

International Conference on Population Geographies – Groningen 25 – 28 June 2013

Abstract for the session on Population Decline

Organizational capacity in local community of interest organizations

Rural areas in the North of the Netherlands face a prognosis of 5 – 10% population decline in 20 years time and a 10 – 20% increase of the elderly. In response to this demographic change local governments develop policy in the field of livability in order to preserve the quality of living in local communities. At the same time local governments undergo cut backs in their budgets and prioritize their expenses. Therefore citizen participation is often mentioned as a means of structuring the relationship between local government and citizens aiming for livable communities and neighbourhoods. Coproduction is the key word for shared responsibilities of local government, civic institutions and citizens, which presupposes that (groups of) citizens are in possession of organizational capacity. Organizational capacity can be defined here as the competency of organized citizens to realize goals of public interest.

In almost every rural community in the North of the Netherlands local organizations are active as advocate of community interests and at the same time as practical organizers of the yearly traditional community activities. These local community of interest organizations (CIO) see themselves as key players in matters of local livability and on behalf of that are acknowledged as partners in close consultation on public matters with local government. These CIO's can be seen as central in the community's organizational capacity. It may be expected in the context of citizen participation that the appeal to the boards of the CIO's to contribute in matters of livability in local communities will grow.

My research is about the organizational capacity of CIO boards in a context of societal changes and of more citizen participation. This paper means to elaborate on the organizational capacity of CIO's in terms of skills, motivation, resources and collaboration and secondly in what way the organizational capacity CIO's transforms as the changing situations ask for more leadership, teamwork and collectiveness – how do these CIO's adapt to their partly self-set tasks? By comparing CIO's in different communities it may be possible to distinguish components of organizational capacity as critical success factor in enhancing livability in communities.

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