

SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT FOR CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

**In general:
sustainizability¹ model, network
analysis and applications**



FIRST A BIT OF THEORY

Background, identity, and orientation

[click on the map to enlarge](#)

Until the fifties the Kempen region (the southern part of the province of North Brabant and the northern part of the Flemish provinces of Antwerp and Limburg) was a relatively poor region with a history and regional identity of mainly hardworking small farmers, who managed to survive more or less. Of course they had to be self-reliant, but the awareness of the great importance of support from and to the people in the area certainly had a major impact on social relations and the way in which ideas were created and developed. This cultural orientation certainly contributed to the emergence of all kinds of cooperatives. A key example of this was the arise of the cooperative Boerenleenbanken (Raiffeisenbank), and more recently the impressive industrial development (Brainport) in which cooperation proved to be the success factor.



This tradition and cultural orientation of “together we can” is still perceptible in the regional folk nature.

Citizens' initiatives

These elements provide a fertile breeding ground for all kinds of (cooperative) citizen initiatives.

In designing and developing these ideas, the initiators regularly discover(ed) that they were stuck in a partitioned organizational structure of governments, and of private service providers as well. This phenomenon was aggravated by all sorts of inconsistencies in legislation and regulations between and sometimes even within the bodies to be dealt with. This compartmentalization is still topical.

Former King's Commissioner Prof. Wim van de Donk:

“The government is like a French fries cutter that cuts initiatives to...”

The end result is often that initiators do not find an integral solution and/or acceptance for their plans due to this compartmentalization and that the opportunities of initiatives are insufficiently exploited and actually discouraged.



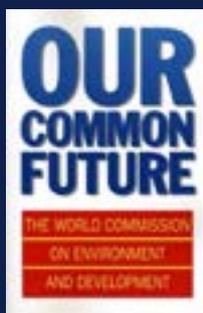
P people

P profit

P planet

TRIPLE P

Important in the development is the influence of the Brundtland report "Our common future, 1987" which makes it clear that a sustainable development process requires sufficient harmony between the three P's: People, Planet, and Profit. These ideas certainly give direction to the commitment of the development advisors.



The importance of citizens' initiatives is becoming increasingly clear and increasingly recognized by several governments; especially to face the alienation of the individual citizen from anonymizing authorities and other institutions. It remains difficult however to de-compartmentalize the organizational structures. It is important to note that this compartmentalization did not arise from bad will or negligence on the part of politicians and/or civil servants, but rather from a sincere sense of responsibility for the manageability and efficiency of their organizations. This makes the de-compartmentalization extra difficult.

Development advisors

Against this background and still from the folk nature of "coping together" a number of development advisors found inspiration and incentive to join forces in the support of citizen initiatives in their wandering through the mazes of laws and regulations. This took shape in the so called *Tussenheid*² expert network, in which informal collaboration has resulted in the recruitment, training and structuring of the expert network.

The development advisors have various expertises, skills, and experiences: spatial planning, nature and environmental policy, community building, business administration, public administration, legal affairs, project management, cooperative organizational development, etc. One of their important basic attitudes is the willingness to align interests and exchange views. This certainly strengthens the integrality of their support.

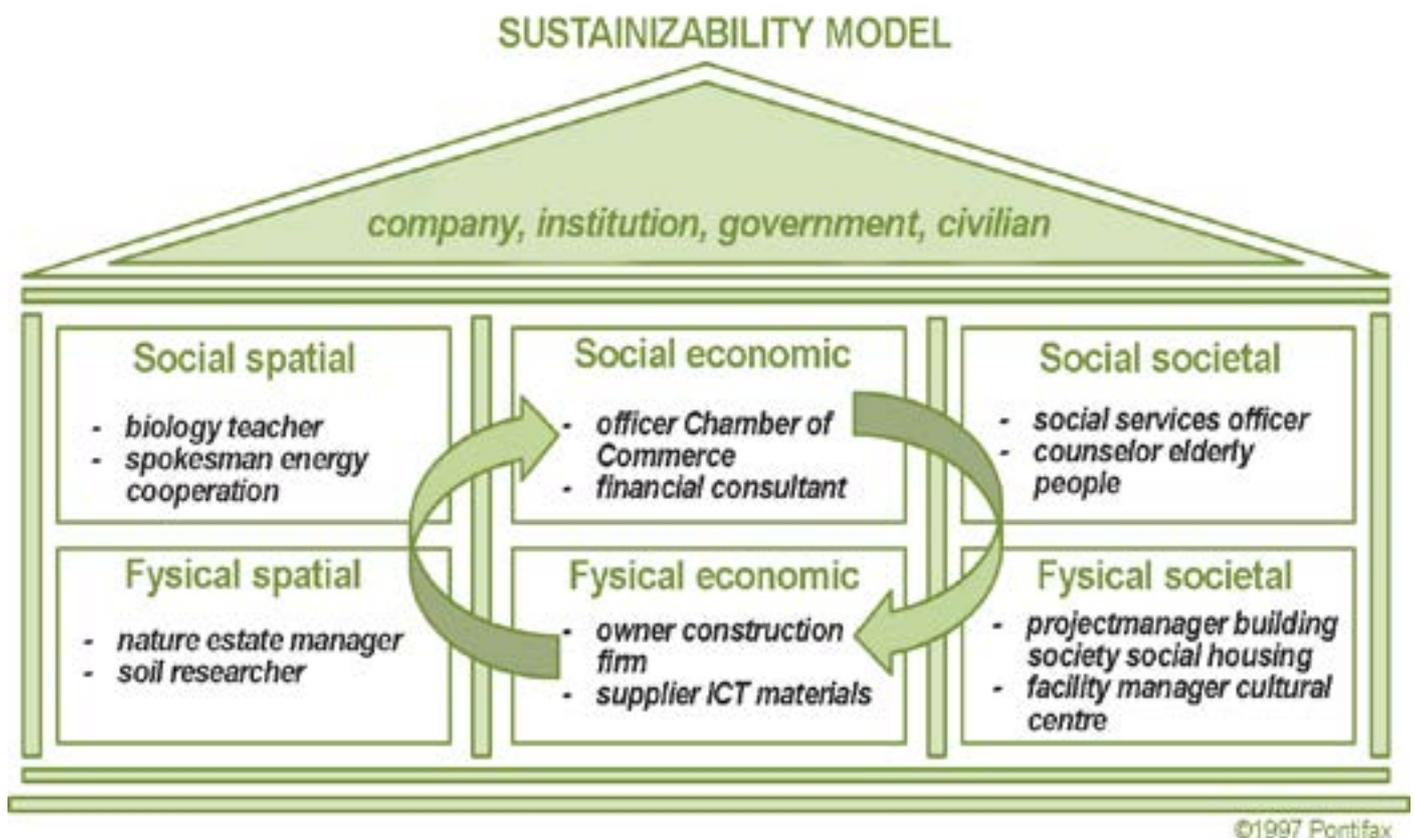
Sustainizability model

For the sake of an even more focused analysis of the problems and to broaden the basis of the support Pontifax added two domains to the Triple P: social and physical. In the social domain we find e.g. teachers, communication advisors, social workers etc. In the physical domain contractors, architects, craftsmen, and the like. This complementary specification is helpful in the analysis and elaboration of initiatives and structures the support of the development advisors. More on this later.

The model thus formulated is called the *sustainizability model*. The term *sustainizability* is explicitly chosen because it contains an explicit reference to an *active, dynamic* attitude as opposed to the term *sustainability*, which refers more to a static situation.

The sustainizability model therefore consists of six domains, each with their typical characteristics, values, and standards; all six of which can ideally be involved in considerations and planning in any initiative.

Based on this model, development consultants operate with experts from the six domains and together they form a sounding board for the initiators.



Inspired by Brundtland and Pontifax, the development advisors consider sustainizability as a perspective and endeavor bypassing bottlenecks due to compartmentalization. They do so by assisting initiators in discovering, connecting, and involving relevant elements and actors from the spatial, economic, and societal domains in the development of their initiatives. They are helpful in finding an optimal mix of opportunities, views, and interests in order to realize the initiative: cooperation aiming a future proof result.

By now the application of this support has proved to be effective in hundreds of initiatives.

The starting point of the model is *connecting* actors from the domains of the 3 P's (people-societal, profit-economy, planet-space) *to work together with the initiator* on sustainizability: so: de-compartmentalize!

SUSTAINIZABILITY MODEL AND NETWORK ENUMERATION / ANALYSIS

As an initiator, for one's activity to be more sustainable one cannot rely on a standard cookery book. Each problem implies its specific challenges to be faced individually and to be provided with appropriate solutions.

In addition to the development advisors, the initiator's relationship network can be particularly useful.

It turns out to be very worthwhile involving people one is acquainted with and trusts from the various sustainizability domains in the actions concerned. Their positions and opinions, and in particular the confrontation and eventual integration thereof certainly contribute to a suitable solution.

To bring this about one must enumerate them carefully, arrange them in siloes (ironically: *compartmentalize*) to eventually de-compartmentalize them.

How to enumerate the group of people that can be helpful?

Use different sources. Consider for example the financial administration (debtors and creditors), the project administration, the CRM system, address files, contacts on social media, business cards or the birthday calendar.

Main rule: only assign people with which one has an agreeable connection!!

How to categorize in the six domains?

The start is positioning the people assigned in one of the six sustainizability domains: In which compartment is the actor most active? Sometimes it seems that one has none or only a few relations in certain domains, but after some consideration one usually finds them.

Obviously, everyone has good relations fitting in the relevant domains.

What to consider putting together a brainstorm group (CIMBY session; Certainly In My Back Yard)?³

A CIMBY session is a focused method to discuss the opportunities of the initiative with a widely committed group of relations (see figure below).

From the network enumeration in the six domains, one pursues an adequate mix of stakeholders (suppliers, customers, and partners) and ensures that the four E's (entitled authorities, education, entrepreneurs, and environment) are represented. Then, make a nice mix of personality features and gender.



Some people can be siloed into multiple domains, others (e.g., the mayor) are more difficult to be put in a specific domain and can be employed as a “joker”.

Of course, the initiator must present his or her ideas to the participants (also called inbassadors⁴) at this session; thus forcing him or her to formulate the ideas clearly and concretely: a litmus test!

Example of a global network analysis

	spatial	economic	societal
social	Brabant Environmental Federation Brabant Museum of Nature Food & Nature Consultancy Agricultural Academy of applied sciences	Regional Network for social-economic development District councils Society building Development cooperation Festival Bottom-up cooperation for rural revitalizing Regional networks Agricultural Academy of applied sciences University of applied sciences: Leisure Business consultancy Regional program for economic cooperation Tilburg municipality; Economic affairs and labor market	Society building District councils Volleyball club Development cooperation Festival Regional Health Service Preparatory science-based education) Tilburg municipality; district affairs Residents' associations Tilburg municipality; Social affairs
fysical	Regional network The Green Forest Regional networks District councils Tilburg municipality; Urban planner Tilburg municipality; Spoor-zone (railroad track quarter) Landscape designer Architect	Promotion of regional goods and services) Leisure consultancy Interim and financial man-agement Tilburg municipality Spoorzone (Railroad track quarter)	Housing association Residents' associations Volleyball club Leisure consultancy and design) Tilburg municipality; Social affairs



What can one apply the network inventory for?

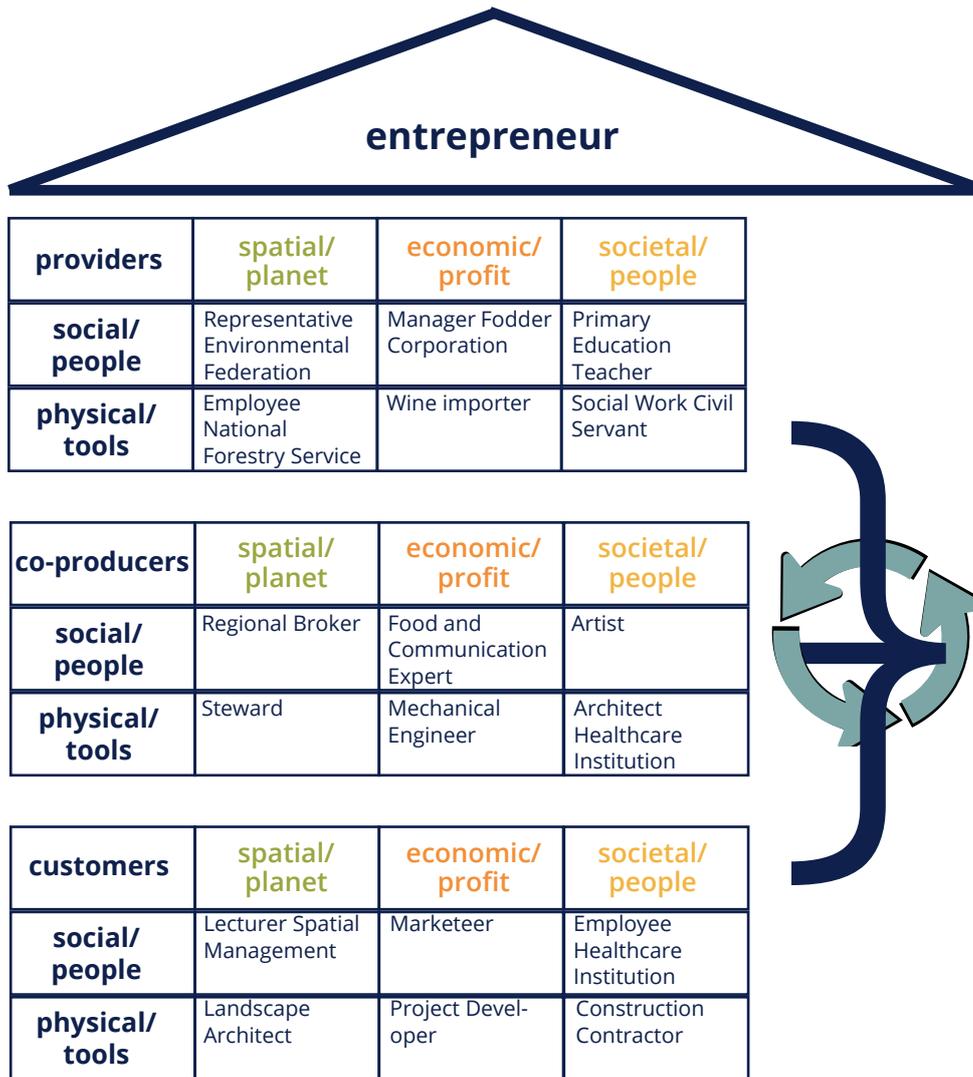
One can ask the selected people to think along, in a pleasant context, about the actions below or to participate:

1. The design of governance of the initiative, or more direct inviting people from various fields to sit in on the board.
2. Create a group for a CIMBY session.
3. Establish a group for a pitch round (in a pitch one presents one's ideas to a group of experts who then reflect on it).
4. Put together a group for a brainstorm session with a specific focus.
5. Use the inventory for acquisition purposes; where are one's blind spots, in which domain does one want to stimulate the development?
6. Use the inventory for network development (expansion or upscaling your plan).
7. Foster acceptance by bringing together a carefully focused group.

SUSTAINABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL WITH INBASSADORS

What kind of people should one look for to compose a comprehensive CIMBY crew comprising all sustainability domains?

Example: Local food and experience entrepreneur.



- Meetings:**
- Business development
 - Product testing
 - Brainstorm Product Market Combinations
 - Topics
 - *Sustainability
 - *Identity
 - *Waste prevention
 - Fun!!!

Endnotes

- 1 This is not a spelling error: the difference between sustainability and sustainizability will be explained later in this paper.
- 2 In betweenness
- 3 See also www.CIMBY.nl (in Dutch)
- 4 A so called inbassador is a selected person from a network analysis: they represent and/or involve a sustainizability domain.

Back to page 1

