

# Beyond simple leadership successes

Leading in heterogeneity (part 1)

## Introduction

In this first pages of a draft chapter I aim to share some first results and observations after most of the field work is finished. Up to now I have done 23 exploratory interviews in both countries with national and regional experts, and I have done 10-18 interviews per case, 4 cases in total (still in progress) with local leaders or other key persons in the selected cases. These are just preliminary ideas, which I wanted to share with you and therefore are still very much rough ideas, and therefore very welcome to comments, feedback etc.

## Positioning the study

First of all I will position these results very briefly in my conceptual discussions that I have handled before. Shortly I start with some basic ideas that have guided my research from the start

- Beyond functionalistic and consensus oriented:** Leadership as more than a successful self-help course to successful place making, so beyond the heroes of place making, towards an understanding of processs in which actor(s) consciously shape the places they live in. Succesful or unsuccessfull, individual or collective, consensual or dissensual

	<b>Duality</b>	<b>Dualism</b>
<b>Dissensus</b>	<b>Dialogic discourse</b>  <i>Leader/ship</i> A partial, ill-defined, ongoing and negotiated persona or identity, to be distinguished from more 'prosaic' management.  <i>Place-shaping</i> Activities and discourses (spoken and text) which constitute certain actors and give them access to supposed self-meaning, status and value.	<b>Critical discourse</b>  <i>Leader/ship</i> A historically situated concept which serves to elevate those labelled as leaders and remove them from censure and critique.  <i>Place-shaping</i> LP programmes and activities which ensure order, predictability and control; a means to mask diversity and 'resolve' dissident voices.
<b>Consensus</b>	<b>Constructivist discourse</b>  <i>Leader/ship</i> No a priori conceptualisation. Meanings of leadership will be socially and culturally construed.  <i>Place-shaping</i> The significance of LP activities will arise from sense-making accounts of those affected, often retrospectively. Emphasis placed on the ritual and symbolic aspects of place-making.	<b>Functionalist discourse</b>  <i>Leader/ship</i> Broadly self-evident and essentialist: a person who displays the abilities, qualities and status of a 'leader'.  <i>Place-shaping</i> To equip leaders with the skills and competencies to lead in cross-boundary, multi-agency environments, making for a more prosperous and healthier society.

Figure 1: source Mabey and Freeman (2010)

- Following from a relational notion of place and space (Massey), seeing places as *Constructed*, leadership therefore in this sense can be identified in the practices that take place; *heterogeneous* and therefore leadership also as mediating and negotiation these relations that make up place. Instead of assuming a value-free leadership exercise, acknowledging that politics of place are much more difficult and politics is there, and leadership is therefore necessarily about power. And also seeing places as *relational*, beyond a bounded logic, leadership of a relational place also means dealing with territorial logics and relational visions etc.

In this chapter I will look into this second element of places and talk about the ways in which in my case studies, leading in heterogeneity takes place. And hopefully can also show you how this gives a better understanding of leading in peripheral places.

Places as:	Leadership as	Focus:	Expected Outcome	Point of analysis:	Chapter
Produced (socially constructed)	Enacted	<b>How is leadership enacted?</b>	Visibility practices	Practices, speech,	5
Inhomogeneous	Mediating, dealing with inherent inhomogeneity inside places	<b>Leading in peripheral places</b>	Mediating, negotiation internal place politics	Place politics (Relations), negotiating living together in a place	6
Relational	Negotiating/contesting the throwtogetherness of relations making up a place	<b>Leading of peripheral places</b>	Lobby relations, municipal collaboration etc.	Politics of place (Relations) Core-peripheries, lobby, environment	7

In this chapter I will explore the leadership dimension which I for now have labelled leading *in* peripheral places. The focus of this chapter is to understand the various ways in which leadership is enacted within places and in which ways this process is encountering heterogeneity in various forms and how this is dealt with by the leaders.

I hereby start from the assumption that every place is heterogeneous and multiple, there is not one place, not one place identity and therefore leading in these environments can be

seen as difficult. In the literature there is also spoken of a certain politics of propinquity, which is seen by Amin (2004, 39) as

*“a politics of negotiating the immanent effects of geographical juxtaposition between physical spaces, overlapping communities, contrasting cultural practices. “ (p. 39 and also a place where “different microworlds find themselves on the same proximate turf, and that the pull on turf in **different directions** and **different interests** needs to be actively managed and negotiated, because there is no other turf.*

This eye for local politics moves the leadership away from a more simple managerial, functionalistic discourse on how places can be lead and furthermore highlights the more fragile notion of leadership in peripheral places.

When I complete the chapter I will come up with recurrent themes in some or all of my cases, which show these processes of leadership.

- Multiple ideals, goals for places (not one possible development route)
- Multiple ideas on leadership (not 1 way to lead)
- Heterogeneous communities, (not 1 community)
- Multiple images, (not 1 image for the community)

For now, I will limit myself to the first bullet point.

## Multiple ideals, goals

In the different cases, I have noticed a certain multiplicity of different visions for these places. When talking to active community members or decision makers, there is never a consensus on how these places should develop. In brainy quotes on management websites and also in place leadership literature however, it is often assumed that there is one consensual development route for places and after vision is set, leadership is about acting out this visions. In this first part I will look into the different, sometimes conflicting ideas for future development of the places, which make leading in peripheral places less clear-cut than a simple leadership formula, such as vision + resources → behaviour change + results formula.

In this sub chapter I will highlight two of the four case studies to show the ways in which multiple visions and ideals for future development often coexist in places. The other cases also showed this multiplicity, but in a lesser degree, and I have chosen to take the most telling examples.

### Pekela: Hennep capital or commuter village?

In Pekela there has been a host of different government interventions aimed at this region, usually from the national or regional level. Plans have been made for the regional scale of Oost-Groningen, which more or less overlaps with the old peat colonies of the Netherlands (Veenkolonien). In this region they have started mining peat from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which attracted work force from other villages, other provinces and from abroad. Later due to the suitable canal structure, this resulted in a flourishing shipping industry, which made Pekela an important node in the shipping networks at this time. After the relocation of bigger ships to bigger ports, the old captains who still had their roots in Pekela invested in industry, Pekela has consequently been an industrial centre for straw-board since around 1900 and still today there are still some factories that make card board (not from straw anymore). This once so flourishing economic heart of the country has lost employment ever since the decline of the industry in the Netherlands and therefore Pekela is still today one of the municipalities with the highest unemployment rate. Around 8.5 % in 2015 against an average of 6.9% for the country. National and provincial government have tried in several ways to improve this employment situation for the region, but without big improvements.

This is the context wherein I found Pekela and also came into contact with people who try to develop or improve the living conditions in Pekela.

One of the initiatives I came across was initiated by a lector at a Higher Education Institute and former inhabitant of Pekela. He has set up a plan to develop a regional cooperative in the wider region of Oost-Groningen with the aim to bring together entrepreneurs, government, universities and research institutes to work in a sustainable cooperative for the region. The idea of this cooperative is to focus mostly on the energy and entrepreneurs and combine this with the knowledge and fresh ideas from research institutes and students and let the government be a pure facilitator of this process. Together with the local entrepreneurs' association of Oude Pekela they are building on this new cooperative for the region. One of the most recent ideas from this group of fanatics is to build further on the energy of some entrepreneurs who have started to build all kinds of things from Hemp (car

parts, building material, tea, essential oils etc.) in order to make Pekela into the Hemp Republic of the Netherlands.

While the goal is to benefit the whole region and also tackle the unemployment problems, talking to one of the leading figures, it is mentioned that.

*“Usually we start with project with the unemployed. Then you already have a certain atmosphere, people are just a bit too late. Or couldn't find the address or didn't bring notes, then you are already thinking....”*

*“We gaan vaak bij projecten uit van werkzoekenden. Na, dan heb je al een bepaalde sfeer, mensen komen net niet op tijd binnen. Of konden het adres niet vinden of hebben geen aantekeningenpapier bij zich, dat je denkt van Gadverdamme! “*

This quote shows in some way the negative feelings that this respondent has with some of the unemployed of Pekela.

But on the other side, from some of the local active people that I talked to I noticed a certain unfamiliarity or in this project. As the local museum volunteer mentions:

*“I think it is public (a meeting for the new to be established cooperative) but I then miss an inviting gesture, something like, make sure you'll be there. That's what I find a bit strange”.*

*Ik denk ook dat het openbaar is, maar ik mis dan eigenlijk een uitnodigend gebaar weet je wel, van zorg dat je erbij bent. Dat vind ik er een beetje vreemd aan.*

Also one of the local political party members had heard from the new initiative and responds also somewhat reserved:

*“It is all very happy-happy, and forgetting that you can only do these kind of things when you include people from the beginning. And I think what they are doing, is yes, very many, big and quite good plans, and then they present it to the inhabitants. And these kind of projects have never worked, I suppose”.*

*“ook wel heel erg happy de pebbie, en vergeten dat je dit soort dingen alleen maar kunt doen als je mensen erin meeneemt aan het begin. En volgens mij wat zij doen is al heel veel, ja, grootse en best ook wel goede plannen, en dat presenteren ze aan de bevolking. En dat soort projecten hebben volgens mij nog nooit gewerkt.”*

This gives an idea of a project mainly aimed at a certain audience and therefore not necessarily for the whole region and also in which not everyone was invited.

*“I sometimes am disturbed by it, when we talk about these kind of projects, to get higher educated jobs to East-Groningen”*

*“ik stoor me er wel eens aan, als we over dit soort projecten praten, hoogopgeleide banen naar Oost-Groningen krijgen of houden”*

In this interview a certain distance is felt from “these kind of projects” who are not meant for a certain part of the community in Pekela, while for this respondent this is exactly the group in the village that should be helped most. In the same interview this respondent also

connects this to a certain blaming of the weaker people in society for situations which they themselves cannot be made responsible:

*Synergon (social employment agency) is closing. That is the second employer here. So, then you can make all kinds of nice projects for start-ups and SMEs, I am all in favour, but sometimes we forget that the real big hits, is not by people themselves. The circumstances in which people live, that is not created by the people themselves, that happened as a result of choices of politics, so you can hardly blame those people for the misery in which they find themselves.*

*Synergon, en die gaat dicht. Dat is de tweede werkgever hier. Dus dan kan je allemaal leuke projecten voor start-ups en wat allemaal en MKB'ers, ik ben er allemaal voor, maar we vergeten wel eens dat er echt grote klappen hier niet door mensen zelf. De omstandigheden waar mensen in leven, wat dus de mensen maakt, die hebben mensen hier niet gecreëerd, dat is door keuzes van de politiek gebeurd, dus kun je die mensen heel moeilijk de schuld geven van de ellende waar ze nu in zitten.*

#### Alternative, Pekela as commuter village

On the other hand there are also other leading figures in the municipality working in the local government and political parties who have given up on major plans of becoming again a growing hub, and settling more with the idea of becoming a pleasant living village for the surrounding bigger centres around.

As one of the alderman also acknowledges that they have tried to lure in investments and companies into Pekela, but he beliefs it is *“trying to pull forward a dead horse”* *“trekken aan een dood pard”*. As another respondent mentions, since distances have lost in importance, it does not really matter anymore if there is employment in the next village or city, people are more mobile than in previous times. In the same narrative, people then value especially the aspects of Pekela, which make it such a nice place to live, low rents, lots of space, green, quietness and all other elements that are usually part of the rural idyll.

*“especially the people who work a bit in Groningen and Assen, why wouldn't you stay in Pekela. We are not a working village, but we are a nice living village”*

*“Vooral de mensen die een beetje in Groningen, Assen gaan werken, waarom zou je niet in Pekela blijven wonen. We zijn geen werkdorp, maar wel een mooi woondorp.”*

And also an element that usually portrays Pekela in a bad way, low rents (since, who would ever want to live in this village) are used as a positive element that could potentially attract people. As also a respondent from a local political party mentions:

*“partly you become a commuter village”*

*“Voor een deel word je een forensendorp”*

In sum, in the small village of Pekela that has always known external influence from people trying to improve living standards, two quite different future scenarios develop, which are not really connected to each other. While both ideas come from people who are trying to help the village forward, there does not seem to be a common agenda. The initiative for a regional cooperative seems to focus on a certain audience, the higher educated, the energetic etc. and seeing a bright future in which Pekela could become the Hemp capital of

the Netherlands, while the leading people in the local government have more accepting idea of a declining population and is preparing their inhabitants to this decline by trying to motivate sports clubs to collaborate etc. Moreover the local government has the responsibility to include everybody in its place and therefore cannot selectively chose to focus on a certain target group.

### Kihnu: island for islanders, tourists, fishermen?

Another example of heterogeneous ideas for future development, is the island of Kihnu in Estonia. In Kihnu leadership is mostly directed towards preserving the cultural heritage. Already from the 1950s interest for its folklore and traditions, which have mostly been preserved exactly because of their spatially peripheral position, have been recorded by scientists. From then on, this attention has grown by as well local actors, as well as by external actors from artists, scientists, journalists and lobbyists (Rüütel 2004; Rüütel et al. 2013). Partly because of these efforts, and of the efforts of local and national active people, since 2003 Kihnu is on the representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO. This is seen as an important mile stone for the community, since this is the symbol of the recognition that this culture should be protected as well internally as to the outside world, protected in the intangible heritage list of the world with also very tangible consequences in terms of funding.

### Negative externalities

The growing attention for this island does not only have consequences for the people engaged in tourism via home accommodation. As one of the teachers on the island explains that sometimes she does not put on her national clothing to not stand out.

*“The attention can be positive, but also negative and ruin your mood for the whole day.”*

Kuutma (2007) has mentioned that Kihnu could in some ways become a living museum. Also signs of irritation against certain media, film crews and exposure have been mentioned in interviews. Also in an example, one of the inhabitants mentioned that due to media exposure more police control is possible on the island. Opening up to the world on the one hand creates more opportunities for some, but on the other hand also means that Kihnu is becoming more visible for mainland institutions. This shows that the openness to the outside world has also resulted in some less intended consequences, which could be seen as less positive by some of the inhabitants.

Furthermore, because of opening up to more tourists with different values and norms, this also leads to some friction between these different values systems: For example the hunt for birds by Italian tourists is seen by some of the islanders as unacceptable:

*“Hunters from Italy are just killing the singing birds for pleasure and this is not understandable in our culture, absolutely not understandable.”*

### Making other development routes less possible

Together with the negative consequences for some of the inhabitants, this emphasis of developing Kihnu as a touristic island also leaves little room for other development ideals. The hegemonic perception of Kihnu as a cultural space and a consumption space for tourists sometimes clashes with other images of the island. For example the strong focus on culture and tourism development does not always leave room for other views on how to develop the island. Agriculture and fisheries have received less attention in the vision of cultural and touristic Kihnu as said by an inhabitant of the island.



Even though it is recognized that fishing is still an important element of living on the island, as also around 60 men and their families are still dependent on fishing, as the chairman of the council explains.

But reasons for a not so strong fisherman lobby is also seen with the fishermen themselves, as one of the entrepreneurs mentions

*“They do not know how to stand up for yourself.”*

And a family member of a former fishermen mentions:

*“Fishermen are not having the same project writing skills as the tourism people. “*

But as one of the entrepreneurs mentions, it is justified by the overall benefit to everyone of the island in some way. As the mayor says in a follow-up interview: *I think everybody benefits from them (tourists). In one way or another, or less.*

Also making some people more useful than others

The rise of the tourism industry has also led to new distinctions on who is “useful” for the island. As one of the main entrepreneurs mentions:

*“While the island has a lack of jobs, this does not mean they can always find “suitable” people. “*

And also a former worker for a tourist company mentions:

*And if you are starting to look, searching those people, you don't find them, because everybody they are not this way, that they don't care about cameras and. They don't want that people see them. They can speak everything, but as soon as you are putting this camera there, they don't want to do this anymore.*

These reactions also suppose that the development route that Kihnu has gone in has led for some people to be more of use than others. Not all people like to be in the picture all the time and also not all people are eager, willing or capable of working in tourism. Also language barriers have been identified as possible barriers.

Therefore in Kihnu a clear choice has been made in favour of developing cultural tourism, of which more and more people are benefiting economically. On the other hand it has also led to negative externalities and made other development routes less possible. Therefore in this case, in a very functionalistic analysis of leadership one could say that it was a success story since tourism industry is blooming as never before. But this is only true for a part of the population. Acknowledging the existence of alternative possible futures leads to a more heterogeneous picture of place leadership in which some choices are privileged over others.

### *Small conclusions*

While in the literature there is often talk of a vision, leadership, commitment, action and evaluation, there is not so much eye for the different kinds of visions and ideas and the politics behind these differences of opinion. As could be seen in the 2 cases of Pekela and Kihnu, there is not always consensus on what vision then should be executed, in these cases we could see that there are often more visions and development routes already thought out.

Acknowledging these heterogeneity of plans and possible futures gives a more complete and fuzzy picture of how leadership is enacted. It shows that every choice for a certain development route is necessarily a choice for not taking up another route.

In Pekela this shows that even though the status quo is very much in favour of a passive strategy of fitting to the peripherality that this place has seen to become ad settling for a commuter village in which inclusiveness is highly valued, in a newly formed regional cooperative there are other plans for a more regional approach which focuses on energy, employment and possibilities and sees a bright future for the region. Both these ideas and goals are part of ways how to develop the place of Pekela and the multiplicity of these ideas coexisting, is a start in seeing heterogeneity in leadership.

In Kihnu there seems to be a broad support for developing the cultural tourism path, while at the same time other emphases on fishing and agriculture are put more to the background. A choice for a certain development path is automatically a non-choice of other paths, and hereby always part of politics. Understanding how these decisions are made and how leading is done in heterogeneity of places, is in my opinion crucial in understanding place leadership.

I am aware that the analysis up to now has not reached that far yet to be able to grasp the politics behind the different development routes of these places. What I do feel is that much of this has to do with resources of different people. Crucial in the Kihnu case were for example the national and international networks of cultural entrepreneurs in Kihnu, the visibility of Kihnu as an island and the selling potential of anything that has anything to do with Kihnu, the importance of project writing skills and the lack of these skills with fishermen. All of these factors played a role in the politics behind why this cultural route has been taken.

In a next step these politics of negotiating these different development paths and possible futures should be central.