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Stakeholders participation regarding student housing provision Groningen

Analysing stakeholder empowerment and power imbalances



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Abstract

Dutch student cities have been struggling with an increasing number of (international) students over the past decades. In the case of Groningen, this has put enormous pressure on the housing market and provision of adequate student housing has been a major problem, especially in the last years. In 2018 the covenant youth and student housing has been signed, involving the participation of nine stakeholders and organizations, which is necessary for this complex and unique issue. This research aims to understand the influences and participation of the multiple stakeholders regarding the problem of housing shortage for students in the city of Groningen with as main research question: *“To what extent have the various stakeholders influenced the planning process of student housing provision in Groningen?”*. In total, eight in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with partners of this covenant. Problems before the covenant were related to the shortage of housing, resulting in a large private sector with slumlords offering unfair accommodation, consisting of high rents and poor maintenance. With the arrival of the covenant, slumlords driven out of the market. Stakeholder engagement is high in the covenant due to empowerment of weaker stakeholders. Although, power imbalances were identified in knowledge, rights, resources and capital, these have not formed large obstacles. Power to influence policies or institutions and potential to contribute and achieve a particular objective in this agreement are mainly allocated at the municipality, educational instances and building housing corporations. Through good communication, this process is experienced as transparent combined with mutual trust and a sense of control.

Table of contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Abstract | 1 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| <i>Background</i> | <i>3</i> |
| <i>Research problem.....</i> | <i>5</i> |
| <i>Structure of the paper</i> | <i>5</i> |
| Theoretical framework..... | 6 |
| <i>Conceptual framework</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>Expectations</i> | <i>9</i> |
| Methodology | 9 |
| Results | 11 |
| <i>The importance of planning and tackling problems.....</i> | <i>11</i> |
| <i>Power imbalances in decision-making process</i> | <i>13</i> |
| <i>Stakeholder empowerment and engagement.....</i> | <i>14</i> |
| Discussion | 15 |
| Conclusion..... | 16 |
| <i>Reflection.....</i> | <i>17</i> |
| References | 18 |
| Appendix A: Interview guide | 21 |
| Appendix B: Data analysis code tree | 22 |

Introduction

Background

As a student who lives in Groningen, I know how hard it can be to find an appropriate room close to the university in a big unknown city. For many students this is the first time that they want to live alone without parents, standing on their own feet. To do that it is important to find an affordable room that meet the demands. However, in the Netherlands and thus especially the university cities, it gets more difficult every year to find one, with the increasing shortage of housing. According to the National Student Union, there was already a shortage of 40.000 student houses in 2018. In addition to that is that many rooms are overpriced as well, which makes it even more difficult for students (Nu, 2018).

There are more reasons why the housing market is under pressure concerning the students. Research by organization Kences (2019:37-38) shows an increase of sixteen percent of Dutch students going to university. Between 2010 and 2018, there was an increase of 112.000 students, which is an average increase of 2.4 percent per year. This also means more students that move to student cities, resulting in higher demand and more competition. Other research conducted by van Huijsduijnen (2019) shows that in the next six years, there will still be 43.000 student houses short in the twenty Dutch student cities. In terms of size and amount of students, Groningen is in fourth place behind Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht. Together with Wageningen, Groningen is the student city with most students living in the city, away from their parental home. However, compared with bigger cities like The Hague, Rotterdam, Haarlem, 's-Hertogenbosch, Amsterdam and Utrecht it has fewer problems among student housing. The housing shortcoming, combined with increasing demand, asks for strange temporary solutions. Especially international students end up in hostels, tents and camps (ten Teije, 2019).

As one of the bigger student cities, Groningen has to deal with this problem. In the city, around 60.000 students have their education here and over 30.000 of these students live in the city. The population of Groningen now consists of fifteen percent out of youth and students, mostly located in the center and surrounding neighborhoods, shown in figure 1. Groningen is a destination for many international students and over the years there has been a strong increase. There were 1440 international students more in 2018 over 2017. This growth in students from other countries is paired with these problems and for them, it is even more difficult to find appropriate housing since they do not have a social network yet and many Dutch student houses prefer other Dutch people instead of Internationals (RTV Noord, 2020). After the University of Maastricht, the University in Groningen has the most international students. In fourteen years this number has risen from 717 to 8754 internationals. In order to provide them with housing, the city and university of Groningen are improvising, with students ending up in the weirdest and most expansive places. Last year, international students had to stay in tent camps on the sport terrain of the ACLO on the Zernike Campus. In

2002 the university and municipality used barracks and sea containers in which students could stay temporarily. In 2013, the Housing Office in Groningen got a cruise ship to Groningen where these international students could stay. (DVHN, 2018).

Location of Youth in Groningen's Neighborhoods

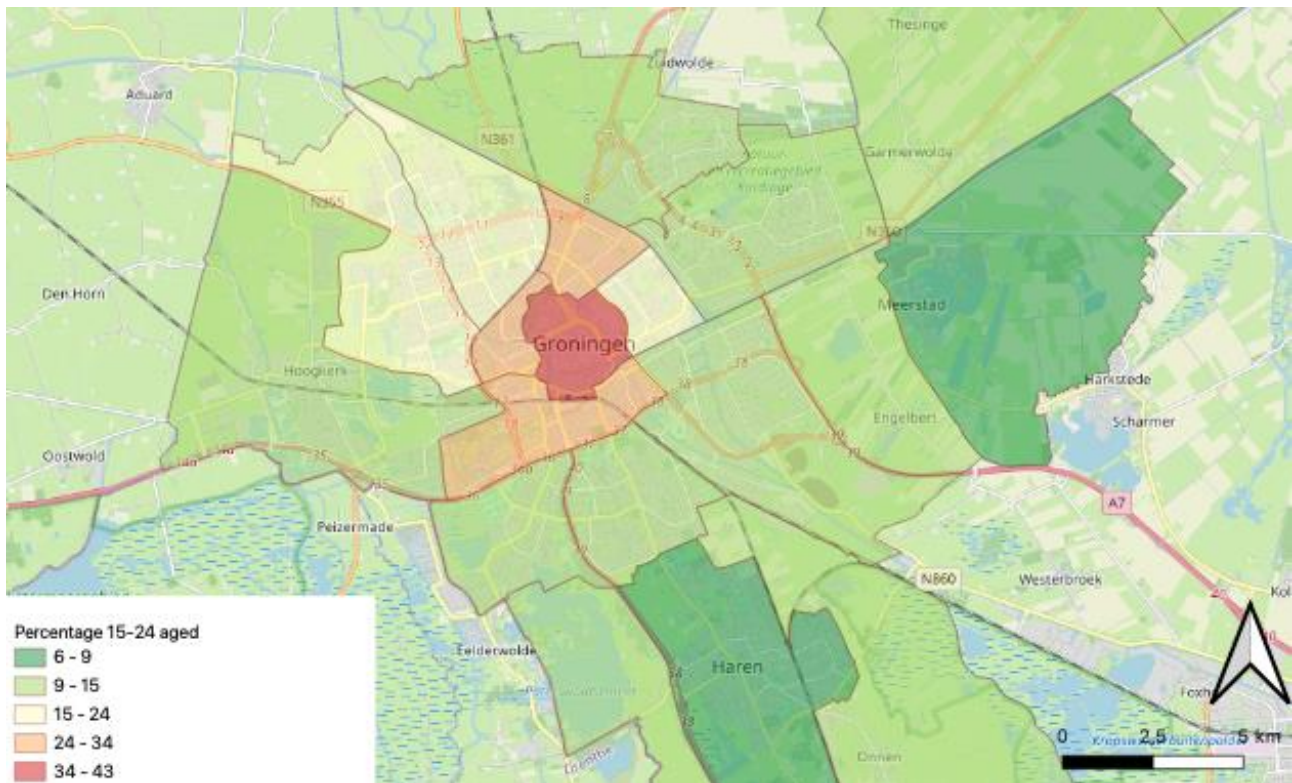


Figure 1: Map Groningen

Since this issue is concerning the Dutch and International students, as well as the housing market of Groningen, parties revolving around these topics are involved. The general purpose of this covenant is divided into two different aspects: short-term housing, also known as peak housing, to take care of the large student intake at the start of each study year. The other aim is to structurally create more qualitative supply to cope with the increasing student housing demand in the long run, with as goal a livable and attractive city for all inhabitants. The municipality and city Groningen has a leading and coordinating role in which monitoring and tuning of the planning process between the other stakeholders is essential to reach the objectives. Other important stakeholders are educational institutions as the University and Hanzehogeschool Groningen, student organizations, like the Groninger Studentenbond and Erasmus Student Network who respectively represent the Dutch and International students. Housing corporations form another important group. Lefier, Nijestee, SSH Student Housing and De Huismeesters are the biggest and well-known in the city and area of Groningen. These corporations have the task to increase student housing supply by investing and produce housing.

Research problem

As mentioned in the introduction, the problem regarding student housing in the Netherlands and thus Groningen is not a problem that just now emerges. It is already a problem that the Dutch student cities have to deal with for quite some time. However, it is also a really recent problem, with the shortage of housing and the temporary and unsuccessful solutions that the municipality has made over the years. For many years, there has been a huge gap between demand and supply. Without the supply of adequate and affordable housing for students, the city of Groningen and the university becomes less attractive for students, which leads to stagnation and possible population decrease, resulting in loss of jobs and economic decline. To combat this and anticipate on the increasing demand for student accommodation, the 2018 covenant came into existence. However, with nine different stakeholders from different instances, fields and expertise, this is a highly complex stakeholder process in which power and influence differ in this cooperative agreement. This research aims to understand these influences and participation of the multiple stakeholders regarding the problem of housing shortage for students in the city of Groningen, as well as the different ideas between all parties involved.

Therefore, the main research question belonging to this research is as follows: *To what extent have the various stakeholders influenced the planning process of student housing provision in Groningen?*

In order to research into this problem, the main question is divided into the sub-questions below:

- How is planning of housing done with regard to stakeholder participation and what are problems on the housing market in Groningen?
- What are the differences in power and knowledge of the stakeholders regarding student housing provision?
- How does stakeholder empowerment and engagement contribute to the planning process?

Structure of the paper

The next chapter, theoretical framework, discusses and describes multiple concepts and theories that have been used to design the study and gain a better understanding in stakeholder participation processes. The chapter methodology discusses the choices that were made regarding data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations. Later, the results of the data collection and analysis will be displayed, followed by an discussion of the findings linked to the theories and concepts. The paper will be concluded by an overall conclusion of the study and reflection about strengths, weaknesses and further research implications.

Theoretical framework

Multiple definitions are given for what a stakeholder exactly entails and this has changed over the years. Silvius & Schipper (2019) claims that the definition of stakeholders has evolved over time and the most recent definition is that “a stakeholder should be considered a stakeholder when he or she *perceives* himself/herself as (potentially) affected by the project”. However, in such a case as student housing in Groningen it is difficult to satisfy all stakeholders involved. According to Barney & Harrison (2018), a stakeholder approach is very complex and comprehensive. It is a shared corporate responsibility, which includes relationships, cooperation, but also has to deal with many tensions. According to Abels (2007), including stakeholders is very important because it increases motivations for those involved, enhance the knowledge and values basis of policy-making, initiate a process of social learning, open up opportunities for conflict resolution and achieving common goals and improves the level of acceptance and legitimacy of political decisions. By including stakeholders in the planning process, firms and organizations aim to reach legitimate decisions.

There are many articles regarding stakeholders’ participation in large planning processes. The most well-known article ‘A ladder of Citizen Participation’ is written by Arnstein (1969). It explains different levels of stakeholder participation: two levels of non-participation, three degrees of tokenism in which stakeholders have a voice and influence on the process and three degrees of citizen power where stakeholders get more power and obtain full managerial power at the top. Several scholars elaborated on Arnstein’s theory and came up with other scales of stakeholder empowerment. Rau et al. (2012) described a simpler scale with four different levels instead of eight. This theory has a split between the process owner and other stakeholders where interactions can be classified into the following categories: information where stakeholders only receive information from the process owner; consultation where stakeholders’ perspectives are requested by the process owner; cooperation in which stakeholders’ perspectives are explicitly taken into account and decisions are produced together with the process owner, also known as power sharing; and (power) delegation where stakeholders take over a task and the process owner accepts their decision. Another theory adds a level of self-reliance on the stakeholder side. In this case citizens would have the power to initiate a process (Späth & Scolobig, 2016).

Some stakeholders are generally recognized as important in projects, like the main contractor and client, but in addition there are also others not perceived as such and whose absence from the decision-making processes may result in a failure to address related issues (Bal et al., 2013). Therefore, it is also important that besides stakeholder engagement, the stakeholders perceived as less important are engaged and empowered in planning processes. Incorporating various interests, especially those of weaker groups in society are crucial for improving policy design and decision-making. Theory also suggest that these can be categorized into primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders can directly affect a decision-making outcome, hence they need to be managed in order to achieve its objectives, whereas

secondary stakeholders are generally seen as individuals affected by the decision-making. If not supported successfully the decision-making may not achieve the objectives (Howitt & McManus, 2012).

The stakeholder power analysis by Mayers (2005) is a useful tool to understand the complex relationships between stakeholders. This tool is particularly used in decision-making situations where the various stakeholders have competing interests and resources, in which all needs should be weighed and balanced. These stakeholders have different degrees of power to influence policies or institutions and potential to contribute and achieve a particular objective. Power originates from the control of decisions with positive or negative effects. This can be understood as the extent of which stakeholders are able to persuade or enforce others into making decisions. This power usually derives from the stakeholders' organization or position in relation with other stakeholders. Potential especially consists of characteristics specific to context and location, like knowledge and rights. Many times these stakeholders' problems, needs and interests are likely to be the most important for many initiatives to improve policies and institutions processes. However, these high potential stakeholders have often little power. Bridoux & Vishwanathan (2018) mention that there are multiple strategies powerful stakeholders could apply on the decision-making. They can either exercise the power they have. For example, withdrawing resources or pressurizing by non-cooperation. Whereas they can also choose to refrain with motivations as making profit or fairness in which they create control and a good identity for future. Experiences from Brouwer et al. (2013) have shown that when existence of these power imbalances is not recognized and dealt with strategically, it results in powerful stakeholders abusing, overruling and excluding the less powerful and disadvantaged stakeholders whose interests and needs are not heard and achieved in participating. By mitigating power imbalances and stakeholder empowerment, this outcome could be avoided or reduced.

According to Crane (2018), trust is one of the most important constructs in stakeholder literature. Since all stakeholders are interconnected, actions by a firm or organization toward one or a group of stakeholders influence the extent to which other stakeholders are willing to engage in future cooperation and relationships. This form of legitimacy depends upon the level of acceptance by the stakeholders and external audiences. Karlsen et al. (2008) mention that trust is built by improving communication, behaving reliably, showing commitment, being sincere and acting with integrity while working towards and reaching common goals and milestones. Additionally, representation, inclusiveness and transparency are also critical aspects when building this necessary trust for legitimacy. The ability of the process to engage stakeholders in a meaningful dialogue in which they feel ownership and the possibility to benefit from participating. This requires fully transparency, openness and respect (Burger & Mayer, 2003).

The paper will provide more insight in the motivations and processes of stakeholders in a large decision-making planning process in the current debate and literature. Emphasis will be mostly on power relations and asymmetries of the various stakeholders and how this contributes to their participation.

Conceptual framework

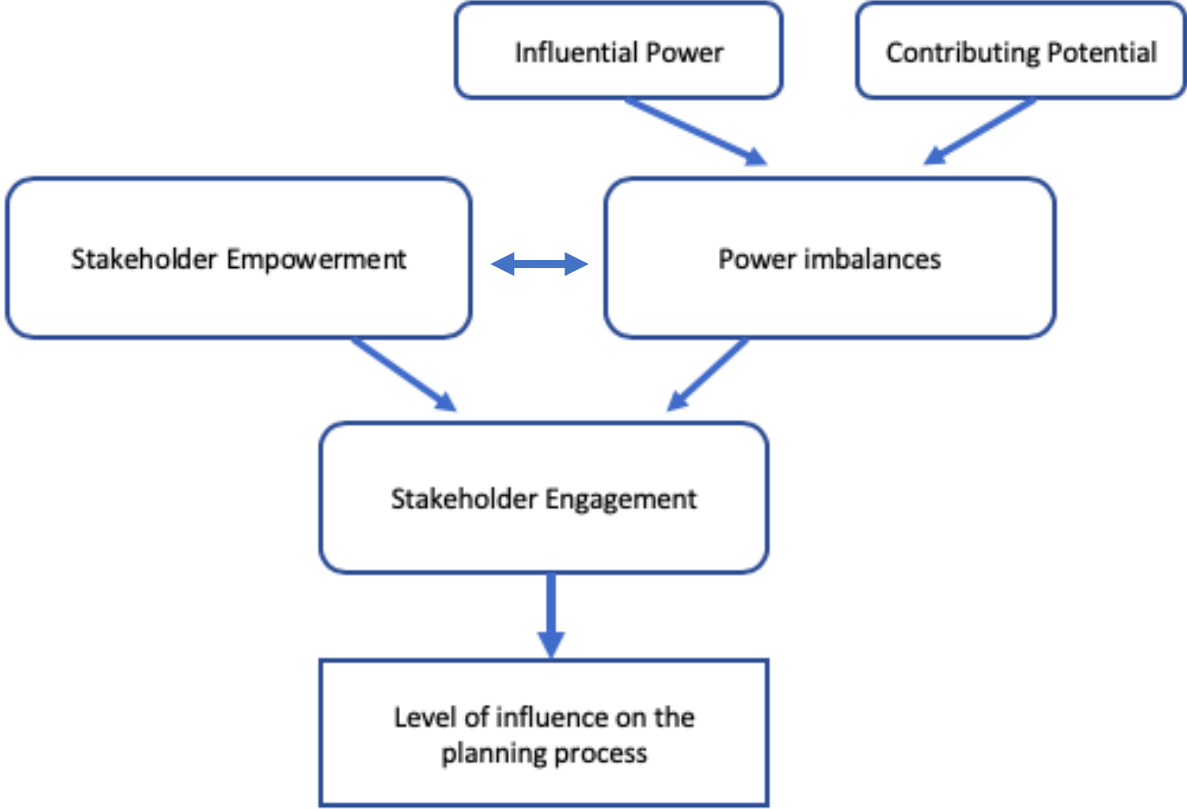


Figure 2: Conceptual model

The conceptual model displayed in figure 2 shows how the concepts and theories are interlinked. The level of influence that a stakeholder has on the planning process and the decision-making depends on several outstanding theories in the field of stakeholder participation. Stakeholder engagement is ultimately divided and created by two concepts, which are stakeholder empowerment and power imbalances. Stakeholder empowerment is basically the level wherein stakeholders, especially the weaker ones, are included into and throughout the decision-making process. Power imbalances, on the other hand, is more inclined with the differences among stakeholders. This can either be their influential power, which consists of resources, capital and position in relation to others or contributing potential that comprises knowledge and rights. They also influence each other. When empowerment is increasing, power imbalances decreases. On the contrary, when power imbalances become too big, stakeholder empowerment is requested. In the end, they meet each other at stakeholder engagement where good communication between the powerful with mutual

trust, control and transparency are required for stakeholders to engage in the planning process.

Expectations

The expectations of this qualitative research is that all involved stakeholders agree that, due to the increasing number of students on the university and in the city, new student housing and projects are required. However, there will be tensions on the subjects of how many houses and where in or around the city they should be built. This is due to the many stakeholder parties involved that all want the best for their interests. International and Dutch students, as well as student organizations probably want more student housing than the municipality, housing associations and inhabitants of the city can handle or want.

Methodology

The research is from qualitative nature, because the topic of research includes relatively few cases, but has many aspects. The best way to collect data for this research is in-depth semi-structured interviews. The advantages of this way of interviewing is that there are already predetermined questions which are helpful to guide an interview into the right direction with appropriate answers, which would be of use for the research. At the same time, the semi-structured design will allow the interviewee to fully express themselves. This encourages the interviewees to provide more useful information, such as their opinions on sensitive and difficult topics (Gerrits & Verweij, 2018). The cases consist of multiple interviews that are conducted with all important parties involved in this issue. These parties are student organizations, the municipality and city of Groningen, the universities, housing associations, residents of Groningen and more. When allowed, the interview will be audio recorded by phone in order to transcribe the interview later for analyzing. For ethical and privacy considerations, it is important that names remain confidential (Stiles & Petrila, 2011). Therefore, no real names will be shown, instead the name of the stakeholder organization is referred to. Since all stakeholders and interviewees are Dutch, the interviews were conducted in Dutch. This made it more comfortable for the interviewee to answer and elaborate upon their answers (Longhurst, 2016). Neutrality towards the interviewee is important to make the interviewee comfortable. In terms of power relations, requests by the interviewee should always be respected.

The data analysis scheme in figure 3 shows the order how the data is collected and analyzed. At first, all stakeholders in this matter were identified, contact made and interviews arranged. Before the interviews, questions were adjusted in order to get the right answers and collect the appropriate data for each group. For example, the interview with the municipality focusses on different aspects compared to other stakeholders. This would be a more technical interview in terms of their plans and ideas and how they try to involve the other stakeholders in the planning process, as well as if they value every stakeholder and their opinions equally or different. Also important is how and when they finalize the decision-making process. Whereas by interviewing other stakeholders, the focus would be more on their opinions and perceptions. Questions like why they are involved, what are their ideas for student housing location and the way they perceive the planning and decision-making process. Does the municipality appreciate and do something useful with their comments.

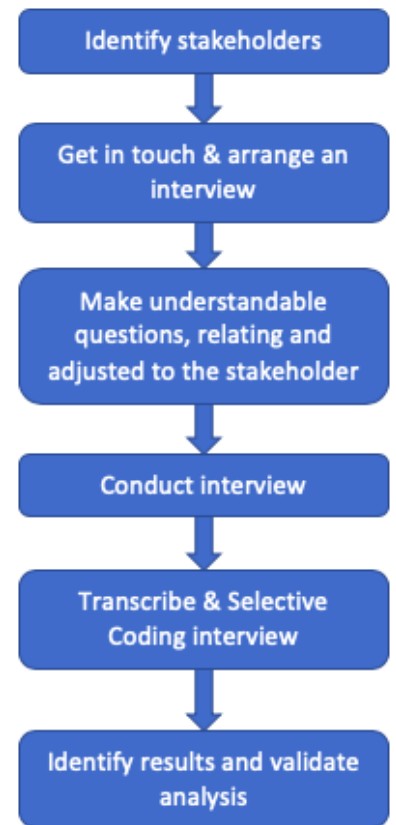


Figure 2: Data analysis scheme

The municipality of Groningen had published the covenant publicly, in which all stakeholders were listed. By sending mails to these stakeholders, I got in touch or was referred to the right people that are actively engaged in the subject of student housing provision. In the end, eight out of nine partners and stakeholders of the BouwJong 2.0 covenant approved to participate. The interviews have been conducted with parties' spokespersons that sit at the table. This means that they are directly involved in meetings, hence were able to provide many insights in the housing situation for students in Groningen, their perspective on the planning process and cooperation, as well as their vision of the future in Groningen. These interviews and characteristics are listed in table 1 below. Data analysis has been done by transcribing all interviews and consequently coding them in Atlas.ti according to the code tree in appendix B, which is based on the concepts and theories from the theoretical framework, events before and after the covenant and other topics that were mentioned in the interview. Throughout the process of coding, labeling and categorizing a constant comparative method was used by comparing transcripts and their data across the interviews.

| Stakeholder | Stakeholder group | Job title interviewee | Duration |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| Municipality Groningen | Municipality | Policy officer Urban development | 35 minutes |
| <u>Rijksuniversiteit Groningen</u> | Educational instance | Senior policy officer | 38 minutes |
| <u>Hanze University Groningen</u> | Educational instance | Manager student affairs | 31 minutes |
| <u>Lefier</u> | Housing corporation | Program manager Social performance | 35 minutes |
| <u>Nijestee</u> | Housing corporation | Portfolio manager | 36 minutes |
| <u>De Huismeesters</u> | Housing corporation | Policy advisor Housing | 30 minutes |
| <u>Groninger Studentenbond</u> | Student organization | Chairman | 40 minutes |
| Erasmus Student Network | Student organization | Secretary | 26 minutes |

Table 1: List of interviewees

Results

The importance of planning and tackling problems

Identifying the stakeholders in the planning process for student housing provision in Groningen is straightforward since they are all the stakeholders that signed the youth and student housing covenant in 2018, which can be seen in table 1. This is a unique agreement, because of the participation of educational instances and student organizations, which is not common in planning of student housing or housing in general.

Planning and building of student housing is not a process that can be done overnight. Lots of consultation and planning precedes between the various stakeholders before a final decision is made. The different roles that belong to these stakeholders become clear throughout the planning process. Before a new year of college starts, the RUG and Hanze universities try to attract Dutch and international students. As an educational instance they want growth, which is their revenue model, thence they go to international congresses to show how interesting the city and university Groningen is. The next important step is to make an estimation of the influx of national and international students, which is mainly done by the RUG, Hanze and municipality. Based on these results the decision has been made that Groningen needs more student housing. At least the amount of housing that can support the influx of students is necessary, but not too much what would result in vacancies for the long-term. Which would

affect the city also negatively. Finding this balance requires good consultation and collaboration.

In the past, 8000 units were already delivered and the aim is to deliver 1500 to 2000 more units. Nowadays the demand is already partly met due to these new student housing, but for the remaining units there is still need for locations and these are scarce. Since, the housing is meant for students it is not an option to locate them outside of Groningen. Students living preferences are in the city, close to the university and the city center. These locations are not something that can be developed due to the built-up landscape of Groningen. Besides, the locations are divided between the municipality and housing corporations. Before new accommodation can be built by housing corporations, the municipality need to grant land and permits. Afterwards, there are a couple options that are considered: demolition, building on the open locations or restructuring. Demolition is seen as a last resort, restructuring is often done for the qualitative aim of the covenant, which is providing students with appropriate housing. Even though locations are scarce, there has been built a lot. Especially new towers and flats scattered across the city serve as good quality housing for Dutch and international students, like the tower at Reitdiep, the three flats at Selwerd or the Upsilon flat in Paddepoel which has 365 units. While building these large flats, the clashing lifestyles of students and other inhabitants has to be take into account. In order to keep this balance, the remaining units will be spread across the city, particularly in the areas and neighborhoods with fewer student housing.

The map in figure 1 shows the neighborhoods categorized by the percentage of inhabitants aged between fifteen and twenty-four. The neighborhoods around the city center have a higher percentage compared to those further away. This has to do with the preferences of students and young people to live in close proximity to the university and center. Paddepoel, Selwerd and Reitdiep are located in the yellow areas between the university and city center, contributing to the goal of the covenant to build on locations with a lower share of students. As a consequence, this arrival of appropriate student housing tackles other problems related to the housing shortage as well:

“I think that those kind of housing complexes for (international) students are really interesting and eventually that private market, the slumlord market, that we slowly drive them out of the market so that you get high-quality and affordable student housing.” – Hanze University.

In terms of problems on the housing market, Groningen is known for their big share in slumlords and the private market. It is in fact one of the cities in the Netherlands with the largest share of these slumlords on the entire housing market. Lind & Blomé (2012) mention that due to long-term mismanagement of the housing market, tenants tend to stay in higher rent and lower quality houses and rooms. Mainly through a combination of three factors: rents were paid by different forms of welfare payment, lack of alternatives because of queues

to other areas and the advantage tenants see in the 'no-question' asked policy that some slumlords follow. In the case of Groningen the lack of student housing or appropriate alternatives, resulted in the rise of the private market. Slumlords could step in and offer students high rents combined with poorly maintained housing. International students are at risk of ending up at these bottom part of the housing market since they need to find a place instantly upon arrival.

Power imbalances in decision-making process

Student housing provision is a very complex situation with many different stakeholders, which have different degrees of power. These differences were mainly found in knowledge, resources and capital. Powerful stakeholders are the municipality, educational institutions and the two biggest housing corporations: Lefier and Nijestee. They have a more powerful and influential position opposed to other stakeholders due to their resources, financial means or knowledge about the topic. Furthermore, restriction due to rights was also present in the process. These power imbalances can vary per stakeholder contra other stakeholders.

In general, the municipality Groningen is in the lead of the entire project. Since everything happens in their city, they determine what needs to be done in this local cooperation process. They are in the end responsible for the made decisions and eventually the outcome.

When the short-term housing is taken into consideration, parties like educational institutions are in control, whereas the long-term or structural housing the corporations are more in the lead. Showing that time is also an important aspect of the power spectrum. This allocation of power changes when the subject of time changes from short to long-term planning of housing and vice versa. Stakeholders that have their primary interest in peak housing also agree that they have more influence in these decisions:

"Not everybody has the same influence, but it is of course that who pays, also determines. When it is about peak housing, that is what the Hanze, RUG and municipality pay for. It is nice that the corporations have an opinion about this, that helps, but ultimately we have to pay so we decide that with the three of us". – Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

Stakeholders organizing the peak housing are provided with support, advice and opinions of stakeholders in the lead for structural housing and vice versa. Knowledge is a minor influence in the power differences, in particular from a student organization perspective who are new in these discussions and are not experienced yet on this stage. Besides knowledge, rights have a minor impact as well. In particular visible in the rights of the student organizations. Both represent the interest of students, however, the GSB does this more in general and politically. They express their opinions and views freely, whereas the ESN represent international students' interests and are closely related to the educational instances. Therefore, they have less knowledge about the whole problem and cannot say everything they want because they are not allowed by the institutions. So, as every stakeholder has its role and task there are

definitely differences in knowledge and rights, however these do not form the biggest power imbalance. Nonetheless, it does connect with resources and capital. Without the necessary knowledge, organizations or corporations are not able to optimal use their resources and capital. Since they do have all of these above, they become more powerful:

“When we disagree about the expansion of units, increasing the supply. Then we are still able to say that I disagree, I see that differently, so I’m not going to build additional student units. As a corporation it is good to indicate what risks you see when an oversupply occurs”. – Lefier.

This is a strategy of non-cooperation that powerful stakeholders can adopt. By withdrawing their resources they put pressure on other stakeholders in the decision-making process (Bridoux & Vishwanathan, 2018). Since Lefier and Nijestee are building corporations with a large market share and significant financial means, whereas de Huismeesters and SSH are managing corporations and fulfil more of an advising role in the covenant. They do not build new accommodation and are relatively smaller corporations focused on quality. Therefore, all parties are dependent on Lefier and Nijestee to increase structural housing for the long term, whereby they increase power and create imbalances.

Stakeholder empowerment and engagement

In this case with various different stakeholders, roles and groups, it is important that there is a satisfying engagement of all stakeholders in the planning process. This entails that not only the powerful stakeholders with more resources, capital or knowledge abuse their influence on the decision-making and planning process. Empowerment of the weaker stakeholders, which are the students and student organizations, is imperative in order to achieve the goals that were set on beforehand. These national and international students are the target group and without any knowledge about them it is not possible to reach long-term satisfying goals. This empowerment of the student group has started with the covenant. Through this agreement the students, who are represented by the student organizations, are included and involved more than they were before. Instead of only receiving information, they are now part of the planning and decision-making process. The student organizations are directly at the table where they get information, are able to interfere and discuss with other stakeholders about the issues. Therefore, it is more likely that preferences of students are taken into account while planning for student housing provision. Students can always contact these organizations about their problems related to housing:

“We can show the role of the students, their problems and needs. We have meetings in which we discuss what students need. Our role is to look at the quality: fairness of prices and honesty of landlords and their housing provision. We now have a rental committee for that. So actually we are more of a controlling body. When we notice something, we also mention that at the table if we could do something about this together.” – Groninger Student Union.

This shows that the students, as a weaker stakeholder that is represented by the student organization, have gained more influence through empowerment and this can also be seen in their engagement and eventually in the planning process. This stakeholder engagement is also the result of the balance between control and trust among the participants. Das & Teng (2001) mention that trust and control are interlinked in multiple ways. Control can have either a negative or positive impact on trust. Formal control, behavioral and output control, undermines trust and results in an atmosphere of mistrust. On the other hand there is social control that influences people's behavior by creating shared goals and norms, which result in mutual understanding and thus trust-breeding. The latter form of control is experienced in the process and decision-making in student housing provision. Consequently, this shared control can be interpreted as social control in which the main goal of the project is for every stakeholder the same. Doloi (2009) also found three major factors for relational partnership success: trust and confidence, communication and joint risk management. Communication was identified as the single most influencing factor impacting on this success, trust and confidence were determined as mutually inclusive for effective communication and having a direct impact on the joint risk management. These theories are in line with the experiences between the stakeholders in the covenant:

“Communication is the key to cooperation and success. That is everywhere and especially quickly communicating works really good. That is also what we have achieved in the covenant, I think. Everyone realizes that good communication is crucial and that helps enormously when you all emit and send the same message.” – Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

By meeting and discussing structurally on a six week notice about plans, ideas and progress all stakeholders are up-to-date of what others are doing. Therefore, the planning process is by many stakeholders perceived as transparent, as well as that there is mutual trust and a sense of control among all stakeholders. This arises through the meetings and consultation moments. This once again shows that communication leads to trust, which is one of the most important constructs for a good and successful cooperation between stakeholders (Crane, 2008). Stakeholders are relatively close and strings are short, contributing to quick communication and smooth progress. This strengthens stakeholder engagement, which was high by all stakeholders throughout the planning process.

Discussion

This paper describes the student housing scene of Groningen, as well as the stakeholder participation in the planning processes. By comparing and linking the main findings and results to the theoretical and conceptual framework to the works of Arnstein (1969) and the updated version of Rau et al (2012), a clear distinction between the stakeholder can be deduced from the results. The GSB, ESN, SSH and de Huismeesters are bound to advice and providing information, hence that they are part of the consultation level. Noticeable is that the two

student organization, and thus students, went up a level on the scale of Rau et al. (2012) through empowerment from information to consultation with their presence in the covenant. The other stakeholders, like Hanze, RUG, Lefier and Nijestee have more power and thus influence in the ultimate decision-making. Therefore, they belong to the level of cooperation. As the process owner, the municipality can be either placed on the level of delegation or cooperation. Since they are in the lead and delegate responsibility, but at the same time most of the decision are made together through cooperation. However, since the municipality has the highest responsibility, they belong to the highest level in this participation scale.

The stakeholder power analysis tool of Mayers (2005) confirms the outcome of stakeholder empowerment and breaks it down even further with distinctions between power and potential and categorization between high and low. The only stakeholder with both low potential and power would be the ESN due to their lack of resources and capital, as well as lesser knowledge and rights. The GSB, SSH and Huismeesters also lack the resources and capital, but do have plenty knowledge and rights to be involved and secure interests of the parties they represent, therefore belonging to the category with low power and high potential. The municipality, Hanze, RUG, Lefier and Nijestee are located in the high / high category. Every one of these stakeholders has the power to influence policies or institutions and the potential to contribute and achieve a particular objective. They are essential and indispensable to the planning process and decision-making due to their knowledge and experience in their own fields and the resources and capital that they invest in the project. Therefore, these stakeholders have the largest influence on student housing provision in Groningen.

Limitations in the theories were in the absence of time. Even though many projects with stakeholder participation have multiple goals related to time, there is no theory where the influence of time on power or stakeholder participation is explained or included. As were seen in this paper, time has a reasonably large impact on the level of power and stakeholder participation. Short-term and long-term goals are present in many of these large planning processes and completely changes the spectrum of power and influence throughout stakeholder participation processes.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this research aimed to answer the following research question: "To what extent have the various stakeholders influenced the planning process of student housing provision in Groningen?". By linking the main findings of this qualitative research to theory, an answer can be provided on this question.

The lack of adequate student housing in Groningen led to some major problems from a student perspective. This shortage has been filled in by the private market and slumlords, delivering poorly maintained accommodation with rents that were too high. To combat this,

the youth and student housing covenant BouwJong 2.0 came into existence in 2018. Since this agreement and cooperation, wherein nine stakeholders participate, there is already a lot of new student housing delivered. Restructuring has been used to meet qualitative demands, whereas new construction in the form of large flats and towers tries to meet the quantitative number. The new student housing is in particular aimed at the neighborhoods that have fewer students living in it. Otherwise the share of students would become too large, disturbing the balance between them and the other inhabitants what could result in conflicts due to the clashing lifestyles.

In terms of the planning process and stakeholder engagement, leading to the influence of stakeholders in the planning process, it can be said that every stakeholder has a significant influence, yet in different ways and roles. Even though that the student organizations of ESN and GSB gained power through stakeholder empowerment and are part of the consultation level, together with the SSH and de Huismeesters, they do not have the same power as other stakeholders. The most power, potential and, in the end, influence on the planning process were at the municipality, educational instances and the building housing corporations: Lefier and Nijestee. These stakeholders are at a higher level of cooperation, because of their knowledge, resources and capital. The municipality can be considered as the highest level: delegation. They delegate responsibilities and are in the lead of the entire planning process.

Reflection

One of the main strengths of the study was the methodology. Since, the covenant provided an overview of important stakeholders in the matter of student housing in Groningen. By interviewing them about the same agreement and cooperation, there was a clear outlining and interviews could be specific and detailed. On the other hand this also formed a drawback, since the stakeholders already discussed together they were on the same page and the possible different views present in the beginning were narrowed. Another weakness of this study is the interference of the Coronavirus. Due to this pandemic, the process of housing provision became slow and confusing as a result of uncertainty. This uncertainty has affected the planning process of this year and raises many questions for the upcoming years.

Recommendations for future research can be broadening the scope of the view outside agreements. In this case that would be the actors on the private market or smaller housing corporations outside the covenant. The negative impact of a disaster, like the Coronavirus, on a planning and stakeholder process could also be studied more.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

Openingsvragen:

- Heeft u in Groningen gestudeerd en bent u hier nog steeds woonachtig?
- Wat zijn uw ervaringen met het huizentekort onder studenten in Groningen?

Hoofdvragen:

Hoe wordt samenwerking en deelname aan het planningsproces ervaren door de verschillende stakeholders?

- Wat is jullie rol in het planningsproces en de besluitvorming?
- Op welke manier worden de belangen van jongeren en studenten door jullie meegenomen in het planningsproces en besluitvorming?
 - Zijn er verschillen tussen Nederlandse en internationale studenten?
- Hoe ervaren jullie het planningsproces en samenwerking met de gemeente en de andere stakeholders?
 - Is het een transparant proces voor jullie waar je weet wat andere stakeholders willen en doen?
 - Is het een proces van vertrouwen waarin jullie er van uitgaan dat iedereen de taken op een goede manier uitvoert?
- Wat is jullie relatie en samenwerking met de andere onderwijsinstelling?
 - Is de input van beide onderwijsinstellingen gelijk of is hier een verschil in?
- Merken jullie verschillen in de manier dat de gemeente met jullie omgaat als je dit vergelijkt met andere stakeholders?

Wat zijn de verschillen in bedoelingen en ideeën van de stakeholders in dit onderwerp?

- Wat zijn de verschillende doelen en belangen van jullie en andere stakeholders in dit project?
- Op welke vlakken zijn de verschillende stakeholders het eens?
- Welke onderwerpen zijn punten van discussie tijdens overleg?

Wat zijn de verschillen in ‘power and knowledge’ van de stakeholders in studentenhuisvesting Groningen?

- Wanneer wordt er iets in het planningsproces besloten over een onderwerp?
- Hoe belangrijk is jullie woord en mening in de besluitvorming over locaties en aantallen studentenhuisen?
 - Waarom is dat zo? Kennis/Macht/Vermogen/Reputatie etc.
- Hebben jullie het idee dat de onderwijsinstellingen controle hebben over het planningsproces en de uiteindelijke besluitvorming?

Sluitingsvragen:

- Hoe gaat de toekomst van Groningen eruit zien wat betreft het huizenaantal en compositie?
- Is er nog iets wat u wilt toevoegen aan dit interview?

Appendix B: Data analysis code tree

