

## **Communities at a Crossroads: the sustainability of bottom-up care and energy services in rural communities**

The 'Communities at a Crossroads' project investigates whether and under which conditions rural communities can live up to policy expectations in terms of delivering key services and facilities via voluntary citizen initiatives. Recent national-level policies emphasize the role of local self-reliance, but it is questionable whether rural communities, where levels of self-organisation are typically already high, can support these additional demands. An even higher reliance of self-governance and bottom-up citizens' initiatives could bolster social cohesion and wellbeing in rural communities. However, if expected levels of self-governance are unrealistic or if the conditions for successful self-governance are not met, a vicious circle could result with deteriorating services and facilities undermining the social networks and social cohesion necessary to sustain citizen initiatives. Hence, it is of key societal relevance to understand how much self-organisation can be expected from rural communities and which conditions enable bottom-up citizen initiatives in rural communities.

The 'Communities at a Crossroads' project zooms in on care and energy citizens' initiatives, both related to huge contemporary societal challenges, with the increasing demand for and cost of health care in an ageing population and with the urgent energy transition. The project unfolds in the Northern Netherlands and aims for co-creation with local institutions in a mixed methods approach.

**Keywords:** Citizens' initiatives; rural communities; volunteers; care; energy transition

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