices for the responsible consumer (Dedeurwaerdere et al., 2017) – for instance via campaigning efforts in greening local food consumption. Additionally, these projects serve the purpose of strengthening and advancing community ties. In this way, the associated sustainability values are not only contained to the projects' locality but circulate to otherwise unaware demographics. Such citizen driven projects are not only emerging in the realm of sustainable food channels, but are also prominent among different domains, such as health care, urban and community planning and the energy sector (Hurenkamp, Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2006; Van Meerkerk, Boonstra & Edelenbos, 2013; Seyfang, Park & Smith, 2013). Although there are many differences from one citizen initiative to the next, in terms of their scope and aim, this paper will refer to citizen initiatives as 'an activity initiated by citizens as a group, where this activity is aimed at a common interest and

where citizens actively participate in the implementation of their projects' (Denters, 2016, p. 233).

Until now, there has been limited research looking into the benefits of community engagement in the form of citizen-induced initiatives on a micro-individual level. Current studies have briefly pointed towards a more personal influence of initiative participation on members' self-development such as more knowledgeable citizenry, greater control over one's livelihood and the creation of new political identities (Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Fung, 2003; Sørensen, 2006; Cooper, Bryer & Meek, 2006). Although the literature on volunteer engagement pays attention to individual outcomes, such as psychological well-being or more vaguely 'happiness', those studies focus almost exclusively on centralised charities, rather than bottom-up citizen-induced initiatives (Alfes, Shantz & Bailey, 2016; Vecina, Chacón, Marzana & Marta, 2013). Therefore, in spite of these unique, but brief accounts, a thorough and definitive analysis of the individual impact of citizen initiative participation and whether expectations of what could be gained from involvement are met in reality, are still rather scarce (Morrissey, 2000; Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016).

Furthermore, by delving into the personal benefits of citizen participation it becomes apparent that such outcomes of 'knowledgeable citizenry and greater control' do not occur out of thin air. Rather, organisational factors may hinder or help the likelihood of citizens gaining a meaningful experience of community involvement (Denters, 2016). For example, the characteristics of the initiative's internal structure, its ability to establish linkages with external providers of resources, group cohesion and decision-making style will most definitely vary from one initiative to the next, with practical implications for those members involved (Denters, 2016; Stukas, Worth, Clary & Snyder, 2009). Thus, a major factor that may influence the degree in which citizens develop their personal capacities is the organisational make-up of the initiative. For instance, Bess, Perkins, Cooper & Jones (2011) find that the outcomes of citizen initiatives are strongly influenced by their available resources and their organisational form. Likewise, Torri & Martinez (2011) emphasize the importance of inclusive and democratic decision-making processes, both within initiatives as well as with local stakeholders. This is relevant since it is possible for coordinators or managers to deliberately design citizen initiatives' organisational characteristics in order to achieve more favourable outcomes for individual development. It therefore becomes important to not only investigate what new sense of self-development is achieved via citizen initiative participation, but also what factors help these individuals grow further. Still, there have been only minimal studies

that explore the organisational characteristics of initiatives in reference to individual members' outcomes. This is especially true for those examining the organisational variables that may facilitate members' self-development (Wandersman & Florin, 2000).

To date, scholarly research has dealt mainly with questions having to do with the scope of participation and the range of individual motives that led members of initiatives to join in the first place (Alford, 2002; Haggett, Creamer & Hammeijer, 2013; Seyfang et al., 2013). Therefore, despite the interest in citizen initiatives, in particular the upsurge of sustainability focused outlets within communities, contemporary research has tended to focus primarily on the factors influencing the uptake and successful implementation of initiatives, rather than their outcomes. As a result, very few studies have explicitly assessed the local impacts of citizen initiatives on the citizens involved, and the ones that do provide only a brief account of the possible developmental factors that can be gained (Fung, 2003; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). Thus, there is a need to enhance the knowledge about the effects of citizen initiatives, as existing evidence lacks concreteness. As mentioned above, such developmental outcomes could relate to the educative effects of citizen participation on the civic skills, possible changes in attitudes and beliefs and changes in individuals' feelings about the self, as little is known on the actual progression for those citizens involved. In addition to this scarcity, studies relating members' self-development progression to organisational-level variables, such as characteristics of the internal structure, daily operations and social climate of the citizen initiative are especially thin (Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Stukas et al., 2009).

Consequently, there is an uncertainty and a lack of clarity about the outcomes of citizen initiatives, in particular a lack of understanding exists in regard to which new capacities are developed within citizen initiatives. Even more so, systematic research examining the effects of participation and the influence the environment has on this relationship, namely the organisational one, is limited. This study will take a developmental perspective of citizen participation by focusing on citizens' meaningful presence and involvement in the interactive process itself, and whether the initiatives' internal-organisational context provide the medium for self-development.

1.1 Research objective and research questions

The main focus of this study lies on citizens and how their personal outcomes are shaped by the organisational context that surrounds them. The research objective of this study

is to understand the multiple ways citizens benefit from participation in citizen-induced initiatives and how these gains are influenced by initiative's organisational context factors.

Thereby, exploring the current position of citizen initiatives, with a focus on those that aim to create a more sustainable society in the United Kingdom (UK), the research question central to this study is: *“What is the impact of citizen initiative participation on self-development for those involved in sustainability focused initiatives within the UK, and how does the initiative's organisational context influence this?”*

In order to unpack this question further and to provide a guiding thread through this study, an array of sub-questions is provided.

1. What are citizen-induced initiatives?
2. What developmental factors of participation are discussed in the literature?
3. What organisational context factors are discussed in the literature?
4. What developmental factors of participation emerge from participants' accounts?
5. What organisational context factors emerge from participants' accounts?
6. How are organisational context factors and developmental factors connected?

1.2 Scientific relevance

In their extensive 2016 book ‘Critical Reflections on Interactive Governance, Self-organization and Participation in Public Governance’, Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk discuss the prevalence and importance of novel forms of interactive governance. Their concluding remarks recommend undertaking further research into the potential consequences and outcomes of interactive governance processes, such as citizen-induced initiatives. According to them, the effects of self-organised forms of citizen engagement on role and identity development are in special need of scientific attention, as those issues are currently largely uninvestigated. This is echoed by Denters (2016), who calls for more research into the educative effects of citizen initiatives on members' civic skills and civic orientation.

Naturally, these individual capacities do not emerge in isolation, but are in fact related to the wider meso-organisational context of the citizen initiative. Again, Denters (2016) bemoans a lack of available research, which looks at organisational factors and how they determine the capacities of citizen initiatives to educate their members. Up to this day, empirical studies investigating these factors remain scarce.

Therefore, it appears fruitful to integrate the two research gaps into a single, comprehensive study. Accordingly, the relational interplay between self-development and the initiative's organisational-level variables will be investigated to arrive at a more holistic account of the outcomes of citizen initiatives. From this, it becomes possible to learn how to stimulate and sustain citizen participation in ways that enhance citizens' sense of self-development. By exploring the impact of citizen initiatives on members' self-development and the influence of organisational-level variables, this study offers a rich learning opportunity for the scientific community concerned with interactive governance.

Additionally, much of current research generally assumes that citizens are no longer consumers or users of public services, but rather emerge as the skilled and competent creators thereof. Thus, citizens are being socially constructed as policy creators by government (Voorberg & Bekkers, 2016). Consequently, this paper seeks to add to the existing literature by exploring the experiences of those involved in citizen-induced initiatives, who seek to take action towards a more sustainable food system in particular and environmental sustainability in general.

Hence, this study addresses existing gaps in the literature, by providing empirical evidence for the local impacts of citizen initiatives on the citizens involved, which has currently been left to abstract notions of civic skills. Further, this study aims to systematically analyse which organisational context factors of an initiative may inculcate these developmental impacts. Its main objective is to concretise the exact capacities and factors that are relevant for citizens development and unearth the relationships between those variables.

1.3 Societal relevance

This study is also highly relevant for the organisation of civil societies across the world, since there are a number of accelerating trends, which negatively affect sustainability goals. The sustainable production of food constitutes one of these goals. As concerns around the global food system continue to escalate, there is a sense that the greatest achievement of the industrial age has reached an impasse (Biel, 2016; Norberg-Hodge, 2016; Horlings & Marsden, 2011). Such a system is characterised by intense agricultural productivity, the application of highly mechanised machinery and exponential reliance on fossil fuels in order to support production that is orientated towards distant and increasingly global markets (Norberg-Hodge, Merrifield & Gorelick, 2001). A global orientated food system has paved the way for the provision of a constant, relatively cheap and abundant supply of food, as well as opening the

space for serious ramifications on multiple levels (Maxwell & Slater, 2003; Vermeulen, Campbell & Ingram, 2012). Subsequently, established food practices are increasingly under pressure from an economic, social and environmental perspective (Ericksen, 2008).

In response to these findings and failings of the global food system, citizen-induced initiatives can be part of the solution for the search of an alternative food system, which is more in line with environmental and conscious consumer demands (Horlings & Marsden, 2011; Norberg-Hodge, 2016; Feyereisen, Stassart & Jonet, 2017). Such observed trends are no different in the United Kingdom, which has seen a recent resurgence in community ‘manpower’ in form of citizen-induced initiatives. Many of these local groups are challenging the status quo, with new voices and actions entering the political arena (Caraher, Smith & Machell, 2014). However, as this study claims, citizen-induced initiatives are not only vehicles to reach political goals but also have educational and transformational effects on the lives of participating members (Denters, 2016). Hence, in order to maximize the effectiveness of initiatives’ impact, citizens must be equipped with the right knowledge and managerial tools to adequately design and guide the processes of citizen initiatives. This study attempts to deliver on this issue, by serving as a source for creating a realistic evaluation approach for other initiatives, and by analysing the way that the initiative’s organisational context influences participation may also help guide the design of future citizen initiatives.

1.4 Study outline

This paper is structured as follows. The next section lays out the theoretical framework of the study, with a review of the literature on the current experience of citizen initiatives for those citizens involved, as well as an analysis on how the organisational context influences this development. Afterwards the methodology will be discussed, in which semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted among citizens who were active in a citizen-induced initiative, which aimed at greening local food production and increasing sustainability in general. Then, the results of this study are presented. They are comprised of two subsections, one focussing on the developmental dimensions of participation, the other on organisational context factors. Additionally, the latter includes findings on how the two aspects are linked to each other. Lastly, the discussion section will interpret and relate the findings with the existing body of literature. Further, limitations and recommendations for future research as well as implications for practitioners are given. The study finishes with a general recap in the form of concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 *Citizens' shifting role in public service delivery*

The conventional way for citizens to exercise power, in order to influence policies, is through the electoral process (Røiseland & Vabo, 2016). In liberal representative democracies, citizens vote for politicians or political parties based on the political programs and promises they claim, which represent the voters' interests; thereby decision-making power is delegated to the chosen political representative (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016). As a result, the delivery of public services often reflects an assumption regarding the relationship between the roles of individual citizens and the government (Gofen, 2015). In many ways, the liberal representative model of democracy resembles the market, whereby citizens are referred to as 'consumers' and 'customers' of public services, who are presented with multiple choices between alternative service providers, as it is the duty of the government to establish a 'market' of competing service alternatives (Gofen, 2015). Subsequently, this conventional role of citizens implies that they take a more passive role, in contrast to the more reactive role assumed by the government, diluting the relationship between citizens and government (Moe, 1994).

Since the 1990s, and contrary to the passive role of citizens, governments both on the right and left have endorsed a more active approach to citizens' role in service delivery, namely 'co-production' (Brandsen, 2016; Whitaker, 1980). A co-production approach to citizens' role in public service delivery emphasizes the unavoidable involvement of citizens in service production, as it is impossible for them to consume the service without affecting it in one way or another (Gofen, 2015). Hence, a co-production approach focuses on the long-term relationship between professionalised service providers and service users, in which both parties make a joint contribution to its delivery (Bovaird, 2007). From this, it is possible to transform citizens' passive recipient role to a more 'active self-sustaining' role (Clarke, 2005). Although this approach advocates an increased involvement of citizens in service provision, it is the government that is expected to create the mechanisms for citizen participation, and to reduce the barriers that may prevent participation. It is clear to see that government still claim the main role in encouraging and nurturing citizens' role in public service delivery, to which citizens are expected to respond to top-down governmental activities (Brandsen, 2016). Therefore, whether citizens are referred to as 'consumers', 'customers', or 'co-producers' in public service delivery, they are only expected to play an auxiliary role. Even if dissatisfied with the public services, citizens are expected to comply with existing policy arrangements (Gofen, 2015).

The analysis above depicts citizens primarily as passive or reactive to governmental processes, regardless of the label given, and does not consider the possibility of a more proactive role of citizens who self-organise and initiate an alternative form of service themselves. However, occasionally citizens may undermine current provision and practice noncompliance by actively engaging and initiating alternative forms of services (Gofen, 2015). Referred to as associations, it symbolises proactive initiation, self-organisation and delivery of alternative services by citizens, primarily for their own use, such as constructing a community garden on public land (Hirst, 2002; Fung, 2003; Gofen, 2015).

2.2 Associative democracy: where hands-on citizens and public service delivery meet

What is pictured above is nothing out of the ordinary. Associative democracy seeks to confront the issues of top-down, hierarchical authority by providing more citizen control, which in turn, adds a new channel for participation, in addition to liberal representative democracy (Hirst, 2002). Associative democracy claims that ‘as many social activities as possible should be developed to self-governing voluntary associations’, as they can preserve democracy by promoting the independence of citizens and giving them the experience of exercising authority themselves (Hirst, 2002, p. 409). These new channels of participation come at a time in which the effectiveness of the representative system is being attacked from many different angles (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007; Røiseland & Vabo, 2016). The pressing concern for the representative model is the widespread decline of political participation, the alienation from politics and dissatisfaction with politicians among the wider population (Hirst, 2002). Citizens have become agitated by the dominance of large companies tackling public service activities, and the short-term reasoning that surrounds them (Hirst, 2002). Therefore, associations touch on the problem of the declining legitimacy of contemporary liberal democracies and often emerge after governments have failed in solving local problems or have failed in communicating to citizens about their policies (Wagenaar, 2007). For example, government-based measures tend to respond to the failings of the global food system by advocating new certification schemes for foods and food practices, such as carbon, organic, Fair Trade and eco labelling (Klintman & Boström, 2012). However, such mechanisms are often subject to much criticism, as it is said that these practices fail to revolutionise the food sector towards more ecologically sound principles. This is because they largely lay on top-down, eco-rationalisation strategies of governments, whereby economic growth must be the basis for sustainable development (Seyfang, 2009). In addressing local concerns, that are often connected to larger complex problems, such as concerns over the conventional food system,

associative democracy can be understood as a strategic response to the decline of formal power in representative bodies, and as a way of reviving democracy (Røiseland & Vabo, 2016).

Associations have enabled large numbers of public and private actors to have a substantial effect on the way society is governed, especially when these actors are directly affected by a project or decision (Morrissey, 2000; Røiseland & Vabo, 2016). For instance, in reaction to the concerns over the conventional food system, communities have taken it upon themselves to respond to the market dominance of the global food system. They can be seen as associations, which aim to find creative ways to protect and valorise local food and farming practices (Norberg-Hodge, 2016). These bottom-up reactions to policy failures are of huge importance in dealing with local issues, as citizens' involvement in fostering sustainability practises gives room to local knowledge that is embedded in the experiences and practices of ordinary people (Wagenaar, 2007). This is because, first-hand, local knowledge from citizens begins to flow through the wider system of actors involved, merging with the professional knowledge of politicians, administrators and professionals (Wagenaar, 2007). The practical knowledge that is acquired by the locals is usually not available to elected officials who operate at a distance from the issue at hand. By making knowledge exchange more opaque, helps actors to see both sides of the issue, which enables creative solutions to be put forward. According to Wagenaar (2007), by giving citizens genuine influence in real decision-making situations forces elected officials to rethink long-term assumptions about the way things are done in city communities.

The instrumental importance of bottom-up associations only scratches the surface of what could be achieved through citizen involvement. The instrumental perspective views citizen participation as a means to an end, with the belief that citizen participation can lead to successful projects outcomes (Morrissey, 2000). This was shown by fostering local knowledge, information and other forms of input about sustainability practices that may work best in a community, which consequently enriches the policy-making process (Røiseland & Vabo, 2016). Therefore, the focus of participation is on the difference it makes in harnessing the complexity of the environmental system and the subsequent improvements to the quality of governing this task. In other words, the instrumental perspective merely regards associations as a vehicle to achieve better governance outcomes. However, this neglects other important contributions of citizen participation on the individual level and reduces citizens' motivation of teaming up in associations to purely extrinsic problem-solving (Morrissey, 2000). Therefore,

the following section introduces citizen initiatives as a particular manifestation of associations and discusses the benefits of participation beyond the reasoning of the instrumental account.

2.3 Citizen initiatives as a way of practicing associative democracy

Citizen initiatives constitute a popular mode of associative democracy, based on the principles of self-governance. As an ideal-type, citizen initiatives are referred to as ‘an activity initiated by citizens as a group, where this activity is aimed at a common interest and where citizens actively participate in the implementation of their project’ (Denters, 2016, p. 233). From the outset, citizen initiatives are initiated by community members themselves. These initiatives are likely to stem from a common concern among the community, and hence they are often rooted in the ‘life-world’ of local citizens (Denters, 2016). A second key feature of citizen initiatives is that they are collective activities, involving a group of individuals who collaborate towards a mutual objective. Therefore, it is important for a citizen initiative to gain the support of others in their locality, the numbers involved can vary from less than a handful to several hundred (Denters, Tonkens, Verhoeven & Bakker, 2013). The need for support is linked to the third characteristic of citizen initiatives, namely the dominant role citizens occupy. This role is not limited to the initiation process, as they also play a vital role in formulating the aims, means and implementation of a project (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016). Playing an active role in the entire process, starting from initiation through to decision-making and implementation is a challenge for any community. Therefore, developing support for innovative ideas, to solve a common concern, to be accepted and implemented by members of the community requires collective action (Denters, 2016).

In practice, citizen initiatives are taking many forms and are emerging in different fields (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016). These bottom-up initiatives of empowered citizens are no longer fully initiated, conditioned and controlled by government, which was a pressing problem of governments’ stance towards active citizenship (Van Meerkerk, 2013). In addition, the number of citizen initiatives involved in sustainability related activities within local communities has also gained traction (Biel, 2016). These citizen initiatives have had a substantial role in developing the need and formation of local sustainability practices, which may include offering permaculture courses, farmers markets, community gardens and campaigning efforts (Norberg-Hodge, 2016). As mentioned above, citizens’ involvement can enrich the policy-making process by providing local knowledge and information about how current approaches to create more sustainable communities can become more resilient and less

resource-intensive. This locally embedded knowledge most likely would not have been available to the wider network of 'deskbound' policy makers who operate at a distance (Wagenaar, 2007). As a result, the potential benefits of active citizenship, in the form of citizen initiatives, allows for better problem structuring, more creative solutions, the formation of greater consensus and the influence to empower and mobilise certain individuals who may otherwise be inactive (Mayer, Edelenbos & Monnikhof, 2005). Therefore, from an instrumental perspective and on a network level, advocates for citizen initiatives have high hopes regarding the capacity of the initiative in reforming the mainstream system by disturbing prevailing unsustainable practices (Seyfang, 2009).

In addition to the advocates who highlight the value of citizen participation towards achieving successful project outcomes, such as progressive sustainability policies, there are those who place emphasis on the developmental perspective of citizen participation. In this view, the benefits of citizen participation are not limited to structural efficiency and effectiveness gains in the creation of public value. Instead, participation is looked at dynamically, as some effects only unfold and compound over time (Morrissey, 2000). Hence, the developmental perspective views citizen participation both as an end in itself and as a means to self-development. This perspective values participation for its contribution in building solidary benefits, such as knowledgeable citizenry, and well as enhancing the democratic process (Cooper et al., 2006). According to Morrissey (2000, p. 63), 'citizen participation has developmental benefits if it promotes new values, attitudes, skills and knowledge for the participants themselves'. In this developmental approach, the focus is on empowering citizens to take control over their lives and solve issues that matter most to them (Davies, 1996). Therefore, from a developmental perspective, citizen participation can result in both a successful project outcome, as well as a number of micro-individual changes to those participating.

At the individual level, participation in community initiatives can result in changes in the individual's feelings about the self, such as personal efficacy, increased confidence and competencies in dealing with issues affecting one's environment (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Sørensen, 2006). These newfound feelings can be explained by higher levels of empowerment reported by those spending more time in local community activities, as opposed to non-members (McMillan, Florin, Stevenson, Kerman & Mitchell, 1995). Increased individual empowerment is linked to the opportunity participating citizens receive in developing new skills regarding how their community structure operates

(Morrissey, 2000). In the context of voluntary community organisations, Florin and Wandersman (1990) describe how citizens spontaneously form associations to tackle issues or solve problems that they deem insufficiently addressed by public authorities. As part of this process, citizens must become aware of the various interest groups and learn to understand the group dynamics that are prevalent in their community. In doing so, citizens further acquire knowledge on the procedures of their local governments and how their community operates, both formally and informally (Florin & Wandersman, 1990).

Further, the literature recognizes that participating in an initiative has educational effects. More precisely, participants are able to gain a variety of civic skills, which refers to participants ability to organise oneself, how to run meetings, write letters, argue issues, and make speeches (Fung, 2003). Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) provide empirical evidence that members do indeed acquire and practice their civic skills when participating in an association, through planning meetings and making decisions within them, writing letters, making presentations and speeches as part of their duties. According to Kirlin (2003), acquiring civic skills forms an integral part of becoming a politically mature citizen and is needed to effectively participate in the democratic processes of a political society. In other words, the transfer of civic skills provides participants not only with practical tools and skills in the sphere of initiative tasks, but further develops citizens outside the boundary of their voluntary organisation. As a result, advocates have often pointed to participation as a way of increasing confidence and efficacy among citizens, whilst reducing policy alienation and powerlessness (Sørensen, 2006).

The benefits to the individual were similarly rewarding to the community. These two levels are interactive, because education expands beyond one's own self-interest, especially when one's private interest links with the community interest, which is a phenomenon at the centre of any citizen-induced initiative (Morrissey, 2000). Therefore, with the opportunity of shared learning across diverse segments of a community, improvements in the interpersonal relationships and social fabric can be formed, as citizens are brought closer together when deliberating on issues close to their hearts (Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Arai, 1997). Given this analysis, citizen participation can play an important role in effecting meaningful change within community and individual life, taking into account the self-exploration participation involves, which enables people to discover what their own real interests are (Arai, 1997; Morrissey, 2000). Next, participation is not an isolated activity. In joining groups, partaking in meetings and even rudimentary tasks such as gardening, volunteers are increasingly exposed

to other participants. Over time, many of these contacts morph into relationships (Isham, Kolodinsky & Kimberly, 2006). Often, these do not remain on the colleague-level but can evolve into long-lasting friendships (Kolff, 2018). As a result, participants are able to expand their pre-existing social networks with previously unknown actors. Table 1. summarises the dimensions of personal development, as mentioned in the existing literature.

Table 1. Dimensions of personal development

Dimensions	Themes	References
Civic Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire the ability to organise, facilitate and conduct meetings • Obtain public speaking skills, argue issues • Political education 	Fung, 2003; Verba et al., 1995; Sørensen, 2006
Relationships and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in interpersonal relationships and social fabric 	Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Arai, 1997; Isham et al., 2006; Kolff, 2018
Community operations and functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn how community functions 	Cooper et al., 2006; Florin & Wandersman, 1990
Psychological development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased self-confidence in dealing with issues • Feelings of personal empowerment through shared learning 	Zimmerman & Rapport, 1988; Wandersman & Florin, 2000; McMillan et al., 1995
Values and beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of new values and attitude 	Morrissey, 2000

However, it is important to note that the rise of citizen-induced initiatives and its optimistic beliefs have not gone unchallenged. Its popularity has also been followed with concerns about the representation of participation (Papadopoulos, 2016). Questions that resonate with critics relate to the number of citizens who actually engage with such initiatives and whether these citizen-induced initiatives are representative of the population at large (Denters, 2016). The problem at hand is that some segments of the population are able to organise themselves and initiate collective action better than others. This is because the capability citizens have in order to participate effectively is dependent on their command over relevant resources such as social connections, relevant skills and knowledge, material resources and time (Denters, 2016). Thus, even if participation is widened, with the help of citizen-induced initiatives, the command over necessary resources and existing inequalities over the population will mean that some are able to make themselves heard in the political arena more than others (Mayer, Edelenbos & Monnikhof, 2005). Through survey research, Verba et al. (1995) found that participation in most associations do reflect an underlying socioeconomic

bias; with those wealthier participating in associations, and thus acquiring the necessary skills needed to participate in other parts of political life. Against this backdrop, it becomes important to acknowledge these initial inequalities and resource gaps when analyzing the development effects of citizen participation to truly understand what is going on within citizen-induced initiatives.

2.4 The importance of ensuring participation in citizen-induced initiatives

Within the UK and globally, small-scale citizen-induced initiatives are vulnerable to sudden decline or failure because these programs rely heavily on the energy and expertise of people who volunteer their time and who are free to withdraw at any moment (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). Many citizen-induced initiatives do not have the funding to hire a large labour force to carry out the work, so volunteers provide the majority of the work, saving initiatives a considerable amount of money (Ryan, Kaplan & Grese, 2001; Healey, 2015). Volunteering can be defined as a pro-active approach to empowerment and a means to bring about social action, much in line with the work of those creating small changes to reform how sustainability issues are treated at the community-level (Measham & Barnett, 2008). As a result, maintaining the work of voluntary citizens can be rather difficult, if initial enthusiasm and excitement wears off (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). Furthermore, the very process of participation in smaller, citizen-induced initiatives as opposed to government-induced initiatives is qualitatively different, where participation is usually more hands on and direct rather than symbolic (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016). Therefore, the personal-level impacts that are lost when a citizen initiative fails to survive are much greater, effecting the social fabric among the community, members' attitudes and beliefs about their sense of empowerment and a decrease in expectations for the success of collective action, so that citizens may not participate in the future (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). In essence, initiatives need a cadre of dedicated and dependable volunteers to sustain the aims and ambitions of their programme. As a result, a heavy burden is placed on initiative co-ordinators to understand and attend to citizens' motivations for long-term volunteering and to consider these motivations in the design of the programme (Evans et al., 2005).

However, people's motivations for volunteering may change over time. For example, helping the environment was found to be a strong initial motivation for urban forestry volunteers, yet more self-interested motivations, such as personal-growth and learning new skills became more important for continued participation (Ryan et al., 2001). In principle,

volunteers seek activities in an initiative that serve a particular function, initially their behaviour is driven by altruistic, expressive incentives, which are ‘rewards that derive from the sense of satisfaction of having contributed to the attainment of a worthwhile cause’, such as environmental conservation (Wilson, 1973, p. 34). However, as time wears on their voluntary efforts are driven by more self-interested incentives such as increasing their knowledge of the world, developing new skills, the ability to enhance their esteem and gain experiences that benefit their careers (Ryan et al., 2001; Clary, Snyder & Stukas, 1996). Therefore, if the available activities do not offer ways, which satisfy these functions at that particular time, then their voluntary behaviour will ultimately drop off. Thus, initiative co-ordinators should recognise that simply providing a source of labour may not match with volunteer motivation and that volunteers are not free labour, but individuals who will keep coming if their needs are fulfilled (Ryan et al., 2001). Initiative co-ordinators need to also recognise that engagement with the organisation, the learning opportunities and the benefits that volunteers gain from contributing their time can be used to deliberate ways that provides learning opportunities so that it appeals to a range of volunteers (Ryan et al., 2001).

Subsequently, it is important to investigate what factors help these initiatives retain their much-needed voluntary work force so that these initiatives can survive, grow and ultimately provide the right conditions for participants to develop their potential and ways to nurture it. Since every volunteer action takes place in a context, often an organisational context, one can turn to the organisational make-up of an initiative to examine how these factors may facilitate the meaningful development of volunteers. If their self-interested desire of personal growth is fulfilled by the organisation, volunteers will be more satisfied and more likely to continue volunteering in the future (Stukas et al., 2009). Thus, participating citizens’ decision to continue their engagement is indeed influenced by their experience with the initiative (Van Eijk & Steen, 2016). A feedback loop between the citizens’ decision to continue their voluntary work and their experience is likely, as they reflect on how their input is used in the initiative, the quality of the relations with management and colleague volunteers, and whether or not they still feel committed to the organisation (Van Eijk & Steen, 2016).

2.5 How the organisational context of an initiative facilitates meaningful development

A major resource of small-scaled voluntary associations are actively participating members. Their time and energy must be organised into active involvement and performance of necessary tasks (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). An initiative that boasts an accumulation of

members on paper but cannot organise anyone to do the much-needed work, can hardly count itself as generating lots of participation. Therefore, knowledge of the organisational variables that may impact citizens' involvement, such as how the initiative can cater to the developmental growth of its members and how it can ultimately retain long-term voluntary efforts, can be used to intervene and build the capacity of such an initiative. The following section will elaborate on how organisational characteristics such as, structure (Bess et al., 2011), decision-making style (Torri & Martinez, 2011) and social climate of voluntary organisations (Wandersman & Florin, 2000) are related to citizens' personal development.

The structural characteristics of an organisation have been associated with voluntary member involvement (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). Structure refers to the way an organisation organises its human resources for goal-directed activities, for example, it is the way the members of an organisation are arranged into somewhat fixed relationships that essentially define patterns of interaction, coordination, and task-orientated behaviour (Steers, 1977; Wandersman & Florin, 2000). Structural characteristics of an organisation include aspects such as the level of control members have, the number of formal roles members can take part in within the organisation, the degree of specialisation, relating to which activities are divided into specialised units within the organisation and the degree of formalisation, which relates to whether rules and procedures are written down and precisely defined (Wandersman & Florin, 2000).

The general finding appears to show that members of voluntary initiatives prefer organisations with more structure over those with loose structural characteristics (Smith, 1966; Milburn & Barbarin, 1987; Stukas et al., 2009). Milburn and Barbarin (1987) categorised several community-development initiatives into the degree of structure (from highly structured to highly unstructured) and found the degree of structure present in the organisation was strongly related to the degree of member involvement in the initiative. It seems as though members in structured organisations are more involved in daily activity and spend more time working for their organisation outside of their duty hours (Prestby & Wandersman, 1985). Why might more organisational structure lead to greater member involvement? As mentioned above, volunteers often join a citizen-induced initiative because they support it as a purposeful group and expect it to be task-orientated, tantalising their initial altruistic incentive (Wilson, 1973). More structure in an initiative reduces ambiguities by outlining clear roles, task responsibilities and operating procedures (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). By reducing ambiguities, a greater variety of options are open to engage and entice the members' energies and interests so that

both the initiative and member can work together to create a symbiotic relationship. The clarity provided by more formalised procedures also caters for a more orderly and predictable organisation (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). This is in line with Bess et al. (2011), who identify community-based organisations to be structured rather loosely, with organisational practises, processes and the very organisational structure emerging primarily from members mutual deliberations. Their research finds that these arrangements are often complicated and can lead to task and role conflict, with organisational internal boundaries becoming increasingly blurred. This is problematic, because both task and role conflict are predictors of dissatisfaction, unhappiness and can even result in burnout (Phillips, Andrews & Hickman, 2014; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). As a result, members are less likely to reap some of the developmental benefits of participation, such as increased psychological well-being or feelings of empowerment, since they are overshadowed by small conflicts within their initiative (Bess et al., 2011). In addition, Milburn and Barbarin (1987) also observed that clear role and task responsibilities allowed members to better manage their time, committing only to those activities or tasks chosen by them, reducing any free-wheeling commitments that may cloud their individual tasks. Therefore, a formalised organisational structure is able to safeguard the good relations between volunteers, as it removes opportunities for conflict. The importance of this translates to both members' development and initiative success, the degree that more structure relates to more success in accomplishing tasks and achieving success, member development is reinforced and amplified (Prestby & Wandersman, 1985; Wandersman & Florin, 2000). This is an example of how the positive effects of participation on individual development, at least partially depend on the organisation's degree of formalisation, as a contextual factor.

All organisations, whether voluntary or not, conduct their business in particular ways. An important characteristic that differs from one initiative to another may be the degree to which these organisations involve their members in decision-making, and this of course has an influence on members' commitment and educational development in the organisation (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). Although members of voluntary initiatives prefer organisations with more structure and may respond to such an organisation with greater involvement, it does not necessarily imply that they merely want to be told what to do by co-ordinators or that they do not want to have a voice in the decision-making of the initiative. Earlier work by Knoke and Wood (1981) found that inclusive decision-making was related to members' commitment, time spent and individual task performance in associations. Furthermore, members spent more time

volunteering in community-development initiatives that used a democratic decision-making process, as opposed to a more autocratic decision-making process (Prestby & Wandersman, 1985). This underpins the findings of Torri & Martinez (2011), who find evidence that inclusive decision-making reduced internal struggles and led to better outcomes in terms of effectiveness and group sustainability. Due to their increased involvement, volunteers are better able to immerse in the initiative's tasks and therefore have an easier time to acquire civic skills. For instance, Kim and Morgül (2017) find evidence that inclusive long-term volunteering strongly contributed to the civic and personal aspects of young volunteers. Therefore, an initiative that allows volunteers to take part in the decision-making process enhances their commitment and their educational attainment (Ryan et al., 2001; Kim & Morgül, 2017).

A final organisational characteristic of importance is the social climate. Social climate is a method of evaluating the collective personality of an organisation (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). Members' perceptions of organisational characteristics, such as relationships between members, co-ordinator support and control and structural characteristics can be used to describe and contrast different organisational setting (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). It is of huge importance to investigate members' perceptions of the social climate, because they can make a great difference for organisational behaviour (Schneider, 1975). Previous work has suggested that members of a community-development association were more satisfied and enjoyed their involvement more when they perceived the association to have 'higher levels of team spirit and camaraderie among members, higher degrees of structure and formalisation of activities and leaders who actively directed the group and enforced rules' (Wandersman & Florin, 2000, p. 256). Moreover, group interaction itself has an effect such that the average time involvement of members is higher in groups that produce a climate that is higher in cohesion, lower in tolerance for independent action that is uncoordinated within the group, higher in encouragement for sharing personal feelings, information and higher in tolerance for negative feelings or disagreement (Kenny & La Voie, 1985). According to Wu and Li (2019), the strength of volunteers' development, in terms of psychological well-being, depends on a favourable social climate and the degree of organisational support that is provided. They find that without the appropriate support, psychological well-being could even decrease in the context of sufficient intrinsic motivation to conduct certain tasks. The presence of supportive supervisors and colleagues is therefore an important organisational context factor to facilitate individual development. Table 2. summarises the dimensions of the organisational context of citizen-induced initiatives, as mentioned in the existing literature.

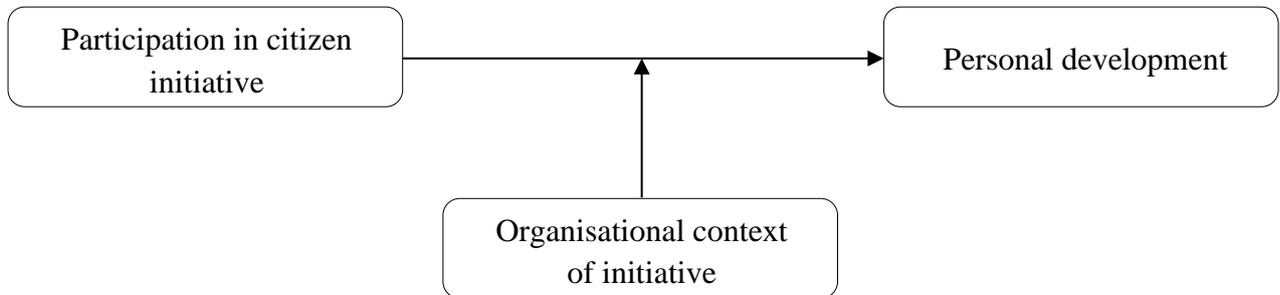
Table 2. Dimensions of the organisational context of citizen-induced initiatives

Dimensions	Themes	References
Degree of autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of control voluntary members have in their role 	Smith, 1966; Milburn & Barbarin, 1987; Wandersman & Florin, 2000
Degree of formalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether rules and procedures are written down 	Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Stukas et al., 2009; Bess et al., 2011
Degree of specialisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether activities are divided into specialised units 	Steers, 1977
Decision-making style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of inclusivity in decision-making 	Knoke & Wood, 1981; Prestby & Wandersman, 1985; Ryan et al., 2001; Torri & Martinez, 2011
Perceived social climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social relations between members, perceived team spirit, degree of cohesion, type of task interaction 	Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Schneider, 1975; Kenny & La Voie, 1985; Wu & Li, 2019
Degree of organisational support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether a key figure leads the initiative Level of co-ordinator support 	Schneider, 1975; Wandersman & Florin, 2000

In sum, citizens have responded to the increasing societal complexity of tackling sustainability related issues by taking back control of their locality. They have done so by creating a new channel of civic engagement, one that truly gives them the opportunity to develop tailor made solutions, taking specific local problems and citizen preferences into account. Citizen-induced initiatives are not only instrumental tools for citizen groups to collect resources and develop problem-solving capacities around sustainability issues, but theoretically and empirically it also stimulates developmental growth at the individual level for those involved. Thus, light has been shone on citizens' meaningful presence and involvement in an initiative's process itself, rather than solely focussing on the impact that their participation has on sustainability policies or initiative outcomes. Furthermore, the growth and development of citizens involved and their ultimate decision on whether to continue volunteering in the future does not occur in a vacuum. From this, some initiative organisations may have practices that offer volunteers the opportunities to satisfy their personal goals of development, whether knowingly or not, which can help to retain their efforts for the future. Ultimately, there are the qualities of an initiative organisation, its internal processes or structure, that may influence the degree to which members of a citizen-initiative undergo personal change in consciousness towards their ability to make empowered decisions, affecting themselves and their wider community. As a result, this study assumes a direct relationship between citizen participation in an initiative and the various kinds of personal development of its individual members. Further, the strength of this relationship is assumed to depend on the organisational context of

the respective initiative (see Figure 1.). In the next section the methodological approach chosen to investigate these developmental capacities and their organisational antecedents, is specified.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



3. Methodology

3.1 Setting and design

This study was designed to investigate the developmental benefits of citizen initiative participation on local actors, namely citizens themselves in the highly relevant, yet understudied context of the United Kingdom. With the UK, this study chose a politically important and critical case for investigation. Terms such as ‘Big Society’ and ‘participation society’ reflect a long-term trend and political interest in encouraging participation, which cuts across the political spectrum (Brandsen, 2016). For example, the Big Society of the Conservative government paved the way for the Labour government to implement their Third Way, both sharing similar messages, namely calls to reinvigorate civil society (Brandsen, 2016). Furthermore, the UK has witnessed both a rise in the number of citizen initiatives which focus on greening local food consumption and sustainability issues in general, as well as growth in membership interest over the last decade (Caraher et al., 2014). What seems to whet local communities’ appetite for citizen-induced initiatives in the UK is the lack of commitment towards funding rural development policies from the British government, referred to as the second pillar of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Second pillar policies, which are designed to support local communities, meet the wide range of economic, environmental and societal challenges of the 21st century are programmes co-financed by national funds (European Parliament, 2018). Contrary to other European countries, the UK contributes the least to second pillar policies, leading to disgruntled citizens who take it upon themselves to initiate local commitment towards sustainability focused activities within their limited boundaries (Caraher et al., 2014).

As a result, citizen participation is not only growing in mass appeal on the right and left of the political spectrum, but it is also pulling on the wider community. Thus, given the sheer appeal and accessibility of citizen initiatives in the UK, especially those working in the area of sustainability related issues, this case offers a highly valuable setting in which to discover new insights on the benefits of participation on self-development faced by citizens from a multi-layered perspective. To capture and explore this multifaceted phenomenon, with a particular emphasis on the experience and perceptions of citizens and the probable influence an initiative’s organisational context may have, a qualitative research design, with both deductive and inductive elements, was deemed most appropriate (Cassell & Symon, 1994; Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). To that end, semi-structured,

telephone interviews were conducted in order to guide the interviewing process into the desired direction, whilst maintaining sufficient room to react to informants' unexpected remarks. Conducting telephone interviews was the only feasible option, given the nation-wide lockdown and social distancing rules imposed in the UK at the time, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, such a structure allowed for comparability between interviews as well as achieving exploratory, rigorous and detailed insights that limited misunderstanding (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

3.2 Sample

With respect to the selection of interview informants, this study followed a theoretical purposive sampling strategy (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). In total, 13 interviews (of 40 minutes to 90 minutes each) were conducted in London, England between March and May 2020, all of which were held in English, when theoretical saturation occurred (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). All informants were citizens participating in one or more citizen-induced initiatives. Due to the study's sole attention on citizen-induced initiatives, especially those focused around the development of new sustainable ideas, practises and habits, being a member of a citizen-induced initiative was a precondition for participation in the study. In addition, considering the study's nature of investigating the organisational context of a citizen-induced initiative, and their exclusive reliance on volunteers, membership on a voluntary basis was another precondition for participation in the study. Thus, all informants were citizens participating in one or more citizen-induced initiatives and all were involved on a voluntary basis. Table 3. summarises some characteristics of the informants and their affiliated initiative. Organisational descriptions were mainly derived from explicit and implicit information obtained from the interviews.

Five informants were part of smaller, local groups loosely connected via the larger umbrella organisation 'Friends of the Earth'. As an environmental campaigning community, groups push for change on causes that matter to their locality. Protecting local environments, adopting alternative food and energy solutions and campaigning for divestment from fossil fuels are just some of the issues that are taken up by these local groups. The first three informants, albeit participating in different local groups, performed similar activities. They were campaigners, who campaigned on designated issues and regularly organised public meetings involving local councillors, hosted stalls at public events as well as visited schools and colleges to raise awareness on sustainable life habits. The final two informants were co-

ordinators of their respective group, they acted as a linkage between their local group and the umbrella organisation and would receive information on a given campaign and disseminated it around the group to conjure up a campaign plan, in addition to drawing up the monthly agenda. Similar to the previous five informants, the next four were part of local 'Transition Towns', an umbrella network of social movements involved in organising action and empowering public participation towards low-resource use and low-carbon living as a response to peak oil and climate change. The first three informants, again participating in different localities, were the project leaders of a community garden, which offered opportunities for the community to learn and share gardening skills, organise farmers markets, with an overall keen interest in urban agriculture. The fourth informant was the project leader in reducing local food waste by harvesting seasonal gluts of fruit and redistributing the surplus within the local community. The tenth participant was a co-founder of a local climate action group, where resources, in the form of a website, talks and meetings were provided to help people living in the locality reduce their carbon footprint, such as ways one could green their food consumption by buying local, seasonal food. The eleventh informant was the chair of a community-based barter system, where members could pool their skills and resources to form a local network, allowing them to trade goods and services without using money. This informant's main activities were to initiate and oversee the meetings of the local group. The twelfth informant was the project leader of a community garden, where locals could go and share knowledge, skills and ideas on growing food, with a special focus on participating with young children in the production of different fruit and vegetables. Finally, the thirteenth informant was an active member of their local biodiversity network which promoted conservation work in the vicinity. This informant was engaged in keeping good order, restoring grass land for biodiversity purposes and played a supervisory role for new volunteers in their induction.

This study identified interview informants mainly through sampling via websites (Ritchie et al., 2014) and snowballing (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and interviewees were contacted via cold calls or email. Since snowball sampling was used to obtain additional informants, multiple interviews could be held one after another.

Table 3. Overview and background of interviewed citizens

	Age	Time working for current Initiative	Current position in the initiative	Predominant course of action of initiative¹	Key organisational characteristics of the initiative
Informant 1	72	40 years	Campaigner	Organising community action and campaigns for positive environmental solutions at a local, regional, national and international level	Moderately structured organisation, special top-down management for temporary projects, inclusive decision-making, moderate team spirit and camaraderie, 10 active members
Informant 2	53	15 years	Campaigner	Organising community action and campaigns for positive environmental solutions at a local, regional, national and international level	Moderately structured organisation, special top-down management for temporary projects, inclusive decision-making, high team spirit and camaraderie, 10 active members
Informant 3	60	2 years	Campaigner	Organising community action and campaigns for positive environmental solutions at a local, regional, national and international level	Moderately structured organisation, special top-down management for temporary projects, inclusive decision-making, moderate team spirit and camaraderie, 10 active members
Informant 4	54	7 years	Secretary/co-ordinator	Organising community action and campaigns for positive environmental solutions at a local, regional, national and international level	Moderately structured organisation, special top-down management for temporary projects, inclusive decision-making, moderate team spirit and camaraderie, 10 active members
Informant 5	66	25 years	Co-ordinator	Organising community action and campaigns for positive environmental solutions at a local, regional, national and international level	Organisation with low degree of structure, inclusive decision-making, moderate team spirit and camaraderie, 6 active members
Informant 6	76	10 years	Project leader	Organising community action and empowering public participation towards low-resource use and low-carbon living as a response to peak oil and climate change	Moderately structured organisation, special top-down management for temporary projects, inclusive decision-making, high team spirit and camaraderie, 12 active members

Informant 7	43	6 years	Project leader	Organising community action and empowering public participation towards low-resource use and low-carbon living as a response to peak oil and climate change	Organisation with low degree of structure, special top-down management for temporary projects inclusive decision-making, high team spirit and camaraderie, 4 active members
Informant 8	74	10 years	Secretary and project leader	Organising community action and empowering public participation towards low-resource use and low-carbon living as a response to peak oil and climate change	Organisation with low degree of structure, special top-down management for temporary projects, inclusive decision-making, moderate spirit and camaraderie, 6 active members
Informant 9	59	5 years	Project leader	Organising community action and empowering public participation towards low-resource use and low-carbon living as a response to peak oil and climate change	Organisation with low degree of structure, special top-down management for temporary projects, inclusive decision-making, high team spirit and camaraderie, 6 active members
Informant 10	66	1 year	Co-founder	Helping to spur local actions and campaigns to reduce the local populations' carbon impact	Organisation with low degree of structure, inclusive decision-making, moderate team spirit and camaraderie, 3 active members
Informant 11	60	29 years	Chair	Community-based barter system, pooling members' skills and resources to form a local network, enabling trade without money	Moderately structured organisation, inclusive decision-making, high team spirit and camaraderie, around 60 active members
Informant 12	74	6 years	Project leader	Networking with local individuals and environmental organisations to secure a sustainable future for the borough	Organisation with low degree of structure, special top-down management for temporary projects, inclusive decision-making, moderate spirit and camaraderie, 6 active members
Informant 13	61	6 years	Active member	Arranging on-going communication between local groups and introducing new groups by highlighting and promoting local conservation work in the borough	Highly structured organisation, special top-down management for temporary projects, autocratic decision-making, moderate team spirit and camaraderie, 12 active members

¹ To ensure personal anonymity of interviewees, specific names of organisations are not always specified.

3.3 Data collection

This study developed interview guidelines, drawing on the research question and an extensive review of the community self-organisation literature and the empirical evidence concerning the impact of participation on self-development and how organisational-level variables may relate to the involvement and participation of members (e.g., Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016; Denters, 2016; Morrissey, 2000; Wandersman & Florin, 2000). Appendix A contains the interview guidelines for citizens who participated in an initiative.

In addition, this study honoured the safety of the informants by assuring all interviewed informants of confidentiality and anonymity. For that purpose, the informant consent form was read through at the beginning of each interview. The informant consent form specified the content and purely academic purpose of the interview as well as information about the safety and duration of data storage. Furthermore, the form explicitly indicated that the interviewees could cancel the interview or withdraw their consent at any time. After going through the form together and clarifying potential questions or insecurities, verbal consent was obtained from the interviewed informants. All informants agreed that their organisation's name could be mentioned in publication, while they themselves would remain anonymous.

3.4 Data analysis

In order to answer the research question, this study employed a mixture of deductive and inductive research strategies. To begin with, deductive reasoning was helpful in confirming previously established concepts based on the analysis of the literature corpus. This did not only allow to affirm theoretical considerations of previous studies (as presented in Table 1. and Table 2.), but it also indicated that the collected data constituted a 'good fit' in representing the actual dynamics of citizen-induced initiatives.

Still, the data suggested that explanatory power of previous theories remained insufficient in explaining the full spectrum of outcomes and internal organisational characteristics of citizen-induced initiatives. This was only exacerbated by the lack of empirical research on these topics. To account for these shortcomings, the data was also analysed with an inductive research approach.

Unlike its deductive counterpart, an inductive research strategy attempts to produce generalizable theory from patterns derived from specific empirical observations (Malhotra, 2007). Integrating an inductive approach had two distinct advantages. On the one hand this

approach had the additional benefit of classifying concepts, which were yet undetected by the previous literature. On the other hand, it enabled the utilisation of various concepts, which were present in the literature, as a starting point for the further identification of adjacent concepts. For instance, this meant, that by departing from established concepts, such as the development of civic skills, other skill-related developments (e.g. practical skills) could be determined. This is in line with Blaikie's (2007) account, which denies the existence of a 'purely' inductive or deductive research approaches. In practise, according to Blaikie (2007), it is impossible to generate and analyse data, test hypothesis or create specific research designs without being influenced by theoretical assumptions or other deductive considerations from previous work (Ritchie et al., 2014). Hence, by adding an inductive research strategy, it was made possible to produce scientific accounts of developmental and organisational dimension based on the concepts and terminology used by actors, who actually engage in citizen-initiatives (Malhotra, 2017). This was achieved by following Gioia, Corley and Hamilton's (2013) methodology for a 'systematic inductive approach to concept development' (p. 16), the data analysis had four main steps. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and imported to NVivo.

Firstly, codes were carefully formulated that reflected the voices and interpretations of the informants, whilst staying as close as possible to the statements of the interviewees and not imposing research interpretations on them at this initial stage. The interviews were largely scanned for statements about informants' own and other people's feelings, perceptions, arguments, actions and practices regarding the micro-individual benefits of citizen initiative participation as well as the how their organisation's make-up may relate to the involvement and participation of its members. To keep track of the varying perspectives, separate code lists were initially developed for views regarding self-development and the organisation's impact on self-development. Overall, this open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) resulted in 710 and 625 codes, respectively. The total number of collected codes amounted to 1,335.

Secondly, axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to identify similarities and allowed codes to be clustered according to a more general and abstract second-order themes, partly inspired by existing theoretical concepts, such as civic skills (Fung, 2003), personal empowerment (McMillan et al., 1995; Sørensen, 2006) and community embeddedness (Wandersman & Florin, 2000), which were identified or being discussed as the personal impacts of participation on self-development. In addition, the same process was conducted for concepts relating to the initiative's organisational make-up, such as structure, decision-making style and cohesiveness (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). At this stage of the analysis, theoretical

saturation of the data become apparent as similar themes and concepts occurred repeatedly, and consequently, second-order themes were well developed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Figure 2. depicts the content and origin of the resultant 15 second-order themes as part of the data structure for the micro-individual benefits of citizen initiative participation. Next, Figure 3. depicts the content and origin of the resultant 12 second-order themes as part of the data structure for the organisational context of initiatives. In line with Pratt's (2008) recommendations for presenting qualitative findings, the prevalence of the themes was first documented (see first-order codes in Figure 2. and Figure 3.).

Thirdly, patterns underlying the second-order themes were detected and clustered to create aggregated dimensions with a higher level of abstraction. Subsequently, during this stage of the analysis 15 second-order themes were distinguished into five condensed overarching developmental indicators under which all main personal benefits fall: *skill acquisition and professional capability development*, *relationships and networks*, *community related role and identity development*, *psychological development* and finally *behavioural and lifestyle transformation*. Furthermore, regarding the organisational context, 12 second-order themes were distinguished into five overarching organisational indicators under which all main organisational factors fall: *organisational design*, *organisational commitment*, *diversity and homogeneity*, *social climate* and *environmental munificence* and its relation to members' self-development. Some of the literature derived themes of Table 1. and Table 2. indeed reappeared as aggregate dimensions. In other cases, the themes only partially reoccurred and were additionally combined with other neighbouring concepts to form newly labelled aggregate dimensions.

Finally, the last step of the analysis consisted of searching for and establishing potential links between the organisational and the developmental realm. Having identified the various aggregated dimensions, the focus of the research shifted back to the open codes. However, this time the initial codes were scanned for statements, which explicitly or implicitly referred to a relationship between the different organisational context factors and the dimensions of personal development. This allowed to unearth the relationships between organisational second-order themes and personal developmental factors. Consequently, Figure 4. depicts the relation between each organisational related second-order theme and the various aggregated dimensions in personal development. This way of visualising the results was chosen to maintain clarity. At the end of the results section, the reader will be presented with a figure, which incorporates these linkages (see Figure 4.).

3.5 Reliability and validity

The reliability of qualitative research is constrained by two factors. First, it depends on the ‘likely recurrence of key features of the raw data’ (Richie et al., 2014, p.356). This is because the settings in which qualitative studies take place, are innately complex and rich in information and extraction methods always only retrieve a limited amount of all possibly obtainable information. Second, the classification or interpretation of this data can never be completely detached from the individual perception of the researcher (Richie et al., 2014). Together, this might lead to different results in replicated studies, even if procedures are followed to the letter. This study attempted to mitigate this form of bias in two ways. First, a semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. By providing a certain set of main questions, which captured the key concepts of this study, future research would be able to follow a similar line of enquiry. Still, this method also gave sufficient freedom to explore the complex settings in citizen initiatives. Further, respondent validation (Richie et al., 2014) was used as another way of strengthening the reliability of the findings of this study. It involved returning to informants to confirm and clarify the correct meanings or interpretations of statements given by them. In some cases, concepts were elucidated, or a certain situation was elaborated in more detail. This was primarily done via email correspondence. As a consequence, the likelihood of emergent concepts being purely the result of the researcher’s individual inclinations and interpretations, was reduced.

In some cases, multiple informants from one organisation were interviewed. On the one hand a more holistic picture was obtained that indeed captured organisational key features of the data more reliably. On the other hand, this could have reduced the variability of the organisational context variable, as accounts were not independent from each other. This negatively impacted the external validity of this study. Likewise, the reliability of the findings was undermined by sampling informants with different organisational roles, ranging from campaigner to co-founder or coordinator. Again, this had the benefit of arriving at a richer account of organisational and developmental dimensions, yet it was expected to complicate future efforts to replicate this study. In order to reduce the impact of these sampling choices, informants from multiple organisations were also included in the sample.

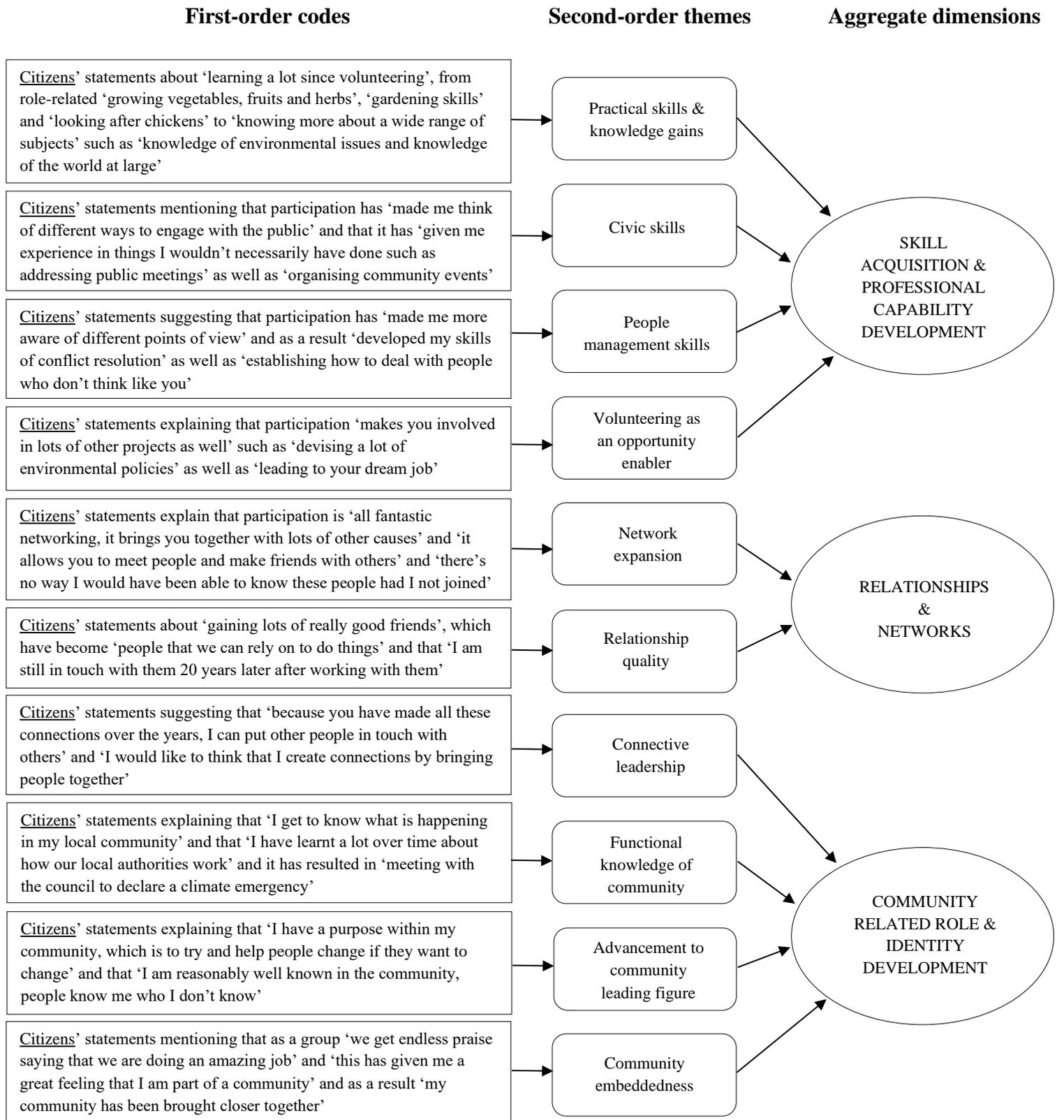


Figure 2. Data structure for personal development.

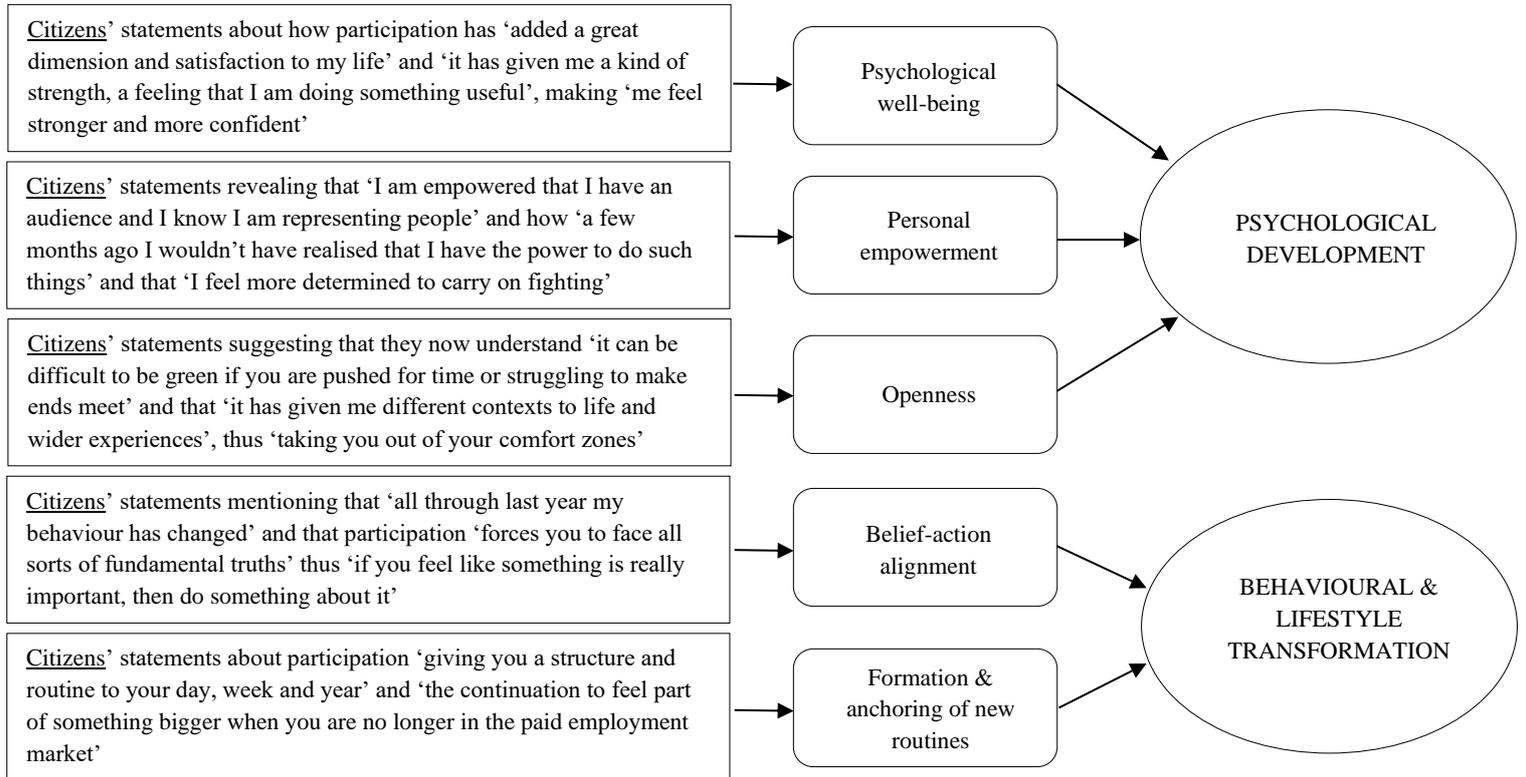
First-order codes**Second-order themes****Aggregate dimensions**

Figure 2. Data structure for personal development continuation.

First-order codes

Second-order themes

Aggregate dimensions

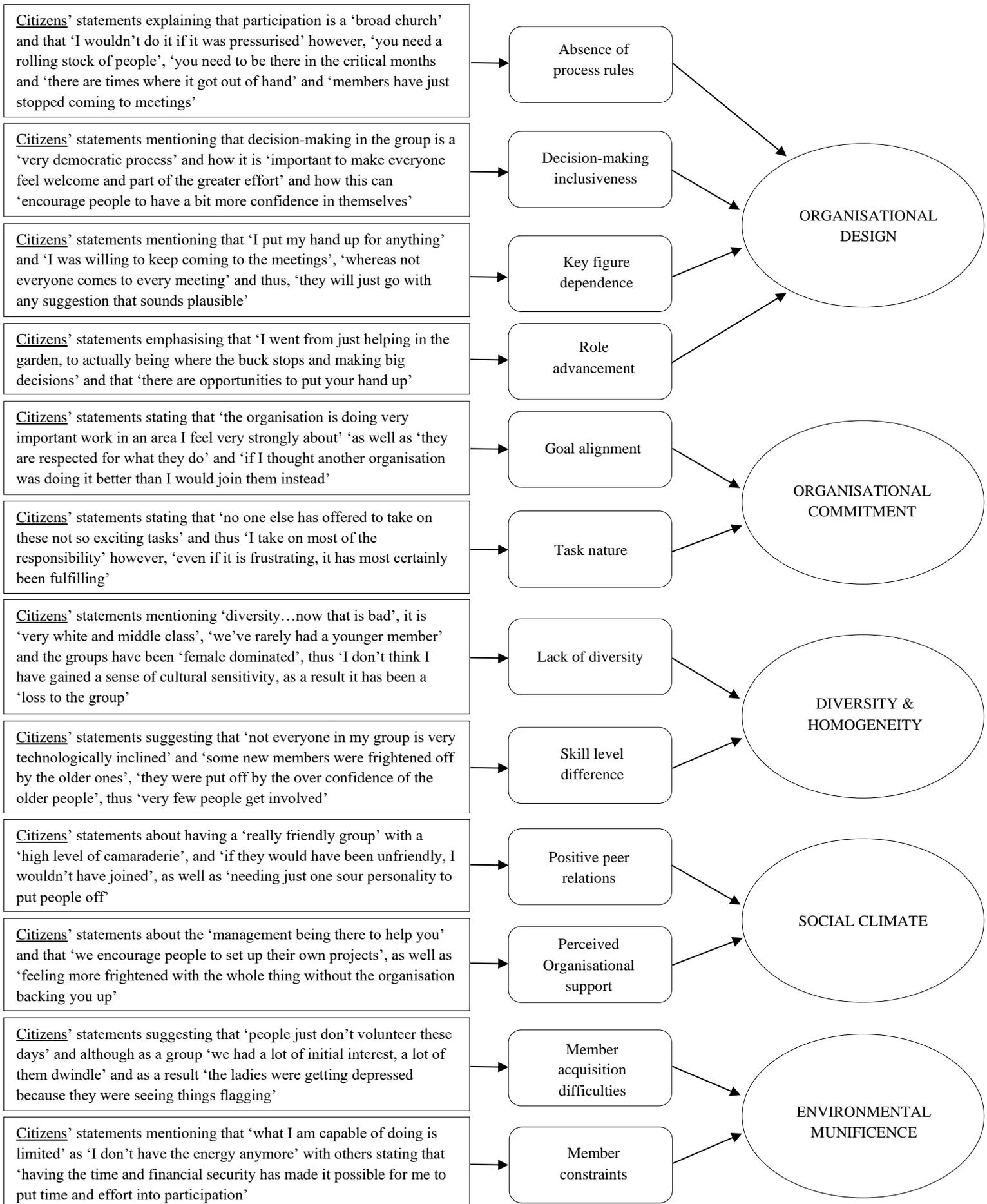


Figure 3. Data structure for organisational context of initiative.

4. Results

The following section presents and explains the five aggregate dimensions of personal development and their respective second-order themes. The five aggregate dimensions are: *skill acquisition and professional capability development*, *relationships and networks*, *community related role and identity development*, *psychological development* and finally *behavioural and lifestyle transformation* (see data structure in Figure 2.). Next, the organisational contexts of initiatives and its five aggregated dimensions are presented and their content, including second-order themes, is explained. They are categorised as: *organisational design*, *organisational commitment*, *diversity and homogeneity*, *social climate* and *environmental munificence* (see data structure in Figure 3.). Further, a detailed account on how each organisation related second-order theme is linked to counterparts in personal development is provided at the end of each organisational theme's subsection (4.6.1 to 4.10.2). A visual representation of these relationships can be found in Figure 4. For an enriched description of the results, power quotes were used, in which 'the informant is so poetic, concise, or insightful, that the author could not do a better job of making the same point' (Pratt, 2008, p.501).

4.1 Skill acquisition and professional capability development

4.1.1 Practical skills and knowledge gains

A popular capability identified across all informants was the effect participation had on their role-related skills and knowledge, "*I have taken on a lot of practical skills*" (active member, informant 13). Informants mentioned a wide variety of skills relating to the maintenance and success of a community garden from "*growing vegetables, fruits and herbs*" (project leader, informant 12) and "*having to learn about apples, as there are at least 200 different varieties*" (project leader, informant 9), to "*looking after chickens [...] I knew nothing about chickens and now I know quite a lot about them*" (secretary/project leader, informant 8). Moreover, citizens also mentioned rather unorthodox skills that would not normally coincide with a community garden:

"My building skills have come along quite nicely and that is wonderful! So, we have a pizza oven and a composting toilet on this tiny little site."

(Project leader, informant 6)

Apart from skills that they could directly apply, informants positively emphasised the discovery and deepening of relevant knowledge. Such knowledge related to the issues being addressed by their initiative such as the development of new sustainable habits, ideas and practices, *“it has greatly broadened my horizon, knowledge of environmental issues, knowledge of the world at large, how the system works, politics”* (campaigner, informant 1). Naturally, the skills and knowledge gains described by informants relates to the very nature of the initiative they were volunteering in. Furthermore, this extensive knowledge expansion came as a surprise to the informants, as they often entered their initiative with a limited scope of their interest:

“What I found is, you get involved in a subject, such as nature conservation and then you realise that it is not actually about wildlife, it is about social issues, like people trying to cover our wildlife in concrete. What I then realised is there’s a much broader issue [...] concern for the environment is not about bird watching, but largely to do with politics and social issues, and then you get onto climate change and saving the planet. It has certainly made me better informed.”

(Campaigner, informant 1)

The deepening of their knowledge came about due to the long-term presence and commitment to their local initiative, *“I sort of keep going, I haven’t just gotten into the subject and then dipped in for a few weeks or months and then gone out again, I have been able to progressively build up the knowledge”* (campaigner, informant 1). In addition, informants regularly compared the gain in knowledge from participating in their initiative to their working life, and again stated the extensive improvements that it made:

“My previous work in education, it was a really narrow world, I didn’t have a bigger view and now I have a much wider view of these issues, particularly climate change issues.”

(Project leader, informant 6)

4.1.2 Civic skills

Another common skill mentioned by most informants was the development of civic skills, including communication, organisation, writing, research and technological skills. Given the nature of citizen-induced initiatives, existing members are often the face of the initiative, and thus they have recognised that *“communication skills are ever more important”*

(campaigner, informant 1). As a result, *“participation has made me think of different ways to engage when I campaign. I have developed ways to approach somebody, a sort of strap line”* (campaigner, informant 2). For some, communication was not just limited to face-to-face interaction, instead they were exposed to much larger audiences which required more careful message handling:

“One of the things I have gained from being a campaigner is my public speaking skills, which I have had to do on a number of occasions and done media interviews. To be able to put across the sound bites that is going to have an impact in the modern media world. I wouldn’t have learnt anything about that in my corporate career.”

(Co-ordinator, informant 5)

Like many organisations, citizen-induced initiatives possess an administrative side. Informants reported skill gains in this domain too, *“I lacked organisational skills then [...] now I am very zealous in keeping up with the admin side of my work- a role model in fact, or so I am told”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). In addition, informants also described how initiative participation was a great way for newcomers to advance their administrative skills, *“I think it is really important for people who want to develop their skill set in the administration side, to get involved [...] it will look great on your CV”* (project leader, informant 7). For some, their role required them to collect and analyse information relating to a particular topic, *“it has given me research skills, I have had to do so much research on all these climate actions that we are putting up on the website”* (co-founder, informant 10). Consequently, many described improvements to their technological skills *“I am a bit of a whiz, I am not as inept as before”* (active member, informant 13), and that they probably *“wouldn’t have bothered with it otherwise”* (coordinator, informant 5) if they were not participating in the initiative.

As a result, participation equipped volunteers with a set of civic skills, which allowed them to effectively participate in the civic and political realm. One informant fittingly puts it:

“It has just given me experience in things I wouldn’t necessarily have done, such as addressing public meetings I would do sometimes, appearing at public inquiries, interviews on radio and television. I have done those sorts of things, all as a result of campaigning.”

(Campaigner, informant, 1)

4.1.3 People management skills

Another dimension, which emerged from informants' statements, was how they have learned to organise interactions. Participation enabled them to better understand and interpret the drivers of behaviour of others and formulate effective reactions. For instance, informants repeatedly highlighted the difficulty of managing different types of characters during their volunteering experience and how they were able to overcome them. *"There is a lot of different personalities and challenges sometimes"* (project leader, informant 12), *"it has made me more aware of different points of view and how to accommodate and manage them so we can still achieve things"* (co-ordinator, informant 5). One informant observes the intensity of volunteers' interactions:

"Learning to herd cats, because volunteers are not necessarily motivated by wanting to be helpful but are also very determined to get their point of view across. So, trying to manage different people's expectations."

(Co-ordinator, informant 5)

Not only did informants improve their *"skills of conflict resolution"* (project leader, informant 6), but they were better able to judge different characters and situations and thus, act accordingly:

"I am normally a bit loud and a bit gobby [...] I am more perceptive, more empathetic and better able to read situations so that my communication style and my whole approach to things is a bit more tailored. I am not expecting people to fall in line with me, I am more falling in line with them."

(Active member, informant 13)

People management skills are different to civic skills, as they focus on the interpersonal aspects of working in citizen-induced initiatives. Volunteers with people management skills found it easier to correctly evaluate others' intentions, motivations and behaviour as well as how to adequately react in these various scenarios.

4.1.4 Volunteering as an opportunity enabler

A shared thought among many informants was that their active participation paved the way for new doors to open up elsewhere, *"it makes you involved in lots of other projects as*

well” (co-founder, informant 10). This is true for both, excelling in other initiatives as well as in the wider professional landscape:

“I am involved in another project which came to me through volunteering in my initiative. I am on the community forum, which is coming up with a neighborhood plan, I am there as an environmental expert to help devise environmental policies [...] I was asked to do this roll as they were aware that I did a lot of volunteering, my CV-profile looked good.”

(Secretary/project leader, informant 8)

For others, participation was rather revolutionary as it became an enabler to their professional domain, *“being in the initiative led her to a job, and it was the job of her dreams [...] sometimes your volunteering role actually becomes your job”* (project leader, informant 7). Additionally, participation awakened the entrepreneurial spirit of some, *“because of volunteering I now have a monthly radio show, which I talk at, play music and interview others to find out about local green projects”* (chair, informant 11).

In general, this career enhancing effect of citizen participation was not expected by informants prior to joining the initiative and additionally did not constitute a reason to take part in the initiative in the first place. Nevertheless, citizen participation as an opportunity enabler was identified as a profound side-effect, which contributed to personal growth and development.

4.2 Relationships and networks

4.2.1 Network expansion

One of the most compelling effects participation had on all informants was the expanded networks of relationships that they gained, *“it is all fantastic networking, it brings you together with lots of other people and causes”* (project leader, informant 9). Informants’ networks did not only grow in pure numbers, but also gained an increased reach. Hence, on the one hand informants were able to connect better with others in their local group and locality, *“other than old school friends, I didn’t know people locally in my town, whereas now, I do”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4), and on the other hand, they were also able to broaden their network horizon with people who did not necessarily have a common goal initially, often from different organisations:

“I met quite a few people from local organisations who I hadn’t of known before that, with not exactly the same concerns, but related concerns. The same issues were cropping up and we kept meeting and so I have gotten to know a lot of the most active people in the community.”

(Campaigner, informant 1)

4.2.2 Relationship quality

Participation did not only affect the quantity of relations, but also the quality of old and new relationships, *“I have gained beautiful friendships with lovely people, like-minded people”* (chair, informant 11). Many of these ties have developed into meaningful friendships as opposed to just known acquaintances, *“the close friends I have grown over the years has been through the environmental movement more than anything else”* (co-ordinator, informant 5). For a few informants these friendships have progressed into highly trusted and supportive connections, far beyond the original context of the initiative:

“They have become genuine friends. One of them drove me to hospital when I had surgery for breast cancer and would come around to see me and help out with various things.”

(Secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4)

Another important aspect of relationship quality identified by many informants was its durability, *“the environmental network, I am still in touch with them 20 years later after working with them, I still keep in touch”* (campaigner, informant 2).

4.2.3 Connective leadership

Apart from experiencing personal network growth and improving relationships, informants also increasingly found themselves in a network managerial type-of-role. By participating in the initiatives, informants become aware of their unique position within their social network and were thus able to bridge structural holes between otherwise unconnected network branches. *“I would like to think that I create connections by using the links I have across many organisations to bring people together”* (co-ordinator, informant 5). This connective capacity is also recognised by other network members who actively sought out this quality:

“Because I have made all these connections over the years, I can put other people in touch with other people and other organisations that can just help each other. Somebody asked, ‘do you know anybody who recycles the plastic from the coffee machines’ and I said ‘no, but I know somebody who will’ and I contacted them, got the answer and got back to them.”

(Campaigner, informant 2)

4.3 Community related role and identity development

4.3.1 Functional knowledge of community

A key theme brought up by informants evolved around the idea of how proactive participation had raised their awareness of the ins and outs of their locality from *“learning a lot about the community in my borough”* (campaigner, informant 1). Participation had opened their eyes to structural issues such as various inequalities and pressing issues faced by community members, *“I have learnt that a lot of people out there are on the breadline, their main concern is keeping their jobs, looking after the kids and having a meal on the table. Maybe that is just as much as they can handle”* (project leader, informant 9). Likewise, informants also emphasised a better understanding of how their community operates in terms of local politics:

“I have learnt a lot over time about how our local authorities work and what the role of the local councilors is and other structures that surround the local government [...] I am probably more aware than most about how this meshes together.”

(Co-ordinator, informant 5)

For one informant, this knowledge unveiled a deeper understanding of the entrenchment of power within their local authorities, *“I have learnt about the strength and size of the opposition to progress. It is enormous and it is a battle”* (campaigner, informant 1). As a result, the informant became aware of the pushback created by the local council:

“If the council decided it wants to build over green spaces, or they want to give these green spaces to a super-rich football club, they normally win. The council will win against the wishes of the community and against environmental protection.”

(Campaigner, informant 1)

Despite this pushback, local councils cannot be seen as a monolithic opposing force. For some informants, they have been told by their local council that they *“really need citizen run groups to work with local people”* (co-founder, informant 10) and as a result, such initiatives have facilitated their councils in declaring a climate emergency. Knowing the dynamics of their community’s institutions allowed informants to gain advantages similar to those of civic skills. Whereas civic skills represent the actual hands-on methods needed to prevail in the political sphere, knowledge of community dynamics more closely refers to a metaphorical roadmap, of where and how to apply their efforts effectively.

4.3.2 Advancement to community leading figure

For many informants, participation in a local green initiative had enabled them to not only acquire relevant knowledge, but it also provided a platform to disseminate this knowledge to the wider public:

“It is about helping and educating the public and getting things done by trying to raise awareness of environmental issues.”

(Secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4)

As a result, informants were aware of their changing role as they felt they had a *“purpose within the community, which is to try and help people change if they want to change”* (co-founder, informant 10). Furthermore, informants also highlighted that the task of knowledge sharing transcended to a more visible role, *“I think I am reasonably well known in the community; people know me who I don’t know”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8) and that they were a *“mover and shaker”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4) within their community. In addition, informants similarly stated that this visible role had a sense of credibility to it as *“some people in the community want to meet me because they think I can help them do something environmentally speaking”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8), and others mentioned their leadership-like role in the community:

“I have an audience; I know I am representing people. We are in a sense representative of a very wide and broad constituency across the borough.”

(Campaigner, informant 1)

4.3.3 Community embeddedness

Another theme mentioned by informants was their discovery of the importance of individual engagement and agency as they “*didn’t have a very community mindset before*” (co-ordinator, informant 5). Therefore, participation provided them with a new light on the influence of their individual as well as collective action, “*now I see what I can do is wider than perhaps the original thought of what a local group does*” (co-ordinator, informant 5):

“Before I paid money to friends of the earth and worried about whales and the amazon rainforest and then it came a lot closer to home when Heathrow was planning its early expansion. It came to me at that point that there was a local view on what matters, which I hadn’t really perceived before.”

(Co-ordinator, informant 5)

For a few informants, collective action via citizen-induced initiatives was “*desperately needed*” because “*if anything is needed to be done, it is usually down to volunteers as climate change is not being addressed by the people whose job it is who ought to be doing it*” (campaigner, informant 1). Thus, informants felt “*more connected and more responsible*” for their town and “*a greater sense of ownership*” (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4) than they did before participation. Consequently, the work of these informants did not go unnoticed, especially from those in the community who did not participate in a local initiative:

“People see what has happened here and they are really appreciative, we get endless praise about the amazing job we are doing. I don’t just take this for myself, but as a group it is quite powerful.”

(Project leader, informant 12)

Many informants reported an overall tendency for a strengthened social fabric. They described feelings of solidarity, “*there is no greed when we dig up produce, we all share it*” (project leader, informant 7) as well as cohesion, “*it is a great way of bringing the community together, rich people and poor people*” (chair, informant 11). Subsequently, there was a general theme that the informants’ “*community has been brought closer together*” (campaigner, informant 3).

4.4 Psychological development

4.4.1 Psychological well-being

A shared belief among informants was that participation in their initiative led to a personal change in their psychological well-being. Informants explicitly and implicitly listed a wide array of reasons for their new state of mind. First, almost all informants elaborated on their increased self-confidence, which provided them with a general sense of trust in their abilities, *“I feel stronger and more confident”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). Volunteering routinely required them to leave their comfort zone and overcome otherwise seemingly unconquerable obstacles:

“It has given me a lot of confidence; it challenges you in ways that you wouldn’t be challenged. I have done things like email the sustainability manager at Arsenal football, and I am not somebody who would normally email somebody else out of the blue.”

(Co-founder, informant 10)

In general, informants found joy in challenging themselves and going beyond their expected limits, *“I will go off and talk to anybody about anything, and I wouldn’t have done that before”* (campaigner, informant 2). This allowed informants to scrutinize their strengths and weaknesses and re-assess their identity, thereby generating a more realistic self-image, which they felt confident with.

Second, the very tasks performed in citizen initiatives allowed them to explore and express their deepest aspirations. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, self-actualization is the highest form of psychological development (McLeod, 2007). It encompasses realising one’s personal potential and comes along with a sense of self-fulfilment. Many informants expressed how volunteering was highly *“fulfilling, because one can work towards key goals of encouraging a more sustainable lifestyle”* (project leader, informant 9). Further, volunteering provided informants with a way of *“expressing your personality, your beliefs, [...] and I believe that if you believe in something you ought to back it.”* (campaigner, informant 3). In doing so, informants felt highly autonomous and even liberated, *“I wanted to do these things and do them on my own terms”* (active member, informant 13) and *“I just love it, I love the way it makes you feel”* (project leader, informant 7).

By engaging in fulfilling and liberating tasks with people of their liking, informants were able to (re-)develop “*a sense of self-worth*” (campaigner, informant 3) and consolidate their self-esteem:

“It has given me strength and a feeling that I am doing something useful. Part of my depression was because I never had much luck with relationships, I have never married, I have never had children and I used to think what am I for? But now I feel as though I belong because I am doing something useful, and as a result I am not bothered about that anymore. I have found a good purpose.”

(Secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4)

Yet, psychological well-being is not only determined by purely personal factors, but it is partially grounded in one’s social context. Positive relations to peers crystallized as a crucial contributing factor for well-being among informants:

“I felt very lonely and isolated when I wasn’t involved in anything. But now I don’t feel like that, I am involved in a wider community and I know I can phone my friends from my group. Knowing they exist is a good feeling [...] I have restored my social life and I am happier.”

(Secretary-co-ordinator, informant 4)

The effect that positive relations have on well-being are not marginal, but in fact can be life changing, as one informant reports, “*we have people that live on their own, we have a few old people who come. It is not only a lifeline for me, [...] but it is a lifeline for them*” (project leader, informant 12).

4.4.2 Personal empowerment

An important aspect of the developmental approach was its focus on how participation encouraged citizens to take control over their lives by solving issues that matter most to them. In other words, participation allowed them to transform long harboured intentions into action. What became apparent from nearly all informants was their ability to do just that, “*a few months ago I wouldn’t have realised that I have the power to do such things [...] it has made me more aware of what I can do*” (co-founder, informant 10). Furthermore, participation shaped informants’ perspective on failure and made them more tenacious:

“I don’t see setbacks as a permanent failure, it has made me more determined, I suppose, to carry on fighting [...] this fighting mentality is a bit like watching the tide come in, it doesn’t all come in at once.”

(Secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4)

Ultimately, this can be understood as an increase in personal empowerment, or how one informant quite literally puts it, *“I definitely feel more empowered”* (project leader, informant 7).

4.4.3 Openness

During their time as volunteers, informants were consistently exposed to people of different social and professional backgrounds as well as people of sometimes drastically differing viewpoints. According to the informants, this triggered an internal learning process, involving increased awareness of diversity of opinion, tolerance and fine-tuned behavioural adaptations when faced with confrontational views. In general, this was perceived as *“good”*, *“helpful”* or *“wholesome”*. For instance, one informant described the end of this learning journey as, *“I’ve learned to be more open-minded and compassionate”* (informant 4, secretary/co-ordinator). Other informants emphasised their newly gained ability to manage their feelings towards disparity:

“I think it has made me more aware of different points of view [...] and it all becomes part of one’s own repertoire, personal growth, personal understanding, meeting different points of view and establishing how you deal with people who don’t think like you.”

(Co-ordinator, informant 5)

Even further, differing perspectives were also used to scrutinize and update informants held-dear stances and often enabled them to recognize disparity as enriching to the general discourse and common goals, *“it makes me rethink my opinions through [...] and we can all work together to achieve things”* (active member, informant 13).

4.5 Behavioural and lifestyle transformation

4.5.1 Belief-action alignment

Participating in citizen-induced initiatives exposed informants to an array of attitudes and beliefs, which can be roughly summarised by the umbrella concept of sustainability. Over

time, participants often adopted these novel sustainability attitudes or enhanced already held environmentally friendly dispositions. Additionally, these attitudes usually translated into consistent action, which did not necessarily remain in the volunteering domain, but were likely to spill over to parts of informants' personal and professional life. As a result, one could observe a general convergence of beliefs and behaviour under the theme of sustainability, which informants were strongly aware of, *"I have noticed all through last year how my behaviour has changed"* (project leader, informant 6). The ubiquity of the newly acquired attitudes were represented by statements such as:

"Like somebody who is very religious, they may be thinking about god in everything they do, [...] I always think about whether what I do is the most environmentally friendly thing I can do."

(Secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4)

Many informants also reported a strengthening of sustainability attitudes in the course of time, *"if anything, it has gotten stronger"* (active member, informant 13) or, *"I think it also forces you to face all sorts of fundamental truths"* (campaigner, informant 1). As mentioned above, these attitudes closely aligned with informants' behavioural choices, *"I literally moved everything that I could over to organic. Food, clothes, washing, everything I could was organic"* (campaigner, informant 2) or *"I have never driven, I cycle or walk or take public transport"* (secretary/project leader, informant 8).

4.5.2 Formation and anchoring of new routines

Citizen-induced initiatives also influenced the lifestyle of their members fundamentally, by serving as a stimulant for establishing new routines. Participation resulted in a reformed structure of *"one's day, week or year"* (active member, informant 13), with informants praising the new feeling of *"continuity"* (project leader, informant 7) or a pleasant feeling of anticipation, *"it is having things to look forward to [...], knowing that there is meaning and activity during the week"* (active member, informant 13). Some members highlighted the positive effect participation in the initiative had on their life in retirement or other life changing events such as dealing with a divorce:

“You face retirement [...], so I think it helps in giving you a structure and a routine when you are no longer in the paid-for employment market.”

(Active member, informant 13)

At times informants also used the initiative as a sanctuary, which provided stress relief by integrating initiative related activities into their otherwise monotonous and exhausting lifestyles:

“I had two small children and it was a way that I could break up the routine of just me and the children [...] so it was a way of getting out the house.”

(Chair, informant 11)

To summarize, the implementation of new routines was regarded as a welcomed type of personal development, which was explicitly mentioned by almost all informants.

4.6 Organisational design

4.6.1 Absence of process rules

First, informants applauded the amount of (organisational) autonomy given to them in citizen-induced initiatives, *“I have a lot of freedom, a lot of autonomy and I love that”* (project leader, informant 6). They were more or less allowed to choose their individual tasks, schedule, degree of involvement and how they were evaluated. This often stood in stark contrast to their external (working)-life and was generally positively received, *“I like it really, I wouldn’t want to have somebody else dictating what to do. I already have a full-time job, so I wouldn’t want somebody else telling me what to do or having a performance review”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). This coincides, with an absence of roles that wield formal authority or would otherwise enforce certain behaviour, *“nobody is going to come down on you if you don’t do it”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4).

However, there seemed to be a dark side to the perceived abundance of autonomy, which some informants explicitly remarked on, *“sometimes I do prefer to just do what somebody has asked me to do and not have to think about it too much”* (co-ordinator, informant 5). This observation points to the larger problem of a general lack of formalisation within citizen initiatives, *“we tend to have informal discussions, [...], but there is not a lot of formal structure* (project leader, informant 12). Often, informants negatively commented on

scheduling issues as well as unclear role definitions that provoked task conflict, *“you need a little bit of order, so people don’t duplicate”* (project leader, informant 7) and uneven workloads, *“it just ended up being me doing it [...] nobody will carry it on, nobody takes over”* (project leader, informant 7). This was described to have adverse effects on the outcomes of initiatives as a whole. For instance, some tasks required constant attention over the week, yet with volunteers freely determining their own schedule, less popular days were left out. Hence, it became difficult to manage and sustain effective workflows. Additionally, due to the absence of formal rules or guidelines, long-term planning became difficult, *“you can’t plan events six weeks in advance, it just doesn’t work like that”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8). One reason for this is rooted in the fact, that critical meetings and communication were not or could not be made mandatory. As a result, volunteers did not feel compelled to partake in those meetings or deliver any form of input whatsoever. Even simple forms of communication, such as email, came to a halt:

“Sometimes members have just stopped coming to meetings and communicating, without any notice or apology. They just disappear on us.”

(Secretary/project leader, informant 8)

Some informants reported severe unhappiness with this situation and considered abandoning their engagements, *“it makes it all bit frustrating [...] I want to stand down because of it”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8).

Organisational design was one of the key dimensions that influenced the relationship between citizen participation and personal growth of volunteers (see Figure 4.). More precisely, the absence of process rules affected how participation contributed to both, the acquisition of skills as well as individuals’ general psychological development. To begin with, the high degree of autonomy within citizen initiatives gave volunteers the potential to learn all the skills initiatives had to offer, including practical skills, civic skills and skills related to people management. Many informants confirmed the utilisation of this potential, with volunteers learning a wide array of skills via their several activities:

“You can learn quite a lot just by reading, but I think it is only when you have to do it, you really make sure that you study and understand the subject.”

(Campaigner, informant 1)

However, this capability was to some extent limited by the apparently biased activity choice of individuals. A subsequent section on task nature (4.7.2) elaborates on this issue in more detail. Next, many informants praised organisational autonomy as a cause for feelings of liberation and empowerment, which constitute important conceptual pillars of psychological well-being, *“one of the things that this allows me to do, is to do what I can do, as opposed to what I can’t do”* (co-ordinator, informant 5). In general, initiatives did not feature many formal rules on roles or responsibilities, which provided a sense of liberty to some volunteers:

“The great thing about volunteering is the lack of responsibility. At the end of the day, I can walk away from it, knowing I have performed my task. It is less stressful than working.”

(Active member, informant 13)

However, as explained above, not all volunteers displayed the same positive ramifications of an absence of process rules and overabundant autonomy. Some felt alienated and left alone with arduous tasks, which were vital for initiatives’ smooth functioning. This ambiguity suggested an interaction of organisational autonomy with a volunteer’s position in the organisational hierarchy. Again, this will be more elaborated upon in a following section termed key figure dependence (4.6.3). Therefore, the absence of process rules exhibited a curvilinear relationship with developmental factors, especially for key figures within the organisation. Up to a certain degree, organisational autonomy positively contributed to the experiences and psychological development of volunteers. However, if this threshold was exceeded, adverse effects including exhaustion, confusion and stress would kick in and outweigh the benefits of autonomy. The same principle applies to volunteers in general, when it comes to skill acquisition. When many rules constrained the task choices of volunteers, they were less likely to be exposed to a multitude of activities, thereby foregoing the opportunity to learn new skills. With more freedom of choice, thus fewer constraining rules, volunteers were able to participate in a broader set of tasks. However, if given absolute choice over their activities, volunteers limited their efforts to few, but satisfactory tasks – again missing out on their developmental potential in terms of skills.

4.6.2 Decision-making inclusiveness

A common theme that emerged from informants’ responses involved the concept of how initiatives arrive at their decisions. In general, decision-making processes were described as highly *“democratic”* (project leader, informant 9) and inclusive. This did not only include

members of the initiative, but also extended to stakeholders, such as locals, outside of the actual organisation, “*we try to involve lots of local people in the way that we do things*” (project leader, informant 6). Decisions were almost always arrived at in a unanimous fashion, “*it is always a joint decision*” (project leader, informant 6), which required all members to be in agreement on how to move forward. This was a deliberate design choice by the management team, in order to “*make everybody feel welcome and part of the greater effort, everybody needs to feel part of it*” (co-ordinator, informant 5). However, as pointed out in the previous section, this could become a problem, if volunteers are reluctant to participate in the decision-making process, “*there is a low turn-out at our meetings [...], so we can't decide on anything or make things happen. This [...] makes the organisation stagnant. There's very little progress and nothing much to manage*” (secretary/project leader, informant 8).

Nevertheless, there are indeed benefits of an intended inclusive decision-making style. Leading figures within the initiative aimed to be leaders in practice, rather than leaders by name, in order to avoid hierarchical distance, “*we just call it a management team with a small m and small t, not too sound too grandiose*” (secretary/project leader 8). Instead, their aim was to “*to encourage people [...] and to try and boost other peoples' confidence*” (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4).

Decision-making inclusiveness constituted another second-order theme, that affected the link between participation and various aspects of personal development (see Figure 4.). First of all, volunteers were able to improve their self-confidence and self-esteem. Since, everyone was encouraged to participate in vital decision-making processes, volunteers were prompted to ponder about their actual stance and had to defend their own opinion in sometimes confrontational negotiations, “*I have been much more involved, I am heard*” (campaigner, informant 1). Many volunteers took on this opportunity and felt empowered as a result, “*we are so used to doing what we are told, and now I feel as though I have suddenly been put in a position where I can come up with my own things. That is extraordinary*” (co-founder, informant 10). Hence, their psychological development was impacted significantly.

Second, inclusive decision-making processes involved a plurality of people. Naturally, these individuals tend to have their own opinions, wishes and character traits, which at times led to conflict, “*there is certainly a chance for more conflict and more discussion*” (co-ordinator, informant 5). Volunteers, who were exposed to these complex negotiation processes were able to train their people management skills, in terms of a general understanding of

people's characters and conflict management tactics. In other words, an inclusive decision-making style, contributed to volunteers' skill acquisition.

Finally, decision-making processes also involved third parties as well as local stakeholders. Consequently, this exposed volunteers to key figures of the wider community, which made them visible representants of the issues of sustainability, nature preservation and pollution in their borough. This enabled them to become recognised as leading figures in the community themselves, leading to a deeper embeddedness in their local context, *"people come to me for help and advice"* (project leader, informant 6).

4.6.3 Key figure dependence

One determining factor of the actual organisational structure was detected in key figure dependence. This theme refers to initiatives' tendency to produce an organisation that is dominated by a few individuals, despite them holding little to no formal authority. However, this was less than a deliberate design choice, but rather an emergent consequence of internal organisational dynamics, which even some informants did not yet fully comprehend, *"I don't put myself up for these things. I suddenly end up with all the responsibilities"* (project leader, informant 7). The interviews unearthed three reasons that shaped this development.

One significant cause behind the formation of indispensable key figures was identified in the volition and commitment of a few motivated individuals, *"I am one of those people who put their hand up for anything"* (project leader, informant 9). Their persistent engagement allowed these individuals to be exposed to the inner workings and functioning of their organisation and ultimately handed them access to key positions, *"I was willing to do it and I pretty much go to every meeting. Not everyone comes to every meeting"* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). Still, this determination was not always a given, but may have progressed gradually through their time in the initiative, *"I think I just sat and listened for a long time, but I did keep going back to the meetings. I think it is the willingness to go back to sit and listen that isn't there possibly so much now"* (co-ordinator, informant 5).

However, there is also a different angle to the emergence of key figures. Not only were some volunteers highly committed, others seemed to have deliberately taken a step back. Many informants reported on their discontent regarding free-riders or slackers, *"nobody has put their hands up, saying they would really like to do what you are doing"* (project leader, informant 6). They bemoan an often observed *"low-ish priority"* (secretary/project leader, informant 8)

of volunteers to engage with managerial or administrative tasks, and a general tendency to not reciprocate helpful behaviour, *“the same person asks for help the whole time, never giving really”* (chair, informant 11). As a result, those occupying key positions felt the necessity to continue and increase their efforts, since otherwise *“the organisation would fold”* (campaigner, informant 2), which constituted a positive, reinforcing feedback loop.

Finally, many volunteers were described to harbour some aversion to ascend to leadership positions. Although they enjoyed active participation in typical hands-on tasks, such as gardening and harvesting, some volunteers were hesitant in seeking out key positions, *“people do not want to take the responsible roles, the figureheads, the organisers. Not many people are willing to do the administration. I think that is a problem”* (co-ordinator, informant 5). Even efforts to woo new leaders were mostly unsuccessful, *“we have done our best to make people aware of it. [...] most people are happier to help than they are to actually lead”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8). The same informant speculated that potential disappointment contributed to leadership aversion, *“taking responsibility is a tall order for some people and they probably worry about letting people down”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8).

As a result, important key positions within the organisation tended to be occupied by only a few individuals, with little to no exchange occurring.

Key figure dependence asserted an influence on the relationship between citizen participation and personal growth in two distinct ways (see Figure 4.). First, due to the emergent separation of leading figures versus regular volunteers, the potential to acquire new skills and capabilities was distributed unequally. This was especially true for administrative and civic skills, but also for people management skills that were related to leadership activities. Since only a few individuals occupied the positions that taught these skills, many volunteers did not exhaust the personal growth potential of their time in the initiative, with one informant paraphrasing a colleague, *“she does everything, there is nothing for us to do”* (campaigner, informant 2). In addition, these skills are usually highly sought after in other domains, such as other volunteering-based organisations, the non-profit sector, but also the general job market. Now, with many volunteers missing out on their training, volunteering in itself was not able to serve as the opportunity enabler it could have been.

Another way in which key figure dependence altered the effectiveness of participation's outcomes, was related to individuals' psychological development. More precisely, those

occupying key figure positions suffered from work overload, as they felt burdened with all the unpleasant tasks, *“sometimes it can be an ordeal”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). As a consequence, their relations to other were often perceived more negatively, they felt entrapped and compelled to continue these tasks on their own, which took a toll on their self-esteem, *“sometimes I just gave up the will to live and just went and did the tasks on my own”* (project leader, informant 9).

4.6.4 Role advancement

Another important aspect of organisational design lies in the way of how mobility takes place within an organisation. Informants reflected on this topic in the terminology of roles and their advancement. Given the autonomous and highly democratic nature and the almost complete absence of hierarchy within the studied citizen initiatives, no established or fixed career paths were found. Consequently, advancing within the organisation was mostly up to the individual, *“there are opportunities to put your hand up, it is volunteering within volunteering”* (active member, informant 13). Despite this inconspicuous methodology, some volunteers were able to produce remarkable success with just “putting their hands up”, *“I have gone from just being a volunteer, to being the one who organises everything”* (project leader, informant 7).

Albeit being only a minor aspect of the functionality of citizen initiatives, role advancement affected individuals’ capacity to learn new skills, as well as their psychological development (see Figure 4.). Volunteers enjoyed almost limitless freedom, when it came to pursuing activities of their choice. They could choose from practical tasks, such as gardening or animal keeping, communicative tasks, including campaigning or planning and hosting social events, or organisational and administrative tasks. Over time, volunteers were able to attain, practise and improve the skills they learned from participating in these tasks, *“I went from just helping and going along to the occasional meeting, to actually being where the buck stops – and making big decisions”* (project leader, informant 6). Hence, the beneficial outcomes of participation are not a one-off outcome, but rather ameliorate for the duration of volunteers’ active stay, *“it has been progressive, right the way through my volunteering career”* (campaigner, informant 1).

In general, volunteers were encouraged to pick up new and challenging tasks by themselves, which made them feel empowered, *“when you do have a bit more authority, it also empowers you”* (project leader, informant 7). After successful practise, they gained trust in

their abilities, indicating gains in self-confidence, *“it has given me a lot of confidence”* (co-founder, informant 10). Further, as they advanced within the organisation their overall self-esteem improved. Volunteers often identified with what they were doing and interpreted the responsibility given to them as a sign of reassurance and confidence by their local group, *“I know I am valued, because people in the group do thank me for everything I do and compliment me on my skills. That is great for my self-esteem”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4).

4.7 Organisational commitment

4.7.1 Goal alignment

Goal alignment was identified as a second-order theme, which involves the relationship between individual volunteer’s goals and organisational goals. Many informants mentioned the importance that they attached to the specific organisational aims and how it was necessary to feel in tune with them, *“they are doing very important work, in an area I feel very strongly about”* (co-founder, informant 10). In general, goals of the initiative were formulated rather broadly, so as to capture the attention and possible alignment of wider audiences, *“there is no other organisation, who deal with a whole gamut of environmental issues”* (campaigner, informant 1). To many, these goals were crucial in building a strong organisational reputation, which was listed as a key attractor for potential volunteers, *“the cause is something that attracted me, because I could have joined anything”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). Perhaps more important than the stimulating effect on member acquisition, the alignment of personal and organisational goals also constituted a binding force on existing members, *“if I thought another organisation was doing it better, I would probably go to another organisation”* (campaigner, informant 3). In other words, informants did not feel committed to their initiative per se, but rather because of the aspirations of their particular organisation. As a result, members were described to be inspired, intrinsically motivated and willing to put in additional effort, *“I feel it is worthy and worthwhile cause to keep going, to keep doing our bit”* (campaigner, informant 2).

Having a match between individual and organisational goals, strongly affected the outcomes of participation on personal development in terms of lifestyle and behavioural transformation as well as psychological development (see Figure 4.). On the one hand, sustainability beliefs, that permeate the initiative, are absorbed and amplified by members carrying goals congruent with these beliefs. Further, citizen initiatives serve as an opportunity to translate these beliefs into action, something which was emphasised and welcomed by

almost all informants, *“I believe in communities and it is a way in which I can express my beliefs”* (campaigner, informant 3). More often than not, this resulted in recurring behaviour and eventually new routines. With individual and organisational goals aligned, these routines became reinforced over time, making them highly durable, *“I’m down here today, I was down here yesterday, and I will probably be down here tomorrow. It ticks all the boxes for me”* (project leader, informant 12). On the other hand, informants described that the harmony between individual and organisational goals contributed to their psychological well-being. Knowing the two types of goals coincided, informants felt to be in the right place and every action they carried out became imbued with meaning. This points to the high degree of self-actualization, volunteers received from aligned goals, *“it is really fulfilling, because I can work towards my key goals of encouraging a more sustainable lifestyle”* (project leader, informant 9).

4.7.2 Task nature

One determining dimension of organisational commitment was identified in the very nature of the tasks carried out by volunteers. The degree of how strongly volunteers dedicated their time and effort towards organisational goals often depended on whether they regarded the tasks at hand as joyful, fulfilling or whether they had an otherwise personal inclination towards them.

Since the degree of organisational autonomy was extremely high and little to no formal procedures were in place to assign volunteers to specific roles, members were almost free to choose their individual set of tasks. Many informants elaborated on their joy of choosing different tasks throughout their initiative experience, *“I have been here for 2-3 years and I have done lots of different things”* (active member, informant 13). Yet, tasks were described as far from being equally attractive to volunteers, *“some people don’t want to do particular tasks”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). This left some tasks, especially administrative ones, with a volunteer shortage, *“no one else has so far offered to take on these not very exciting tasks”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8).

Almost all informants located the reason for this imbalance in the degree of joy derived from the particular tasks. Some tasks were simply perceived as more pleasant and joyful than others, *“I find admin and coordination to be less interesting and rewarding than actually doing stuff”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8). In other words, individual organisational commitment largely depended on individuals’ extent of task enjoyment. More satisfactory

tasks included, gardening, growing food, harvesting, campaigning and hosting social events. Less preferred tasks included, administration, office duty, legal tasks or digital communications.

As the previous points suggest, the nature of the task had a profound effect on volunteers' participation experience and their personal growth (see Figure 4.). Being highly selective about tasks showed to be a double-edged sword, which increased volunteers' feeling of self-actualization and psychological well-being, yet came with the cost of not being able to attain civic skills to the full extent. For instance, some volunteers abstained from conducting any administrative work whatsoever and focussed their efforts on more practical activities, such as gardening or socialising. As a result, they were unable to capture civic skills, including organisation, (formal) communication, documentation, budgeting and scheduling. Still, these volunteers greatly enjoyed how they spent their time and were often deeply fulfilled, by the more practical tasks, *"it is incredibly rewarding to dig up this fresh organic food"* (project leader, informant 7). Of course, not all volunteers made such an extreme distinction between their choice of tasks, with many helping out in both domains. Nevertheless, a tendency to dedicate less time to the subjectively perceived boring administration prevailed among volunteers, *"I feel much happier doing my practical projects than I am keeping the admin going"* (secretary/project leader, informant 8).

4.8 Diversity & homogeneity

4.8.1 Lack of diversity

All informants brought forward concerns regarding the demographics of their organisation. According to them, initiatives were largely homogenous in terms of age, socio-economic background, ethnicity and gender. In terms of age, some informants characterised their initiative as having *"rarely any very young members"* or *"our group now only consists of people over 40"* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). However, informants disagreed on the effects of a high average volunteer age on the initiative. On the one hand, an old volunteer-force was regarded as a problem. Informants described a *"lack of energy"* (chair, informant 11) or difficulties in keeping up with technological demands, *"older people might not have the energy or social media savviness"* (project leader, informant 7). On the other hand, older volunteers had more *"time on their hands"* (co-ordinator, informant 5), they were usually more experienced, *"they have got the knowledge and experience"* (project leader, informant 7) and were able to *"transfer the skills down to generations"* (co-ordinator, informant 5).

Additionally, initiatives were comprised mostly of ethnically white volunteers, coming from a middle-class background. This tendency was strongly recognised, by almost all informants, often with a negative undertone, “*we are all very pale*” (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4) and, “*volunteering is a terribly white, middle-class activity*” (active member, informant 13). Some informants speculated, that the reason for this demographic imbalance lies in the way community members self-select for volunteering, “*people tend to associate with those that are more like themselves and that is always a problem*” (co-ordinator, informant 5). Further, initiatives often carried a reputation of being rather homogenous, “*there is a stereotype that it is white and middle-aged people*” (campaigner, informant 1). These findings were underlined by informants’ unsuccessful attempts to bring in people from different social backgrounds:

“There is a block of flats opposite the garden and I don’t think there is one person from that block of flats who comes and joins in. Even though we have put up posters and knocked on the door.”

(Project leader, informant 12)

Finally, informants described volunteering as a mostly female activity, “*our group has also always been female dominated*” (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). This coincides with the demographics of the informants themselves, who, with one exemption, were all female, ethnically white, middle-class and middle-aged or beyond.

These findings illustrate that organisational demographics have an impact on individuals’ outcomes of participation (see Figure 4.). To begin with, a group that is homogenous in terms of age, gender and ethnicity, with members coming more or less all from the same socio-economic background, features fewer links to the wider network of the community or society as a whole. As a result, participation in abundantly homogeneous initiatives did not provide volunteers with an opportunity to access underrepresented parts of the community. Not only did this limit individuals capacity to expand their networks in terms of numbers, but it also influenced the degree to which community embeddedness is affected by participation, “*I don’t think I have gained a sense of cultural sensitivity, even though I do live in a very mixed race area*” (campaigner, informant 3). The surrounding communities were often much more mixed, especially in terms of ethnic diversity, than the initiatives themselves. With only few to no members of these parts of the community joining the cause of initiatives, local groups struggled to imbue knowledge of the larger community to its members.

Consequently, participation did not result in a strengthening of the social fabric, *“we really struggle to get the different communities to work together”* (campaigner, informant 2).

Further, initiatives suffered in particular from a gaping age gap, with only very few young people joining the ranks. Many informants confirmed that this had an effect on initiatives' capacity to teach and transfer relevant skills, especially technological skills. According to the informants, young people in general possessed a higher affinity towards digital communication skills, compared to their more senior peers. *“I don't know if we will be able to have our meetings, unless I can drag everyone to the 21st century and get them to do it on zoom”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). Naturally, the absence of younger volunteers denied the opportunity for potential technological knowledge transfer.

The lack of diversity also affected the efficacy of participation on the psychological developmental component of personal growth. Due to the limited access to a diverse range of people, volunteers were less exposed to alternative ideas, approaches or perspectives, which otherwise may have enriched their own thinking. *“Different communities would bring in different points of view to the group, different ideas and different ways of approaching things. The lack of diversity is a shame and a loss to the group”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). In other words, volunteers were less likely to broaden their minds and become open to new experiences.

4.8.2 Skill level difference

Some informants reported a difference in skills or the perception thereof as an inhibiting factor to initiative and volunteering success. To begin with, some volunteers originated from a *“very city culture”*, (project leader, informant 7). At times, these young volunteers felt intimidated, as they perceived to not possess the necessary skills to participate in a community garden. Albeit their strong interest, they were hesitant to bring themselves fully in, *“they felt a bit scared to immerse themselves in gardening”* (project leader, informant 7). A similar point was made when comparing new members to more old-established colleagues. The former were described to be daunted by the presence of the latter, due to a perceived difference in relevant knowledge and skills:

“A meeting I went to [...] there was a mixture of people, those who were new to campaigning and those who were old timers like me. I have a nasty feeling, that the people, who were new to it, were frightened off by the older ones.”

(Co-ordinator, informant 5)

As a result, newcomers were less likely to express their perhaps fruitful thoughts and opinions in meetings as *“they will go with any suggestion that sounds plausible”* (co-ordinator, informant 5).

Furthermore, a few informants mentioned that some roles required a certain amount of educational knowledge in order for them to be conducted properly. Due to this prerequisite, *“very few people get involved in campaigning or community activism”* as *“you can’t really campaign and debate if you don’t know what climate change is”* (campaigner, informant 1).

Finally, not all members had the same affinity towards technology. This constituted a problem during the coronavirus pandemic, in which administrative and planning work was mostly conducted from home, via the internet. Especially some older members had to forego meetings, due to their inability to use the relevant software.

The abovementioned observations strongly point towards a link between (perceived) skill level difference and the effects of participation on personal development (see Figure 4.). First of all, if volunteers perceived peers to be vastly superior in terms of skills, their self-confidence and self-esteem decreased, *“the younger people, who were new to it, were put off by the overconfidence of the older people”* (co-ordinator, informant 5). They were less likely to launch their own projects, fully engage in existing ones or contribute to group discussions and decisions. Thus, if the perceived individual skill levels differed greatly within the organisation, those on the lower end, tended to display lesser degrees of empowerment from participation. In addition, intimidated or hesitant volunteers were not able to capitalize on the skill teaching and enhancing capabilities of citizen-induced initiative participation. Shying away of tasks, due to a perceived inability to accomplish them, led to exactly this outcome – a self-fulfilling prophecy, *“I haven’t been to university and I don’t know all this stuff”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). Especially the acquisition of civic skills, such as public speaking or document writing, fell behind, as they are often not perceived as a learnable skill, but rather as a natural disposition or talent *“I am really crap at public speaking. I will always pass it to somebody else. I am afraid it will probably never improve”* (project leader, informant 12).

The reverse conclusion is true as well. Previous experience made volunteers more likely to pick up additional tasks. Since less experienced colleagues were less likely to opt in for these

tasks, they even faced little competition. They were familiar with a volunteering context and perhaps even similar tasks, which made them start off with a higher degree of self-confidence in the first place. Still, they were keener on taking on new challenges, which resulted in the further improvement of their possessed skill set, *“I have tended to lead on campaigns, my knowledge has developed”* (campaigner, informant 1). To conclude, the (perceived) difference of skill levels within an organisation suppressed the essentially positive effect of participation on personal growth for those with a low (perceived) skill level and often amplified the benefits of participation on personal development for their high scoring peers.

4.9 Social climate

4.9.1 Positive peer relations

Informants unanimously agreed, that the social climate of their initiative was a key influencing variable in determining, who joins and remains in the organisation as well as for individual and organisational outcomes (see Figure 4.). However, not all informants gained the same experiences in their respective initiatives. On the one hand, there were those who stressed the beneficial effects of a positive social atmosphere. In those cases, peer relations were described as *“really sociable and lovely”* (chair, informant 11) and *“welcoming”* (project leader, informant 6). This camaraderie served as a social lubricant, which allowed volunteers to find common ground and associate quickly, *“we are all on the same page”* (project leader, informant 6). As a result, volunteers encouraged each other, *“they were friendly and encouraged me to stay and get involved”* (campaigner, informant 1) and created a common feeling of acceptance and respect, *“all volunteers that come feel valued and we are interested in them as people with their own thoughts and ideas”* (project leader, informant 12).

On the other hand, some informants explained how a hostile social atmosphere can have adverse effects. First, one informant hinted at the fragility of a good social atmosphere, since *“you only need one bad apple with a sour personality to put people off and for them not to come again”* (project leader, informant 7). There were other reports of how negative relations diminished volunteers’ commitment and, in some cases, even drove them away completely, *“I love it here, but I can’t be with these guys”* (project leader, informant 12).

Yet, the tightness or closeness of some volunteer groups could also have adverse effects, as newcomers find it increasingly difficult to integrate into an established group,

“because we are such a tight group, they come out on a few tasks and we never see them again” (active member, 13).

As outlined above, the current state of peer relations differed from initiative to initiative. Consequently, the effect of peer relations on personal growth must be seen as equally ambiguous. On the one hand, if peer relations were good, the positive effects of participation on individual psychological development and networking were amplified. By definition, positive relations with others is considered a dimension of the construct of psychological well-being. Still, this trivial link becomes clear when looking at one informant’s account:

“Emotionally it has been a great support for me [...] it is about watching out for people and making sure they don’t slip through the net and become destitute and lonely.”

(Chair, informant 11)

An intersection between networking effects and psychological development was strongly visible in a series of social events, described by informants. On many occasions, citizen initiatives organised and hosted social events that had members, volunteers of other initiatives, council staff and local citizens mingling together, *“we would set up events, so that local community groups could come together”* (project leader, informant 9). These events enabled informants to become more open towards other parties’ perspectives and connect them with each other, hence forging new relationships, *“it’s a social hub”* (project leader, informant 12). Again, positive relations among peers, stimulated people to attend these events and engage sincerely. A positive social climate among peers allowed members to build mutual trust over time and eventually even become reliable friends, *“I have got all these friends I can rely on”* (project leader, informant 7). This shows how a good social climate can amplify the already positive effects of participation on relationship quality and durability, besides mere network expansion. On the other hand, if peer relations were poor, those effects were suppressed or in the case of psychological well-being, even inverted, *“sometimes a colleague of ours comes across rather patronizing. A new member commented on that and said they were not impressed with his behaviour. I wonder if it has put some people off”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4).

4.9.2 Perceived organisational support

Informants consistently listed organisational support as a vital part of their initiative experience. Two different origins of organisational support were located. First, the

management team and initiative co-ordinators were described to show a strong dedication towards enabling and supporting volunteers' individual projects, "*we encourage people to set up their own projects*" (project leader, informant 9). They helped by providing financial resources, administrative infrastructure, legal advice and insurance, "*my initiative always has a continual offer that we have a bank account, we have administration, we have got insurance as well as background support, that you would need, if you wanted to start a community project*" (secretary/project leader, informant 8). This provided volunteers with a safety net and made them feel reassured of the initiative's support, "*I enjoy making things happen and my initiative has been a support system to make things happen*" (secretary/project leader, informant 8).

However, co-ordinators' support also assumed shape in form of mentoring activities. Co-ordinators helped to provide an overview of activities for newcomers and assisted volunteers in discovering their personal interests and strengths, "*the management team was there to sign-post people, if they came to volunteer. They were very helpful in that respect*" (project leader, informant 9). Informants described the nature of these exchanges to be frequent and open, "*nobody is going to come down on you if you don't do it*" (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4).

Next, many citizen-induced initiatives, despite being individually managed organisations, were connected to other citizen initiatives via a larger umbrella organisation. This wider network of initiatives was the source of other forms of organisational support. Informants predominantly referred to the goodwill of these other organisations in sharing knowledge and pooling resources, "*they provide materials, information and backup to local groups. They also help the group to organise itself*" (campaigner, informant 1).

Perceived organisational support undoubtedly contributed to individual's psychological development (see Figure 4.). Through encouragement and enabling support, informants reportedly were able to leave their comfort zone, gain self-confidence and even found opportunities for self-actualization via their own small projects. They felt strongly empowered, "*I would feel a lot more frightened and it would be more difficult, because you need that backup. You need the organisation to back you up*" (campaigner, informant 3). Additionally, the guidance and mentoring provided by senior volunteers and co-ordinators allowed members to discover their own strengths and interests, thus establishing previously unknown self-knowledge. Moreover, the accumulated knowledge on how to conduct certain tasks, was also

catalogued and disseminated by local leaders and the overarching umbrella organisation, *“the information I am given in order to improve my campaigns is giving me the empowerment to do them better”* (campaigner, informant 2), sometimes even in the form of formal training, *“they will provide resources, help and an amount of training”* (campaigner, informant 1). Further, organisational support had a positive effect on networks and relationships. Being part of a larger network, including a supportive umbrella organisation, allowed volunteers to expand their network with competent and helpful contacts, *“we get in touch with other local groups. We have occasionally asked them to help and I have also gone along to help with something they are doing”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4).

4.10 Environmental munificence

4.10.1 Member acquisition difficulties

Despite not being a purely organisational factor per se, the environmental circumstances surrounding citizen-induced initiatives were shown to have a large impact on their operations and outcomes. This largely stems from the fact, that initiatives all compete for the same indispensable resource: people’s time, *“there is not enough people volunteering”* (project leader, informant 9). Informants described a few trends, which point to the scarcity of this resource. On the one hand, volunteering is, as the name suggests, just volunteering. More often than not, individuals have to dedicate time to other parts of their life, such as work, education, family and friends or other hobbies, *“a lot of people work long hours, they have children, they work evenings and nights, they don’t necessarily have the time or energy to be involved”* (co-ordinator, informant 5). Additionally, initiatives face increased competition from other initiatives, *“there are a lot of things going on that provide similar opportunities”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8). Further, informants explained how old-established local groups lost their feeling of novelty among potential volunteers, *“partly the novelty has worn off”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8), who rather create their own niche group, instead of joining existing ones, *“people want to invent their own group, they don’t want to join”* (co-ordinator informant 5). Moreover, especially young audiences are more easily captured by hyper vocal social movements, such as extinction rebellion, who overshadow local initiatives, with their media presence and aggressive marketing, *“extinction rebellion sucks up a lot of young people and energy”* (secretary/project leader, informant 8). Hence, it becomes difficult and time intensive to find and recruit new members. Finally, this effect is enhanced by the high turnover of members some informants reported on, *“we have problems with people coming*

and going haphazardly” (project leader, informant 12), which makes it difficult to organise and plan ahead.

The most striking consequence of member acquisition difficulties concerns the already prevalent lack of diversity in citizen initiatives. The findings suggest a reduced influx of socially and economically disadvantaged community members as well as younger demographics. As the degree of homogeneity increases, various aspects of personal growth become negatively affected (see Figure 4.). In other words, a scarce organisational environment indirectly influences the relationship between participation and personal development. This is likely to be true for many types of citizen-induced initiatives and not only limited to ones operating in the sustainability sector. One informant bemoaned, *“everybody wants volunteers, everybody. The NHS wants volunteers, local councils want volunteers, all the charities want volunteers and so on, and they are all falling over themselves”* (active member, informant 13). Clarification on the mechanism of this relationship can be found under the ‘lack of diversity’ section. Further, initiatives’ inability to bind volunteers for a longer time, led to a frequent joining and departing. This caused members to generally feel disheartened and dissatisfied with volunteering as a whole – in other words, their sense of psychological well-being suffered, *“we are burnt out to a certain extent. It is a constant battle to get new volunteers. It is one of the reasons I am giving up now, I am just sick of it”* (project leader, informant 9). Difficulties in acquiring new members asserted a negative influence on the relationship between participation and the psychological developmental component of personal development. Another apparent drawdown of member acquisition difficulties concerns missed out development in the domain of relationships and networks. This argument follows the simple logic of numbers; if only few or little new members arrive in the initiative, individual networks expansion remains capped, *“it is a shame and a loss to the group”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). Finally, with less people being actively involved in the initiative, the likelihood of discovering and sharing new knowledge or the transfer of skills between volunteers is reduced, *“if nobody volunteers, then we don’t have the resources or particular intellectual or physical skill”* (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4).

4.10.2 Member constraints

Not only were there factors inhibiting new members from joining citizen initiatives, informants also referred to constraints experienced within their organisation. Some of these were similar to limitations impeding member acquisition. For instance, just like non-members,

volunteers “*have partners, families and other responsibilities, even work*” (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4), indicating, “*people are being pulled in different directions*” (project leader, informant 7). Additionally, some members can be considered as serial volunteers, of whom “*most belong to other groups*” (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). As a result, many are short on time and may not be able to perform organisational tasks to the necessary extent, “*I’d like to be more involved. I’d like to take part in the decision-making, but there is only so much bandwidth*” (project leader, informant 7).

These findings suggest that member constraints negatively affected personal development of initiative members (see Figure 4.). First, volunteers’ psychological well-being decreased, with some informants bemoaning low levels of energy and diminishing motivation, due to work overload, “*it is a bit of a chore, trying to fit things in and I do get very tired, because I work full time as well*” (secretary/co-ordinator, informant 4). In addition, the increased demands on members led to exhaustion, which forced members to neglect certain tasks and learning opportunities they would have otherwise liked to participate in, “*I would know a lot more, because I would have a lot more time to read up on things*”. As a result, participation cannot live up to its potential in developing skills and knowledge from these foregone opportunities.



Figure 4. Relationships between organisational context and personal development.

5. Discussion

5.1 Academic Impact

The goal of this study was to explore the developmental benefits of participating in citizen-induced initiatives on an individual level and the extent to which this relationship is influenced by meso-organisational factors of the initiative, as such research had been lacking.

To begin with, research on the effects of citizen participation often locates positive outcomes on the project or community level, thereby overlooking its impact on individual development (Wagenaar, 2007). Hence, what this development actually entails remains insufficiently explained. This study overcomes this shortcoming, by identifying decisive factors and enriching previous literature with a much more granular perspective thereof.

Still, there is a contrast between the deductively derived dimensions of Table 1. and the inductively produced dimensions that emerged from the empirical data (see Figure 2.). Table 4. presents a comparison of literature-based dimensions and their empirically enriched counterparts. The first major dimension that emerged in this study was labelled, skill acquisition and professional capability development. Previous studies primarily focus on the acquisition of civic skills and the enhancement of self-confidence (Fung, 2003; Verba et al. 1995; Sørensen, 2006), which are confirmed by the findings of this study. However, the findings unearth a plurality of additional, so far unmentioned, developmental factors related to skills. Some of these skills were more general, such as people management skills and civic skills, which are likely to surface across various types of citizen initiatives. Other skills, including practical skills and knowledge gains were more specific to the respective initiative and the sustainability sector in general. Hence, the exact nature of the acquired skills and knowledge strongly depend on the focus of the initiative itself. In the case of this study, volunteers acquired skills and knowledge related to sustainability practises, including gardening, food-distribution and waste management. Initiatives, which operate in other sectors, would therefore be expected to transmit other, focus-specific abilities.

In some cases, however, the dimensions' labels were indeed congruent. Still, the pre-existing concepts, which were based on the literature analysis, were often enriched by the findings of this study. This applies to the dimension of relationships and networks, which initially only entailed improvements in the quality of interpersonal relationships (Wandersman

& Florin, 2000; Arai, 1997). Still, it was found that not only the relationship quality, but also the size and reach of networks increased, due to participation.

Next, although knowledge of community operations and functions was crystallized from the previous literature, it quickly became apparent, that participation was tied to more than just general notions of community knowledge (Cooper et al., 2006). Instead, volunteers experienced increased community embeddedness, which comes hand in hand with improved connective leadership capabilities, as well as an ascension to community leading figures. Thus, these findings further underline the work of Wandersman & Florin (2000) and Morrissey (2000), who describe a general strengthening of social fabric as a result of citizen participation and an increase in community related understanding. Again, due to the commonality and width of these concepts, community related role and identity development was constructed as a developmental dimension, which was deemed to be more accurate.

Again, the dimension of psychological development retained its label, but was fundamentally enhanced by a number of themes. An overlooked key developmental component mentioned by all volunteers concerned their perception of an overall improvement of their psychological well-being. This included among others an increase in self-confidence (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988), feelings of liberation, fulfillment, positive relations with others and even self-actualization. Moreover, openness and personal empowerment were also verified as adjacent concepts. The latter was partially touched upon by McMillan et al. (1995), who hypothesize a causal relationship between participation and personal empowerment.

Finally, behavioural and lifestyle transformation was another aggregated dimension that incorporated much more than what was initially stated in the literature. The findings show that participation has an amplifying effect on volunteers' sustainability related attitudes and beliefs. Additionally, this study also found that these newly found beliefs were also translated to new behavioural acts and habitual adoptions, which often reflected volunteers' sustainability ideals. Again, such transformation of beliefs to action is likely to be in line with the goals of the respective initiative itself. Thus, the promotion of sustainability focused behaviours are likely to only be adopted by those participating in an initiative with such a focus. Therefore, other initiatives, which feature less belief-driven organisational goals, might not be subject to this developmental dimension. However, it can be expected that initiatives differ in the extent to which they are able to modulate the beliefs and attitudes of volunteers, as not all causes behind citizen-induced initiatives are as dominantly tied to a strong belief system as

sustainability focused initiatives (Scarce, 2016). Apart from a minor account of Morrissey (2000), on how participation is linked to the development of new values and attitudes, the literature on citizen initiatives remains mostly silent on this topic and provides no empirical research. The literature in the field of psychology does find some explanations for this phenomenon in the guise of social identity theory (Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worchel, 1979). For instance, prior to participating in initiatives, volunteers often already hold favourable views of sustainability related topics, including environmental protection, local food production or climate change mitigation. After joining an initiative and becoming more involved with a group of like-minded individuals, volunteers are likely to form a common social identity in accordance with sustainability norms (Tajfel et al., 1979). As a result, previously held beliefs are amplified, opinions and attitudes towards other topics are likely to change and align with the ideas of sustainability and finally, personal routines and lifestyle choices are adapted to satisfy sustainability norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011).

Due to the fundamental additions and discovery of new underlying themes by inductive reasoning, some dimensions were relabelled, to more accurately represent their content. Ultimately, this resulted in the aggregation of five general dimensions of personal development: skill acquisition and professional capability development, relationships and networks, community related role and identity development, psychological development and finally behavioural and lifestyle transformation.

Nevertheless, interrelations between different themes do exist, with concepts influencing or impacting each other in various ways. This can be true even across aggregated dimensional boundaries. For example, volunteering as an opportunity enabler can be expected not to magically appear as a result of participation but is likely to be connected to other developmental themes of volunteering. One could speculate that volunteers are more likely to successfully navigate the job market, with newly gained skills and knowledge and increased feelings of empowerment as support as well as an expanded network to reach out to. However, the evidence provided from data analysis, which would link the different themes to each other, cannot be considered sufficient for developing solid theoretical arguments and can only be used to arrive at a preliminary understanding of the dynamics at play. More research would be necessary to grasp the conceptual interactions, their directions and their respective strength.

Still, it is important to note that all dimensions and themes are conceptually distinct. For instance, arguments for relationships and networks as well as positive relations, as part of

psychological well-being seemingly overlap, but this congruence is only superficially true. Of course, both concepts involve other parties in some way or another. However, the argument for network expansion or improvement of relationship quality is purely structural. As a result of citizen participation, volunteers' networks are simply quantitatively larger, and the strength of their ties is stronger. Positive relations on the other hand, rather refer to and highlight the psychological effects of being surrounded by friendly and trustworthy individuals.

Table 4. Comparison of dimensions of personal development

Dimensions based on literature	Dimensions based on empirical analysis	Fundamental changes and additions
Civic skills	Skill acquisition and professional capability development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now correctly represents a wide spectrum of skills gained, as well as consequences for capabilities external to initiative
Relationships and networks	Relationships and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now includes qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of network structure (number and strength of ties)
Community operations and functions	Community related role & identity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds relational aspects of community knowledge, including recognisable identity generation, leadership roles and local embeddedness
Psychological development	Psychological development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds psychological well-being as crucial developmental factor
Values and beliefs	Behavioural and lifestyle transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now includes both, making of new beliefs, as well as strengthening of old beliefs and how participation contributes to behavioural adaption and habit formation

Previous literature suffers from two deficits, regarding organisational factors. First, only few concepts are carved out and discussed superficially, including social climate, autonomy, decision-making style and the organisational structure (Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Ryan et al., 2001; Stukas et al., 2009). Second, the studies brought forward mostly focus on voluntary organisations in general (Studer & Von Schnurbein, 2013), such as charities, rather than in citizen-induced initiatives in particular (Alfes, Shantz & Bailey, 2016). As a result, it remains unclear whether the findings of these studies apply to citizen initiatives. Henceforth, this study started off where the previous literature stopped. Table 5. presents a comparison of literature-based dimensions and their empirically enriched counterparts as well as a list of newly developed dimensions. To begin with, the data affirmed the previously

developed factors, yet often with fundamental adaptations. For instance, the established factor autonomy was discovered to be a highly ambiguous in nature. Initiatives only had very few guidelines that regulated volunteers' actions and were found to be rather abundant in autonomy. Although volunteers initially praised this tendency, they were also quick to bemoan the negative side effects that came along with it. Consequently, this factor was enriched and relabelled as, absence of process rules, to bring the lack of formalisation and structure within citizen initiatives into the foreground. In line with the literature, decision-making inclusiveness was retrieved from volunteers' accounts, as organisational leaders tended to include, both volunteers as well as parts of the local community into their decision-making (Ryan et al., 2001). Newly identified concepts were role advancement as well as key figure dependence. Role advancement refers to that part of the organisational design, which allowed volunteers to easily assume more responsible roles, if desired. Key figure dependence describes the initiatives' tendency to produce an organisation that is dominated by a few individuals. Noteworthy, these key figures were not formally appointed leaders. During the research process, it appeared that key figure dependence, as a structural property of many initiatives, was rather created or amplified by a series of other organisational factors, such as absence of process rules, task nature, member constraints and (perceived) skill level difference. Accordingly, key figures often ended up in responsible or even influential positions, due to their own commitment and willingness to take on administrative tasks as well as others' aversion to do so. Although with a different focus, the emergence of key figures is a similar finding to those studies that question the representativeness of citizen-induced initiatives (Papadopoulos, 2016; Denters, 2016). The presence of key figures does display the fact that some parts of the population are more capable in making themselves heard in the political arena, as stated by Mayer, Edelenbos and Monnikhof (2005). However, this is not a result of volunteers' resource abundance, such as social connections, knowledge and material resources (Denters, 2016), but, according to the findings of this study, rather stems from their intrinsic motivation and commitment. The totality of the previously mentioned themes and factors were integrated into one single aggregated dimension: organisational design.

Another dimension that was confirmed by this study was (perceived) social climate. The findings affirm the importance of interpersonal factors of social climate, such as team spirit and camaraderie, from which volunteers drew organisational support (Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Kenny & La Voie, 1985). This study additionally uncovered the importance of encouragement by managing staff or coordinators, as their actions played a more outstanding

role in contributing to a positive or negative social climate. Still, the creation of organisational support is found not only to be limited to the interactions with other initiative members, but it further arises from the presence of a number of deliberately arranged support schemes. This includes, funding schemes, insurance or administrative facilitation for volunteers, who want to set-up their own small projects within the scope of the initiative.

A third emergent dimension concerns organisational commitment. One aspect of this dimensions describes the consequences of having the volunteers' goal align with the initiatives' goal under the theme of goal alignment. This study highlights the repercussions that nonalignment has on the organisational and individual level, as well as the potential benefits of harmonious alignment. Furthermore, the nature of the set of tasks offered or carried out in an initiative was also found to play an important role in volunteers' association to a citizen-induced initiative. This necessarily implies that initiatives in other sectors, which offer different sets of tasks, are likely to feature slightly altered internal dynamics.

Next, previous literature displays scepticism concerning the representativeness of citizen-induced initiatives (Papadopoulos, 2016). A range of studies mention a phenomenon, that only a specific clientele of the population is drawn to volunteer in initiatives (Denters, 2016; Verba et al., 1995). However, this topic is rather dealt with on a macro-societal level and is more prominently directed at the potential (un)democratic effects of citizen initiatives (Denters, 2016). Still, there are consequences for the organisational level. In accordance, this study finds sustainability focused initiatives, tend to be rather homogeneous in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and socio-economic background. It is revealed that a lack of demographic diversity impacts the very makeup of initiatives and their internal organisational dynamics.

Last but not least, environmental munificence was identified as an important organisational context dimension, which influenced the internal dynamics of citizen-induced initiatives. Unlike the other dimensions it does not focus exclusively on the organisational domain, but the interaction thereof with its immediate environment. The findings of this study locate sustainability focused initiatives in a highly competitive environment when it comes to attracting volunteers. This mismatch between volunteer supply and demand left initiatives often stagnant with current members feeling compelled to shoulder the full burden of keeping the initiative afloat. Hence, the difficulty of recruiting and retaining volunteers over longer periods of time also contributed to key figure dependence as a structural imbalance of initiatives.

To reiterate, the final emergent dimensions are: organisational design, organisational commitment, diversity and homogeneity, social climate and environmental munificence. From these, organisational design was mentioned most frequently by volunteers and its contents were described in a way that indicates substantial impact on development factors.

Table 5. Comparison of dimensions of organisational context

Dimensions based on literature	Dimensions based on empirical analysis	Fundamental changes and additions
Degree of autonomy Degree of formalisation Degree of specialisation Decision-making style	Organisational design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of previous factors into one unifying dimension • Adds key figure dependence as decisive structural component of citizen initiatives • Includes notions of how volunteers progress within initiatives in terms of their trajectory
Perceived social climate Degree of organisational support	Social climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New dimension that accounts for both, interpersonal components of organisational support as well as structural mechanisms set up by the organisation (funding schemes, insurance, administrative facilitation)
-	Organisational commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New dimension that refers to alignment between organisational and individual goals and the consequences of task nature
-	Diversity and homogeneity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New dimension describing the importance of organisational demographics and human resources
-	Environmental munificence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New dimension looking at the intersection between the organisation and its environment in terms of recruitment difficulties and consequential personnel constraints

A major contribution of this study is the link between organisational context factors and the dimensions of personal development. This study produced a number of organisational factors, which affected personal development. Each organisational factor impacted one or multiple areas of personal development. From these factors, organisational design appeared to be the most influential one. On the developmental axis, skill acquisition and professional capability development as well as psychological development stood out as the most strongly affected dimensions (see Figure 4.). However, the strength and direction of the effect often depended not only on a single factor, but on the accumulated effect of all associated second-order factors. Naturally, it is difficult to fully assess the strength and interaction of all effects

with a qualitative research design. Still, this study contributes a thorough list of relevant organisational and developmental themes to improve the academic and practical understanding of citizen-induced initiatives.

Although this study was primarily concerned with sustainability focused citizen-induced initiatives, it is likely that the findings regarding organisational factors are transferrable to initiatives operating in other sectors. However, this may not apply to all types of initiatives. For instance, all initiatives that were included in the sample shared a similar design profile, with low degrees of formalisation and high levels of organisational autonomy. This is not necessarily the case for government-induced initiatives or other more formal types of associations (e.g. foundations). Such initiatives usually display much steeper hierarchies, top-down control mechanisms and formalised interactions, in comparison to citizen-induced initiatives, which evidently follow a more laissez-faire approach (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016).

Finally, a prevailing notion in the current literature emphasizes the privileged starting conditions of volunteers. Accordingly, volunteers are described to already have command over relevant skills, are deeply integrated into community and professional networks and tend to be highly educated (Verba et al., 1995; Denters, 2016). However, this study does not replicate these previous findings, but to the contrary, observes the opposite. In this case, volunteers were widely characterised to wield little to no skills when joining the initiative. This concerns both, civic and organisational skills, as well as practical skills, which were part of regular initiative activities. Additionally, they only possessed few and weak ties to initiative members or the rest of the local community. In some extreme cases, volunteers depicted the times prior to joining the initiative as lonely, isolated or even alienated. Instead these and other qualities were rather gained over time, by actively participating in the initiative.

5.2 Limitations and directions for future research

One of the major limitations of this study concerns the sample of selected interviewees. In most cases, only highly motivated individuals positively replied to partake in an interview. This was shown in their general attitude towards the initiative, but also in the fact that they majorly occupied leadership positions within their respective organisations. As a result, their interview answers are likely to exhibit some degree of bias. Additionally, informants more or less all shared the same demographical criteria, such as age, gender, socio-economic background and ethnicity. Although this composition relates to the reality on the ground in

citizen initiatives, it questions the external validity of this study's findings. As outcomes of citizen initiatives are not equally distributed among their members, the voices and potentially different experiences of lesser represented demographics might be neglected. This could be partially caused by snowball sampling as an interviewee acquisition method. Therefore, future studies should specifically focus on those members of citizen initiatives that have slipped through the cracks of this study. Researchers should make sure to include a wider variety of demographics, especially along age and ethnical lines, as well as actors holding different organisational positions. Another reason for the relative demographical homogeneity of members could stem from the sampled type of initiatives, which exclusively focus on sustainability issues. It is possible that initiatives with a different cause, attract and comprise other demographical groups or possess other degrees of internal diversity.

Another limitation of this study relates to its data collection method. This study provides only a single snapshot in time, at which informants were queried about their development and organisation. However, interviewees had a long history of participation and thus had to resort to sometimes blurry or unclear memories. This can lead to problems of demarcation. For example, one informant found it difficult to distinguish between her experiences from multiple initiatives, some of which were not citizen induced, and her working life. Hence, a longitudinal study may have been the more appropriate research design. Two benefits of this approach come to mind. First, researchers would have access to very recent data, which is less likely to be influenced by opaque recollections. Second, researchers would be enabled to more accurately reconstruct the developmental path of initiative members over time. For instance, such an approach would allow making statements on when exactly personal development occurs or if at some point saturation is reached, as suggested by Ritchie et al. (2014).

As a third limitation, it should be acknowledged that all informants and their respective initiative operated within the south east region of the UK, particularly London, and their perceptions of personal development and the organisational context could be stimulated by their locality. Urban populations might feature different attitudes towards voluntary engagement and community life, compared to other groups from different localities, (Kousis, 1999). Although London, as a sampling locality, entailed a plurality of sustainability focused initiatives, only a limited group of more established initiatives, found its way into the sample. Hyper-mediated associations, which gather support especially from younger demographics,

should be approached in future studies to obtain a more holistic and representative picture of the citizen-initiative landscape.

Although some degree of interview saturation was reached, further qualitative inquiry has still the chance to unearth unidentified relevant factors. As a consequence, the framework of this study may orientate future research towards further testing and refining concepts and deepening theoretical understanding of the developmental perspective of citizen-induced initiatives. It is encouraged that researchers apply quantitative methods, in order to assess the actual strength of the various effects of organisational context on citizens' personal development, which were uncovered in this study.

Another promising avenue for future research includes the network structure of citizen initiatives. Some informants mentioned the embedding of their organisation in a larger network, often under the umbrella of a larger meta-organisation. Future studies could focus on the effects of being part of such an umbrella group on citizen-induced initiatives.

Finally, citizen-induced initiatives can only lead to personal development, if actual participation occurs. The interviews indicated that there were many cases, where individuals would only participate for a short period of time and leave the organisation soon after. Future research could investigate the organisational and social factors, which lead to their premature departure.

5.3 Practical implications

Theoretical contributions aside, the findings of this study suggest various practical recommendations for those leading or managing a citizen-induced initiative and those interested in founding their own.

One major problem of citizen initiatives was identified in a disadvantageous organisational design. Many initiatives suffered from an absence of process rules. This meant that volunteers were often overwhelmed by the provided levels of autonomy, which led them to avoid certain tasks (especially administrative), thereby foregoing potential skill acquisition. To counteract this unwelcome development, initiative leaders should assume more authority and implement a mandatory rotational principle for administrative and organisational tasks, for instance by alternating the chair of meetings on a weekly basis. On the one hand, this would ensure a more equally distributed attainment of civic skills. Volunteers, who are only familiar with the practical aspects of their initiative (e.g. harvesting or campaigning), would be exposed

to a lesser known side of the organisation. This could further increase their confidence in accomplishing previously intimidating tasks. On the other hand, it will alleviate the burden of those volunteers, who feel obligated to carry out these tasks consistently. By reducing their experienced work overload and lack of support, psychological well-being is likely to increase. Further, by enforcing a rotational principle, it could be possible to lessen the likelihood of producing highly dependable key figures, which was identified as another unfavourable organisational factor.

Next, this study found skill acquisition and professional capability development to be strongly influenced by volunteers' perceived organisational support. Volunteers were more likely to kick start their own small projects within the scope of the initiative or take on more responsibility by engaging in new activities. As a result, leading figures in initiatives should actively strive to become visible mentors, who respect and facilitate volunteers' individual goals. This is in line with research by Gaventa (2004), who looks at leadership in citizen involvement and local governance. Apart from individual behavioural adaptations, initiative leaders should use some part of their funding to provide insurance, financial as well as legal support for entrepreneurial volunteers, who want to create their own projects. In order to further increase this capacity, initiatives should engage in networks with other similar organisations to share knowledge and resources. A similar approach on the local governmental level is brought forward by Hawkins & Wang (2012), who highlight the benefits of networking and networking organisations on knowledge transfer and resource efficiency. The findings showed that some initiatives were integrated into such a group. Asked about the impact of such an arrangement, informants referred to feelings of empowerment, reassurance and being backed by a larger community. Therefore, by teaming up with other initiatives, volunteers' perceived organisational support could be further increased.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of citizen initiative participation on self-development for those involved in sustainability focused initiatives within the UK, and how the initiative's organisational context influenced this. By interviewing 13 volunteers from 10 London-based sustainability related citizen-induced initiatives, it was possible to collect extensive amounts of qualitative data. Data was subsequently analysed by a systematic inductive approach, which led to the emergence of 10 distinct conceptual dimensions.

A first conclusion is that citizen participation indeed influences personal development. This study confirms the findings of previous studies by correctly identifying the acquisition of civic skills, the improvement of psychological well-being as well as strengthening of interpersonal relationships as developmental factors, which were improved by volunteering in a citizen-induced initiative. Still, an array of additional, yet unpredicted factors was detected, which in conjunction with the previous factors, amalgamated to five aggregate dimensions: skill acquisition and professional capability development, relationships and networks, community related role and identity development, psychological development and finally behavioural and lifestyle transformation. In other words, citizen participation was confirmed to be a means to self-development and an enhancement of capabilities.

Second, this study further revealed that personal development depends on an array of five organisational context factors: organisational design, organisational commitment, diversity and homogeneity, social climate and last but not least environmental munificence. Although all context factors influenced personal development to some degree, initiative's organisational design stood out as a determining factor. Likewise, not all dimensions of personal development were similarly affected. Skill acquisition and professional capability development as well as psychological development displayed the strongest interaction with organisational context factors, both positively and negatively.

Finally, a third conclusion recognizes that personal development in initiatives is not uniformly distributed across its members. In order to answer the question of *cui bono*, or 'who benefits?' it is not enough to look at the organisational level alone. Instead, it is necessary to look at the interplay between individual member characteristics, such as motivation, confidence or age with organisational context factors, such as decision-making inclusiveness or organisational goals. This study shows that highly committed individuals are able to benefit

more from citizen participation than others in terms of personal development. However, these individuals are also exposed to higher workloads and psychological stress.

In order to improve the experiences of volunteers as well as the processes and outcomes of citizen-induced initiatives in the long run, more research remains necessary. Future studies should focus on uncovering the interrelations between the various organisational characteristics and respective effects of distinct developmental aspects of participation. Further, in laying out the internal dynamics of citizen-induced initiatives by using the insights and accounts of members themselves, initiative co-ordinators as well as volunteers are presented with the rotational principle as a profound starting point for organisational reform.

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Appendix A

Interview guidelines for participating citizens

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time and effort to participate in this study. Before we start, I would like to give you a short summary of this research project. I am conducting interviews in order to get an insight into personal skills that can be gained when citizens volunteer their time towards community projects. I would like to know why you chose to volunteer here, and when you look back at your time here, what you have gained personally, and finally I would like to know how your organisation fitted in with this ‘personal growth’.

General questions about personal background

1. How old are you?
2. What are the goals of the initiative you are working for?
3. How long have you been working at this initiative?
4. How long has this initiative been around?
5. Does your initiative have a formal structure? Such as a board?
6. How many members are involved in this initiative?
7. What is your current position in the initiative?
8. What are your key responsibilities and duties within the initiative?
9. Do you have any prior experience in community initiatives?

Questions relating to a sense of personal development

10. Why did you choose to volunteer your time for a community cause?
11. Why do you think others chose to volunteer their time for a community cause?
12. Looking back at your time here, how do you think your participation has affected you on a personal level?
 - a. Do you think this would have been the case had you not participated?
13. How do you think your participation has impacted your understanding of the issues being addressed by your initiative
14. Has your opinion changed regarding what your personal role is in solving these issues? If so how?
 - a. Do you think you would have achieved this had you not participated?
15. What about your knowledge regarding how your community operates and functions on a daily basis and its role in tackling these issues, do you think this has been affected since joining?
16. Regarding your main duties in the project, what skills have you developed?
 - a. Have your duties in the initiative developed or changed over time?
 - b. Do you think you would have developed these had you not participated?
17. How has your time here impacted your relation to others that live and volunteer in the community?

18. How are your relations to other members/community projects that focus on issues apart from agriculture, has this been affected since joining?
19. Has your opinion changed regarding what your personal role is within the community you live in? If so how?

Questions relating to the influence of organisational context on personal development

20. Why did you choose to become part of this project specifically?
21. Why do you think your colleagues chose to be part of this project specifically?
22. What was the process like to become a volunteer here? Was it difficult/easy?
23. Did this impact your decision to ultimately join?
24. How would you describe the daily operations of your work? Do you work with specific guidelines or do you have more freedom towards your tasks?
25. How do you feel about this way of working? Does it result in better project success and personal success or not?
26. How are key decisions decided upon in this organisation?
27. Are you involved in this process?
28. How does that make you feel?
29. How would you describe the relation you have towards your colleagues?
30. Does your organisation purposefully create events for you to interact with each other?
31. How does that make you feel?
32. How would you describe the social atmosphere in this organisation?
33. Do you feel as though you are supported in this organisation?
34. How does that make you feel?