



VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Exchange Visit to Benterlo, Twente (NL)

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General feedback report

Colofon/Project coordination

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Website of the project (this document is published on this website)
www.villagedevelopment.eu

Content

1. Composition of the VDP-feedback team.....	3
2. Key-questions of the Dutch partner	5
3. Feedback of the VDP-feedback team on the questions posed by the people from Twente.	7
A. General observations	7
B. Answers to the key questions: working with volunteers	8
C. Answers on the key questions: scaling-up	12

1. Composition of the VDP-feedback team

Dutch Host

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Antje Grolleman
Henk Nikkels
Ellen te Riele

Feedbackteam

Denmark

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2. Key-questions of the Dutch partner

Twente listed 9 questions on which they wanted feedback on.

These questions are:

Volunteers

1. How to maintain the quality of the activities / projects when working with volunteers?
2. How to deal with formal responsibilities?
3. How to keep volunteers involved and active? (question of project management, government)
4. How do you generate a collaboration between tourist entrepreneurs and volunteers?
5. How to capitalize on the efforts, knowledge and skills of volunteers

Relation volunteers – local government

6. What can be the role of local people in decision making / generating / performing social services (such as sports facilities, library, transportation etc)? (Question of government, project management)
7. What is a good workable structure (regarding decision making, consultative processes) between villages and government, and between villagers themselves?

Scaling-up

8. How to scale –up How to link with the wider regional issues/ agenda's? Which instruments should be used? Which organizational structure is appropriate? Which financial structure?
9. Can a village development plan be used as an integrating concept, linking a variety of activities? And how can we use it as a communicating tool wit local government?

3. Feedback of the VDP-feedback team on the questions posed by the people from Twente.

A. General observations

During the visit we received three powerpoint presentations during the visits:

1. presentation monday afternoon, by Antje Grolleman, Henk Nickels and Wouter Roozedaal, on the development of the Better Baentel project.
2. presentation tuesday morning by Frans Nije Bijvank of municipality Hof van Twente, on the way local municipality is engaged in local development
3. presentation by Ellen te Riele (villager of Bentelo), on the problematic issues that are relevant at this moment.

These presentations can be downloaded on the website.

The first presentation led to a discussion, the results of which were incorporated in the discussions of Tuesday. The presentations 2 and 3 generated a very interesting tension between the 'noble ambitions of local government' and the reality faced by the people in the village of Bentelo. The ambitions of local government presented by Frans Nije Bijvank include a desire for 'another' type of government (*Andere Overheid* in Dutch), with a major role for active citizen participation. This demands new role definitions for both government and village, giving more responsibility to villagers. This is quite a wrestling game for government; it is not only a matter of reorganizing governmental structures and procedures, it is also about delivering results with which to regain the trust of citizens. Main policy effort to create a new link between village and local government concern the creation of a so-called 'area-committee', that is asked to come up with plans for an area comprising both the village of Bentelo and its neighbour Hengevelde. (see for details ppt presentation) Ellen te Riele, from the village of Bentelo, nicely phrased the currently 'aching' issues as follows (see for details ppt presentation):

- Local and provincial government take too much time for own processes
- Lack of knowledge of processes and roles
- No imaging into other people's worlds and vision
- It is difficult to translate tangible ideas into abstract goals
- Trust is lacking: why are the two village 'condemned' to eachother? Why did government define a spatial unit instead of social one?)
- Rivalry between village of Bentelo and Hengevelde

The topics have been dealt with in several sessions, notably Monday afternoon and Tuesday. The findings by the visitors are listed below, under the heading of *Working with volunteers* (addressing questions 1 to 6) and *Scaling-up* (addressing questions 7 to 9).

B. Answers to the key questions: working with volunteers

Host partner questions

1. How to maintain the quality of the activities / projects when working with volunteers?
2. How to deal with formal responsibilities?
3. How to keep volunteers involved and active? (question of project management, government)
4. How do you generate a collaboration between tourist entrepreneurs and volunteers?
5. How to capitalize on the efforts, knowledge and skills of volunteers
6. What can be the role of local people in decision making / generating / performing social services (such as sports facilities, library, transportation etc)? (Question of government, project management)

To start with: what is important for a volunteer?

We understand that the Better Baentel project is a project that builds on the efforts of several entrepreneurs, who have been able to motivate other village dwellers to cooperate voluntarily, through the involvement of a professional project management bureau. So our feedback about volunteers should be read with this in mind.

Before getting to the questions of the Twente people, first a few general remarks on volunteers. Most of the time volunteers want to contribute something to their area or village. And they can contribute a lot, to different kind of projects and activities. They know the area/village as their own pocket and feel both concern and responsibility to do some work for the common sense of the village. They offer their work with pleasure, for free. But they need to see that their work is being appreciated. Hence, their contribution depends on a few conditions. As a feedback team, we enlisted a few points that are important to volunteers.

Motivation

In order to do a good 'job', volunteers have to like it, and need to feel appreciated for doing it. So, make sure they feel they are worth it! Make them feel proud and valuable for the project. And give them feedback: what went well and what went wrong. Important: *don't whip the volunteers, but provide carrots*. The more appreciation volunteers receive, the more active they will become in the project. Motivation is the cornerstone of voluntary work. Motivation is fed by rewards, responsibility, a clear timeframe and a good match with their skills and preferences.

Reward

Give them for example "vacation" money (for assisting a formal meeting e.g.) or small, repeated rewards. This shouldn't be necessarily money, preferably not even so, but for instance a free party night. Or a barbeque. Or a small personal gift. And express your appreciation also in media communications. By a small interview etc.

Responsibility (limited)

Each volunteer wants to have some responsibility, it stirs his or her motivation. It depends on the person what kind of responsibility (s)he want to have and how big this responsibility can be. Some volunteers can be entitled with formulating the visionary plans for the area. Or with a mandate for taking decisions. Or are willing to represent a group in a formal committee. But others have enough with providing chairs for a meeting. Be aware: don't load them too much, take notice it still is voluntary work, they do the job because they like it.

Whatever responsibility is given to a volunteer, make sure that (s)he is informed about:

- For which activity/project am I responsible?
- What is expected from me? What should be done?
- Which rules do I have to deal with?
- What are the time limits?
- What are the resources I can work with?
- How is my work linked to that of others?

When these responsibilities are well defined, you can count on them.

Limited timeframe

Volunteers aren't available for ever. Make sure to create small and attractive projects with a value that appeals to the volunteers. So that sign up for a new period as a volunteer. Or are able to switch to do something else.

Ability/ Skills

Split up the project in tangible projects/activities and make sure to create a match between the preference and skills of the volunteers, and the needs of the project. Simply discuss with the volunteers what kind of activities/projects they like and what they want to do. In this way, volunteers can stick to it and be proud of their own results/achievements. If you can make a match between the hobby of a volunteer and what a project needs, then you have a fine and sustainable combination. Other suggestion: keep a list available with small tasks that can be done for the benefit for the project.

Answers to the questions of Better Baentel

Question 1: How to maintain the quality of the activities / projects when working with volunteers?

Answer:

This implies that a project manager, an entrepreneur or a local authority one should be well informed about the possibilities and impossibilities of the volunteers, regarding skills, preferences, ambitions and availability. Maintaining their motivation is crucial to create sustained project quality. Important is:

- to define milestones that are measurable and that everyone agrees to.
- to keep communication on a personal level: no abstract letters or news through the media.
- To be always open for other or new volunteers (and employees of municipalities) that might be able to take over from a volunteer when (s)he done. Then you can keep on moving.
- To start a project with small activities that benefit the whole community
- Provide training for volunteers when needed
- Get volunteers on board with an inspiring and wide vision, who may be able to convince other volunteers to contribute.

Question 2: How to deal with formal responsibilities?

Answer:

Make sure that during the whole project there is a clear communication about the ambitions, limits and rules of the project, and that people know who is doing what, when and how.

As regards representation of volunteers: in the case of Better Baentel, several themes were formulated. Let the members (volunteers) of each thematic group choose among themselves a representative that can communicate with the local authorities.

Question 3: How to keep volunteers involved and active?

Answer:

For the first part of the answer: see the answer to question 1. Additional points are:

- Provide constructive feedback to the work of volunteers (no whipping!)
- Give volunteers decision making power: their judgement counts!
- Don't ask volunteers to work for something, when there is nothing going on. Volunteers work with more interest when they see that their works had added value to solving a problem, or creating a possibility.

An interesting instrument for local government to express appreciation for the work of volunteers is by creating a village fund. A percentage of the local tax could be used to fill this fund; the villagers themselves decide who to spend the money.

Another suggestion is to celebrate each year a meeting from municipality with associations of volunteers of each village where wishes and ideas are brought together.

Provide good volunteer structures (like what...?????).

Question 4: How do you generate a collaboration between entrepreneurs and volunteers?

Answer:

Find the common goal for working together, a goal shared by both entrepreneurs and volunteers. Make sure that the urgency to take action is clear ('why do you need me?'). Both parties have to have a benefit for working together. Start linking volunteers to those tourist entrepreneurs who are enthusiastic, start small. Success will convince others (both entrepreneurs and volunteers).

Make sure that the entrepreneur provides a kind of benefit to the volunteer (e.g. if a volunteer assist in developing a biking route, he might be given a free bike repair by the biker shop. Or the volunteer who contributes to a local museum, can be given free admission for his family).

Question 5: How to capitalize on the efforts, knowledge and skills of volunteers?

Answer:

Have available a series of tangible tasks that can be done by a volunteer.

Make these tasks known: through a local website, a notice at the local shop etc

When a volunteer stops his or her voluntary 'job', make sure he passes on his/her knowledge to the next volunteer. Make sure that this 'debriefing' is a nice event; e.g. by providing a dinner. This is a kind of reward a volunteer needs.

Question 6: What can be the role of local people in decision making / generating / performing social services (such as sports facilities, library, transportation etc)? (Question of government, project management)

Answer:

In general, volunteers give a push to the quality of the activities because they bring in relevant information. They do know the village and its background and what is going on. Appreciation of this quality by professionals who work in the area is crucial. Yet the role of volunteers can hence vary from very ambitious to very small.

A lot depends on the process framework that local authorities and volunteers agree on. Is that clear enough? Is it concrete enough? Is there a match between tasks, skills and ambitions? If volunteers are to be involved in decision making or performing social services, a joint development of the plan and the activities is crucial.

C. Answers on the key questions: scaling-up

Host-partner questions:

7. What is a good workable structure (regarding decision making, consultative processes) between villages and government, and between villagers themselves?
8. How to scale –up. How to link with the wider regional issues/ agenda's? Which instruments should be used? Which organizational structure is appropriate? Which financial structure?
9. Can a village development plan be used as an integrating concept, linking a variety of activities? And how can we use it as a communicating tool with local government?

Analysis of the situation

Before answering the questions of Better Baentel, we will describe how we interpret the situation. As we see it, there is a strong willingness on part of both local government and villagers to collaborate. Cooperation structures are potentially available, like the 'area commission' that is being installed these months, and this is really good, unfortunately these kind of structures are not always present. There is even a budget available to pay an area coordinator to coordinate, and a budget was set aside for potential projects coming out of the work of the area commission. So in this sense prospects are really positive, and it is good to keep this in mind, even though you might encounter difficulties while developing your work, and giving *colour* and *meaning* to the structure.

The difficulties as we perceive them as the feedback team are as follows. The great interest in the development of your area brings also with it that there is an enormous amount of actors 'on the playground', with different expectations. Throughout the discussions, we perceived unclear role definitions, and unclear responsibilities of the actors involved, while at the same time these actors were not always aware of each others existence, roles and ambitions.

What is e.g. exactly the task of the area coordinator? What are his responsibilities? And who is the owner of the initiative for an area commission? What is the link of the local village council with the proposed Development Foundation for Bentelo?

This rather confused situation may be in part explained by the pressure of new legislation from central and provincial government ('reconstruction'-policy, 'area commission'). It seems that things have to be developed over night, in which a rushed timescale overrides the fit with the local agenda. The local agenda is further tensioned by the rivalry between the two villages of Bentelo and Hengevelde. This rivalry seems to be rooted in history, and is furthermore complicated by a different project dynamic in the two villages. Hengevelde is the bigger of the two, yet Bentelo was able to secure a big project (Better Baentel); Hengevelde is hence interested in defining projects quickly so as to secure the money that is said to be waiting; Bentelo would rather focus on a reflection on what is really needed, before defining projects that may not fit in a wider vision.

Our recommendations

Given this situation – or at least our interpretation of it –we have a series of suggestions and answers to your questions. We first tackle the questions on scaling-up (8) and a good workable structure (no. 7). We embrace, in our view, the other questions, so we will start with that one.

Question 8: how to scale up?

Question 7: What is a good workable structure

Answer.

You can't scale-up before you have solved a few issues! One of them is creating a good workable structure, which in its turn demands clear definition of roles, responsibilities and expectations. See suggestions below

Suggestions for the village of Bentelo:

- Be proactive as a village, and seize the initiative! Don't wait and half heartedly adapt to proposals from local and regional government, but develop your selves a proposal for developing an area vision/community/action plan. Propose this to the government.
- This proposal includes first a proposal for the process ('this is how we would like to go forward – build our vision and link it to Hengevelde's vision').
- Secondly, Bentelo should develop this vision, not in detail, but in general. This is important, because it will force you to reflect on what is really important to you. The same holds of course for Hengevelde.

Suggestions for local government

- Appreciate the different dynamics in both villages, don't overrule them.
- Create conditions (providing time, seed money, experts) in which both villages can develop their own vision on how to work together and build a joint vision.
- Compare both plans, identify shared dreams and other commonalities, and facilitate the coming together of both dynamics
- Look for a really independent area coordinator/chairman of area committee (not living in Benterlo nor Hengevelde)
- In an area committee (and hence the area development vision) all proposals/themes should be possible; the fit with funding comes later. Area development should be *needs led, not funding led*.
- However, you can demand a prioritization by the villagers, as to which projects they would like to see happen and in what order of priority.
- Based on village prioritization then develop integrated village plans with detailed proposals, funding lines, expertise. This means creating an open work structure that can incorporate any aspect of village development whether that is spatial, social or economic in focus.

Challenges for overcoming the rivalry between the two villages

- Please close the book of 'rivalry'. Of course things have happened in the past, and they should be paid attention to, but in the 21st century we all have the responsibility to look beyond our immediate surroundings. So try to **create a wider sense of belonging**.
- A practical ways to create this wide sense of belonging is e.g.:
 - Identify small projects that benefit both places. So start to look for (small) common projects (e.g. library?). **Trust grows when you start doing things together**. Giving priority to these kind of projects may turn out to be a very efficient spending of local government money.

Challenges for building the village development plan (for both Bentelo and Hengevelde)

- As regards Bentelo, we felt that the current efforts to strengthen the local economy through entrepreneurial and touristic activities were good, but that integration with other aspects of village life was missing. Please link economics to the social challenges in the village, as well as to the environment (landscape).

This makes your plan 1) more integrated; 2) appealing to much more people in the village, avoiding bad talk and jealousy – and possibly attracting more volunteers to contribute to it; 3) challenging for local and regional government, as resources possibly can be combined and put to greater synergy;

- As regards Hengevelde: we have not been able to speak to people from Hengevelde. Based on what we heard, it seems to be wise to facilitate Hengevelde with an external village development expert, to help the village to check and where needed increase the consistency of the plan.
- Don't be constrained by financial options that are offered to you. First develop your view, than look for a match with funding.
- At the same time: prioritize your action plan, and be pragmatic. In order to generate quick success, it is strategically important that you initially work on projects that governments / institutions have funding for. This doesn't mean that you give up your ambitions, but simply that you make the boat move. Then, other issues that are important to you but that can not be financed right away, can be negotiated for along the way.
- **Before scaling up, scale out.** This means that while making an integrated area development plan, go beyond the 'usual suspects', and make your activities interesting for others in the village. Simply ask people! Create a website for internal village use. By making it more integral, it becomes also more interesting for other government departments.
- Call on provincial/municipal expertise when needed as required by the area (including funding expertise). As Churchill said: **Experts on tap, not on top.**
- Translate your plan to a map. Many issues of village life have a spatial dimension. Make use of this fact by mapping these issues (may ask a landscape architect or a planner to help you with this). It is a great way to integrate your vision in a simple piece of paper, and government people love it.

General conclusion and other suggestions for scaling up

- Create an open work structure. Both villages and government should come with integrated proposals (village plan), funding opportunities (budget lines), expertise.
- An interesting instrument that generates an almost silent, yet joyful scaling-up, is inviting neighbouring villages and municipalities to do a peer review of other villages. This means that villagers of e.g. Diepenheim are asked to join a meeting of the Bentelo people (or visit a specific project), and vice versa, providing fresh views.

Question 9. Can a village development plan be used as an integrating concept, linking a variety of activities? And how can we use it as a communicating tool with local government?

Answer:

Yes you can. Depends on how you define your plan. It seems that you have a series of individual, mainly entrepreneurial projects, all worthwhile in itself, that are linked by a touristic route. So that is giving a first integration. But we also observe that the mainly economic focus is not linked as of yet (or at least not very explicitly) to social and environmental issues. So it seems that you need to develop a more comprehensive vision for the development of your village. That will make you a more interesting partner for local government. See also the observation on: **before scaling-up, scale out.**

In order to have it work as a communicating tool with local government, you will need to establish something that fits in governmental procedures and is attractive reading for government officials, including a prioritisation of your goals. Usually, spatial maps work quite well, even social issues can be linked to spatial ones and plotted on a map. Check if you have a landscape architect in your village who can do this for you.