University of Groningen

All together now!

Hasanov, Mustafa

DOI:
[10.33612/diss.182832702](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.182832702)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2021

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Hasanov, M. (2021). *All together now! community initiatives engaging in sustainability transformations in the Netherlands*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen.
<https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.182832702>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Mustafa Hasanov

All together now!

**Community initiatives engaging in
sustainability transformations
in the Netherlands**

Mustafa Hasanov

All together now! Community initiatives engaging in sustainability transformations in the Netherlands

252 pages

© Mustafa Hasanov

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system of any nature, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying or recording, without written permission.

Printed by: ProefschriftMaken | www.proefschriftmaken.nl

Layout by: Mustafa Hasanov

Cover design by: Mustafa Hasanov and Gert Jan Roskammer

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.182832702>

university of
 groningen

All together now!

Community initiatives engaging in sustainability
transformations in the Netherlands

PhD thesis

to obtain the degree of PhD at the
University of Groningen
on the authority of the
Rector Magnificus Prof. C. Wijmenga
and in accordance with
the decision by the College of Deans.

This thesis will be defended in public on

Thursday 18 November 2021 at 11.00 hours

by

Mustafa Hasanov

born on 26 May 1987

in

Omurtag, Bulgaria

Supervisors

Prof. L. G. Horlings

Prof. C. Zuidema

Assessment Committee

Prof. G. de Roo

Prof. A. Davies

Prof. T. de Moor

Contents

SUMMARY	11
----------------	-----------

INTRODUCTION	19
---------------------	-----------

21	BACKGROUND
24	RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS
28	KEY ISSUES IN THIS RESEARCH
30	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
36	DESIGN AND METHODS
40	OUTLINE

CHAPTER 2	43
------------------	-----------

THE VALUE OF COLLECTIVE INTENTIONALITY FOR UNDERSTANDING URBAN SELF-ORGANIZATION

45	INTRODUCTION
47	METHOD AND APPROACH
48	BACKGROUND
57	FINDINGS
64	CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 3	71
------------------	-----------

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF SELF-ORGANIZATION: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING LOCAL ENERGY INITIATIVES IN THE NETHERLANDS

73	INTRODUCTION
75	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
80	RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODS
82	RESULTS
90	DISCUSSION

93 CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 4 **97**

LOCAL COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR SUSTAINABILITY TRANSFORMATIONS. EMERGING NARRATIVES FROM COMMUNITY-LINKED ENERGY INITIATIVES IN THE NETHERLANDS

99 INTRODUCTION

101 BACKGROUND

105 MATERIALS AND METHODS

106 Q METHODOLOGY

111 RESULTS

117 DISCUSSION

120 CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 5 **135**

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY SELF-ORGANIZATION IN THE CREATION AND CREATIVE DISSOLUTION OF A COMMUNITY FOOD INITIATIVE

137 INTRODUCTION

139 SELF-ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNITY FOOD INITIATIVES

143 METHODS AND DATA: EXPLORING COMMUNITY SELF-ORGANIZATION

147 THE FREE CAFÉ: SUSTAIN, FLIP OR LET GO

156 DISCUSSION

161 CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS **165**

167 COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND THE BIGGER PICTURE

173 KEY FINDINGS

183 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

195 REFLECTIONS

REFERENCES	201
-------------------	------------

APPENDICES	231
-------------------	------------

233	APPENDIX A: LIST OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
235	APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE PER CHAPTER
239	APPENDIX C: Q-SORT QUESTIONNAIRE AND INSTRUCTIONS
246	APPENDIX D: INFORMATION SHEET FOR (DOCTORAL) RESEARCH PROJECT
248	APPENDIX E: AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE
250	ABOUT THE AUTHOR
251	THE RESEARCH IN BRIEF

List of Figures and Tables

FIGURE 2.1 THE POSITION OF URBAN SELF-ORGANIZATION IN THE INTERFACE BETWEEN EXPERT PLANNING AND CITIZEN-LED PLANNING INTERVENTIONS	51
TABLE 2.1. SUMMARY OF THE CASE STUDIES IN THIS ARTICLE	58
TABLE 3.1. QUOTES FROM INTERVIEWS, ILLUSTRATING A TYPICAL RESPONSE	84
TABLE 3.2. LIST OF INTERVIEWS INCLUDED IN THIS ARTICLE	95
TABLE 4.1. THE Q GRID USED IN THIS ARTICLE	107
TABLE 4.2. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH	123
TABLE 4.3. FACTOR MATRIX	124
TABLE 4.4. LIST OF STATEMENT AND BY-FACTOR RANKING OF ALL STATEMENTS.	125
TABLE 4.5. DISTINGUISHING STATEMENTS FOR FACTOR 1: LOCALISM	130
TABLE 4.6. DISTINGUISHING STATEMENTS FOR FACTOR 2: FACILITATION	131
TABLE 4.7. DISTINGUISHING STATEMENTS FOR FACTOR 3: ORCHESTRATION	132
TABLE 4.8. DISTINGUISHING STATEMENTS FOR FACTOR 4: TRANSFORMATION	133

S

U

M

M

A

R

Y

In West and North Europe, local communities are increasingly taking matters into their own hands and working together to engage with contemporary sustainability-related issues such as energy transition, food waste, and climate change. Often, research on community initiatives discusses them in light of local outcomes in the form of change and impact. However, community initiatives can also contribute to changing the way we live. They enable meeting spaces for and by residents, where people with diverse backgrounds can share experience and expertise.

This research shows that community initiatives reflect local social, economic, and political capital and can transcend their boundaries (Dentoni et al., 2020). They instigate shifts in the way people think, work and collaborate; alternative approaches to reshape our value chains; and provide demand-driven interventions embedded in a local context and driven by hopes of global impact. Their impact is not merely those local outcomes they deliver. Community initiatives focus on social value creation, interact with the institutions and organizations surrounding them, and influence policy-makers and policies.

Community initiatives can play a vital role in engaging civil society in sustainability transitions. Drawing on the experiences and outcomes of several community initiatives in the Netherlands, most of them situated in the northeast of the country, this research discusses how initiatives engage in and with sustainability transformations. Sustainability transformations in the context of this research are understood as long-term societal changes needed to keep the anthropogenic influence on the environment within planetary ecological boundaries. Looking from the perspective of initiatives themselves, this research suggests that community initiatives considered in this research work towards creating practical solutions in the context of sustainability. These solutions explored in this research are community gardens, local energy initiatives, and community food sharing initiatives. Taken together, the findings of this research suggest that community initiatives make sustainability transformations relatable and tangible to society.

This research uses the lenses of self-organization and collective intention-

ality to understand how community initiatives, formally and informally, formulate their goals, decision making and create everyday governance mechanisms and what that means for the institutional world around them. While community initiatives may not operate fully according to a fully conscious plan and are subject to self-organizational and emergent processes, individuals can be reflexive regarding their norms, values, and beliefs, leading to a collective process of shared wayfinding. It thus can be argued that collective intentionality helps us understand how such wayfinding happens. Furthermore, it can also reveal how to find their way and remain close to their core norms and values. It is what makes them possible, and it sheds light on understanding how they keep focused on what lies ahead of them and what makes initiatives possible.

This research aims to understand how society, in general, can better interact with community initiatives. If we suppose community initiatives could relate to sustainability transformations, I would argue that they also have something to say about civil society's role in transforming governments and businesses. Therefore, the effort to understand community initiatives is also an effort to interpret municipal, state, and national governments' relationships to them. To provide insights to researchers, policy-makers, and funders, we need to pull back the curtain and see what is going on behind the scenes of community initiatives. Behind the scenes refers to going beyond their outputs, such as what they deliver in the form of kilowatts, waste prevented, or members engaged and tapping into the diverse ways community initiatives work towards better futures. Hence, ***How do community initiatives engage in sustainability transformations from the inside out?*** is the central question of this research.

Answering the central research question required the use of four research questions which guided four original research articles.

- ***Why and how does self-organization matter for understanding participatory planning processes? (Chapter 2)***

The starting point in this chapter is the academic debate on public participation in planning, where self-organization stands out as an innovative approach addressing bottom-up community involvement (Boonstra, 2015;

Rauws, 2015). To do so, I discuss three different initiatives: a community garden, a shelter for the homeless and other vulnerable people, and a neighborhood activist group. Next, the chapter explores how collective intentionality and self-organization are intertwined in community initiatives and why community initiatives matter. The findings point that more attention should be given to the interplay between community organizing processes, socio-spatial proximity, and, most intriguingly, collective intentionality. On a theoretical level, this chapter illustrates how community initiatives reflect social performances; that is, how the individual actions pursued in and by community initiatives manifest themselves in social reality and, through the effects of self-organization, might instigate social change. Finally, this chapter suggests that community initiatives manifest collective intentionality and are open to dynamics and diversity; they thrive on, influence, and become part of their environment.

- ***What is the transformative potential of self-organization in the context of community initiatives? (Chapter 3)***

This question took inspiration from the argument that self-organization is a helpful vehicle for understanding the institutional interplay between local initiatives and local governance structures. Drawing on qualitative research on local energy initiatives located in the northeast of the Netherlands, the chapter looked at socio-cultural components of community initiatives and how these shape and are shaped by self-organization. The chapter suggests that self-organization accommodates and is influenced by community initiatives and the institutional environment surrounding those initiatives. Finally, the chapter explores how initiatives trigger institutional change by analyzing the interaction of community initiatives and their institutional environment. It argues that the potential of self-organization within community initiatives emanates from the fact that it sparks, facilitates, and maintains social and institutional practices in both initiatives and their environment. On a practical level, apprehending those practices will help us better understand the relationships between community initiatives and local governments.

- ***What kind of perceptions do people engaged in community initiatives have of local collective action, and what kind of sustainable transformations do they aspire to by engaging in community-linked energy initiatives? (Chapter 4)***

The chapter uses the concept of local collective action as an analytical lens to examine the ways people engaged in community-linked energy initiatives think it might be possible to reach sustainability transformations. The chapter implies that understanding local collective action requires embracing the diversity of actions and ideas and the way combinations of those in community initiatives could unlock community-linked sustainability transformations. In doing so, the chapter discusses local collective action as a dynamic manifestation of what community initiatives do at any given time. It argues that local collective action, and the sustainability pathways it aims to contribute to, are interpreted differently by those who engage in these initiatives. The results reflect some specific thoughts and ideas that feed into the ways people engage in community initiatives and see their initiatives in relation to an aspired pathway for sustainable transformations. The findings also emphasize that local collective action means navigating among different assumptions, values, and transformation processes for those engaged in community initiatives

- ***How do community initiatives generate and fuel community self-organization processes, contributing to broader transformational shifts? (Chapter 5)***

The rationale behind posing this question is to explore the various developments paths within a community food initiative – The Free Café. The quest here is to determine how differences within community initiatives generate different self-organizing paths. First, the chapter looks at how self-organization manifests in the actual day-to-day realities of making food systems more sustainable. Second, the chapter draws on a participatory research method by following a community initiative's day-to-day practices and actions to determine how exactly it self-organizes. The chapter argues that community self-organization brings together people with various motivations and experiences, which result in collective ac-

tion. Furthermore, it shows that societal transformation can be enacted in different stories found within citizens' initiatives. In doing that, the chapter also illustrates how the dynamic interplay between intentions, perspectives, and actions of individuals results in various expressions of transformative change.

- ***How do community initiatives engage in sustainability transformations from the inside out?***

Community initiatives engage in sustainability transformations from the inside out by planting change in society and institutions. They transform ways of thinking about sustainability for both participants and those interacting with them while also instigating new feelings and actions regarding the pursuit of sustainability. Hence, community initiatives contextualize and intellectualize what sustainability transformations could mean pragmatically, as they, for example, produce their energy, reconnect with nature, or prevent food waste. At the same time, the processes within community initiatives show how those engaged in initiatives often navigate a sea of opinions and meanings associated with the initiative, its possible role in pursuing sustainability, how it came to be what it is, and how to proceed in the future. This juxtaposition illustrates that in an era of global misalignment and disagreements on climate change and sustainability issues, community initiatives are vehicles where visions about these issues are expressed or manifested, showing examples of what could be. In doing so, community initiatives do not need to be expressions of a singular imagined reality. Instead, they engage in sustainability transformations from the inside out by showing how diverse people can engage differently in a joint action with varied aspirations.

This research shows that 21st-century community initiatives aiming to cope with sustainability transformations do not necessarily respond to a need for coordinative capacity. For one thing, some of the cases included in this research show community initiatives concerned with fixing a specific problem. These seem to be somewhat reactive, responding to pre-existing situations while also pursuing an energy transition. Nevertheless, they do so by being pragmatic and possibly impermanent.

Secondly, participants might be primarily ideologically motivated, i.e., proactive and prosocial, aiming to foster planetary care and change the food system. To suggest that community initiatives in the past have not engaged with similar short-lived pragmatism and deep ideological and self-directed pursuits would be a gross oversimplification. By all means, some certainly have. However, these initiatives show two almost opposing starting points driving the initiatives studied in this research. That is also the main point I hope to convey here. If we are to understand better what is novel and relevant about our 21st-century initiatives aiming to achieve sustainability transformations: they are highly diverse, even within the small sample of those I studied. Hence, my challenge to the cult of community initiatives is to refute a singular perspective on community initiatives and see the richness of who they are and what they do and the very different values, critiques, and future aspirations they express.

This research has shown that community initiatives could balance ambiguity, structure, and agency. The art of balancing is always there, but it also takes initiatives into unexplored and new territories. Learning how not to repeat themselves requires a mindset of thinking and acting that can construct new insights and innovate and create ideas and practices that no one might be expecting beforehand.