CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN MEGA-EVENTS

EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Case study: Floriade 2022 Almere

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Abstract: This paper tries to answer the question: *"What are the prospects for citizen participation during the pre-phase of mega-events based on the experiences of local government employees?"* The question was answered by the case study of the Floriade 2022 in Almere which is currently in development. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with local government employees working for either the municipality of Almere or Floriade BV. All six interviewees were involved in citizen participation to different degrees. In the paper, the forms of citizen participation implemented in the development of the Floriade as well as motives for choosing these forms are discussed. Furthermore, based on the results it can be concluded that lessons for the future of citizen participation in mega-events can be derived from the experiences of local government employees. These lessons consist of working from existing structures in society to involve residents with a constituency, as well as formulating clear aims and targets relating to what to expect from participation at what stage of the process.

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Figure title page: visualisation Floriade area (MVRDV, 2021)

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Introduction

Mega-events are high profile events generally thought of and presented as generating economic growth and benefitting society. They are also known to make significant changes to the physical and social environment of the hosting city through urban development and regeneration (Hiller, 2000). However, whether the many benefits generated from hosting mega-events actually take place is debatable. Aspects relating to urban planning during mega-events, such as the building of stadiums, require a top-down planning approach. Consequently, the needs of the city's residents then have a chance to be overlooked as top-down approaches often do not provide a base for participation processes (Hiller, 2000).

More recent research shows that citizen participation is often considered a crucial element in urban planning as it provides the opportunity for a more democratic urban governance (Wamsler et al., 2019). In the organisation of mega-events, this is also a more current phenomenon. Research on both urban planning and mega-events shows that citizen participation has many positive benefits, such as creating local support, ensuring transparency as well as preventing citizen alienation from the event (Ermolaeva, 2014; Garcia, 2008; Garcia, 2012). According to Leonardsen (2007), citizen participation should be crucial in mega-events as these often use public money and therefore ordinary taxpayers have the right to be involved in the decision making process. Although it is argued that citizen participation in mega-events should be a high priority, in reality, its implementation remains limited due to institutional and governmental norms, limited time for construction causing pressure, as well as people's attitudes, behaviour and routines (Ermolaeva, 2014). Thus, despite citizen participation being considered as crucial in urban planning, the implementation of citizen participation in practice is not as widely adopted and a positive outcome is not as straightforward as it could be.

An interesting perspective to investigate possible explanations for limited citizen participation in mega-events is the perspective of local government employees. The subjectiveness of government employees in urban planning is known to influence their approach and how they make decisions. Although citizen participation knows a vast amount of literature, research often misses the chance to address the personal sphere of government employees that work with it (Wamsler et al., 2019). This causes a knowledge deficit on how to support government employees in dealing with complex planning approaches, such as citizen participation. It can be suggested that this is the case in mega-events as previous research shows that participation remains limited here as well (Ermolaeva, 2014). Thus, filling this gap in knowledge about the experiences of the government employees with citizen participation in mega-events will be relevant to find out what challenges they have to face when implementing citizen participation into the planning process. Through the investigation of local government employees' experiences, it is possible to say something about the prospects for citizen participation in mega-events. By these prospects are meant lessons for citizen participation in the near future of organising mega-events. These lessons are expected to be derived from the challenges and possibilities experienced by local government employees during current mega-events. Consequently, by creating a better understanding of these prospects a more efficient and supportive way for implementation of citizen participation in the future could be derived from the possible explanations that proceed from this research. This can be considered as of societal relevance since, as mentioned earlier, effective implementation of citizen participation could contribute to optimisation of the positive impact a mega-event has on the host city.

Research questions

Considering the above mentioned, the following main research question is proposed:

"What are the prospects for citizen participation during the pre-phase of mega-events based on the experiences of local government employees?"

To help to answer the main research question four sub-questions were formulated:

1) What forms of citizen participation are implemented in the development phase of the mega-event?
2) What are the current motives for involving citizens?
3) What factors affect local government employees' experiences of citizen participation?
4) What lessons for future citizen participation in mega-events can be derived from the local government employees' experiences?

Theoretical framework

Motives behind implementing citizen participation

Spectrum of spatial planning

A theory that is useful for understanding the need to implement citizen participation is provided by De Roo and Voogd (2019). They argue that within planning theory two rationales can be found: the technical rationale and the communicative rationale. The technical rationale embodies a world in which the focus is primarily object-oriented and on facts from exact sciences. In relation to planning, this results in interventions from which the outcomes are highly predictable. Planning according to the technical rationale often happens through a top-down approach. De Roo and Voogd (2019) explain this approach as traditional within the field of planning and for some time this was considered as the only existing approach. However, in reality, there is often a degree of uncertainty that asks for a different approach.

According to Inch (2015), a 'communicative turn' was the result of a need for more inclusive forms of planning and resulted in a more people-centred form of governance. This is emphasized by Groot et al. (2018) who indicate that this 'turn' led to a new planning philosophy called radical incrementalism. This shift means that governments rather set wider and larger scale goals instead of implementing blueprints of policy. Through trial and error governments collaborate with society to implement policies. De Roo and Voogd (2019) explain this communicative approach as a reasoning that is able to deal with complexity and uncertainty. Therefore, it is argued that "... the more uncertain a situation becomes the less useful facts are (...). The desire to interact with each other and to share intersubjective reasoning increases." (De Roo & Voogd, 2019, p.25). Through the sharing of opinions and ideas, people create an understanding of the situation and are able to create agreements. Thus, the communicative rationale is a means to empower stakeholders and citizens but also as a way to cope with uncertainty. De Roo and Voogd (2019) mentioned that it is important to realize that between the two rationales there lies a spectrum of planning with all different situations that differ in degree of certainty and therefore ask for different approaches.

Existing perceptions

Considering the existing perceptions on citizen participation, the vast amount of literature on this topic shows a contradicting picture. This section will only discuss a few pieces of literature. Wang (2001) shows a rather positive picture of citizen participation. This research explains that citizen participation is necessary to reach satisfaction of public needs, public trust and consensus-building. It is also argued that citizen involvement in local government can help to gain support for governmental decisions and goals.

However, Silverman et al. (2020) found, while investigating citizen perceptions, that the access citizens have to urban planning is continuing to be limited. Ferreira et al. (2020) also emphasize this aspect and argue that this limited access results in an outcome where the citizens' needs are not prioritized. Citizens experienced that most of the time they were only involved and notified at a stage where the plans were already finalized (Ferreira et al., 2020). Besides this, they felt like the involvement of citizens was only implemented as a matter of form to satisfy the minimum requirements of citizen participation. This leads to dissatisfaction and disempowerment of citizens but also the breaking of promises by planners and the government. Ferreira et al. (2020) argue that despite citizen participation is promising, it is rarely adopted as it often slows down the process if there is a lack of consensus through different interests.

Forms of citizen participation

A theory that will be helpful to assess different forms of citizen participation is the Ladder of Citizen Participation developed by Arnstein in 1969 (Figure 1). This is a typology, consisting of eight levels of citizen participation which helps to analyze the level of involvement and the power of citizens in planning projects (Arnstein, 1969). As mentioned by Arnstein, in reality, these levels might not be as clear-cut and the topology does not offer roadblocks to achieve actual citizen participation. It does show the relationship between the citizens and the decision-making process. Above all, Arnstein argues that public participation is often an empty ritual. The typology shows how these levels are shaped by different tools of participatory planning and can be related to political interest (Legacy, 2016). However, one could argue, since the topology does not provide a means to evaluate the different levels, it seems that Arnstein implies that the greater the level of participation and empowerment the better (Berner et al., 2011). This implication can be treated as unsatisfactory as higher levels of citizen participation are not always possible or desired. Nevertheless, as the topology provides a clear overview of different degrees of citizen involvement, it is still considered as suitable for this research.

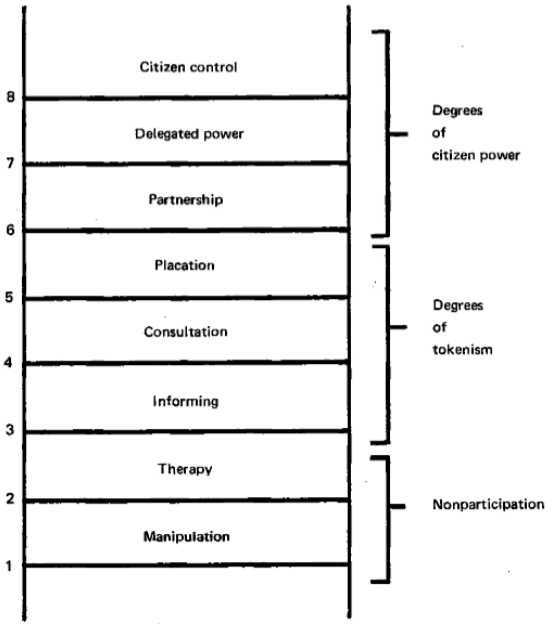

Figure 1 Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Conceptual model

Figure 2 gives a visual representation of how the different concepts relate to each other. In the centre of the model, the prospects of citizen participation in mega-events are placed. In this research three concepts are expected to provide lessons for the future of citizen participation in mega-events. The first concept can be described as reasoning or motives behind the implementation of citizen participation. The second concept in this research is the experiences of local government employees with citizens and the third concept is the form or type of citizen participation. Finally, the interrelation between these three concepts will enable drawing conclusions on and lessons for the possible challenges and opportunities that are expected to take place in the future of organising mega-events, and thus its prospects. It is recognized that more concepts could exist which influence prospects for citizen participation in mega-events. However, to keep this research's scope relatively compact, it was decided to focus on the three concepts visualised in Figure 2.

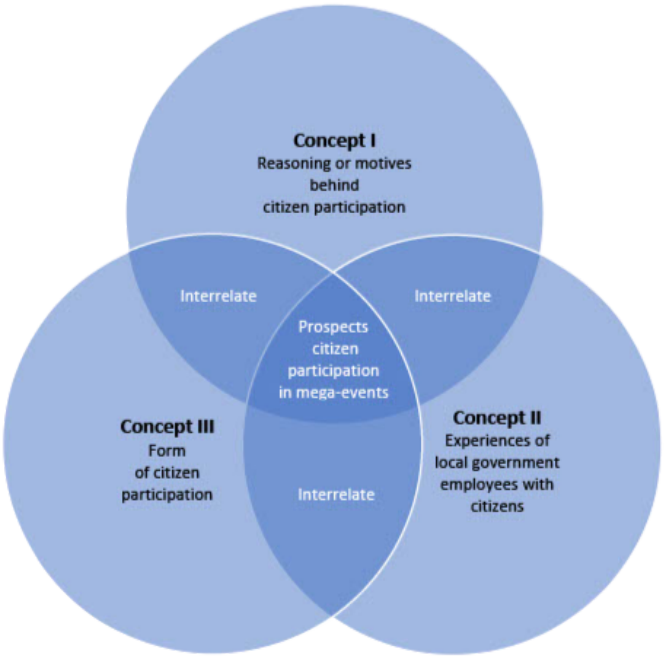

Figure 2. Conceptual model (Author's design, 2021)

Methodology

Case study

For this research, a case study method was used to answer the research questions. The case functioned as an explanatory tool for researching a contemporary and real-life situation. This was beneficial as it allowed for an in-depth investigation of a specific context. The case used in this research is the Floriade 2022 in Almere. This is a mega-event in the form of an international horticultural exposition and will be open for visitors for six months in 2022. After the event, a new urban neighbourhood will remain. From 2012 onwards the municipality has been working on the organisation of the event. Currently, the event area is being developed according to the earlier established plans. The Floriade 2022 in Almere was chosen as a case since the event was, and still is, very much presented as a tool for Almere to boost growth and the image of the city while improving the quality of life for its citizens (Duivesteijn, 2012). Furthermore, from policy documents it became apparent that the

residents of Almere should be involved in the process of the event since in these documents, the principle 'people make the city' was stated as important (William McDonough + Parents, n.d). However, two citizen panels (Citisens, 2017; Citisens, 2019) indicated that the majority of Almere's citizens have a negative attitude towards hosting the Floriade in 2022. This negative attitude mainly arises from concerns about the event costing too much money but also relating to the citizen's interests not being reflected enough in the Floriade (Citisens, 2017). This makes the Floriade an interesting case as, despite the involvement of residents being framed as important, the residents still have a rather negative perception of the event. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent Almere's citizens are involved in the developing and realisation phase of the event. Thus, it could be implied that citizen participation plays a role in the Floriade, however, this role is not fully optimized.

Data collection and analysation

As the central aim for this research was to collect experiences on citizen participation, primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This method of interviewing gave the interviewees the opportunity to further elaborate on topics they deem important while at the same time allowed collection of the data on pre-defined key aspects. This was a valuable process that prevented important aspects from being overlooked. The interview guide used during the interviews can be found in Appendix A. A total of six semi-structured interviews were conducted with local government employees about their experiences with citizen participation. After conducting the six interviews saturation was reached meaning no further interviews were necessary. The six local government employees that participated in this research work on different levels within the development of the Floriade and are involved in citizen participation. This means that the interviewees adhere to the research requirements: 1) should be employed in either the local government of Almere or the private company Floriade (Floriade BV) and 2) should be involved in either decision making on citizen participation or work with citizen participation in practice. For this research, it was decided to not interview residents of Almere as local government employees were expected to have more knowledge relating to the interview questions. The six interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling. This meant that the first three potential interviewees were approached through Linkedin. These people indicated in their online profiles to be working for the Floriade BV and were therefore selected to start the snowball sampling. From these three people, email addresses for other potential interviewees, also within the municipality of Almere, were derived. Consequently, multiple emails were sent to find suitable candidates. Each potential interviewee was asked if they knew other potential candidates.

Considering the current context, interviews were conducted through (video) calling during week 14 to 18. With the permission of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded. Interviews were held in Dutch, thus during transcribing the interviews, they were directly translated to English by the researcher. It is important to take into account that through translating the transcriptions the collected data can lose contextual aspects. However, taking into account the researcher's experience in the English language, translation of the transcripts was done as truthfully as was possible.

For analysing the interview results a deductive coding tree was established based on concepts, literature and interview questions (Appendix B). However, inductive coding appeared to be preferred after the adaptation of the research questions. Therefore, the deductive coding tree was used as a guide for inductive coding and the creation of a codebook (Appendix C). Atlas.ti was used to code the interview results according to the codebook. This process increased the reliability as well as the validity of the research as it enabled analysation of the results in a consistent manner. After coding, the results were analyzed to answer the research questions.

When reflecting on the collected data, it was relevant to take into account that interviewees 4 and 6 were sharing experiences from diverging viewpoints in comparison to the other interviewees. This meant that they provided insights from within a certain position that was either very specific (interviewee 4) or very generalistic (interviewee 6). However, as their experiences still provided the researcher with valuable insights it was decided to also keep the findings of these interviews as part of the results.

Ethical considerations

Before conducting the interviews it was deemed important to consider if this research is ethically justified. Recognising the nature of this research, interview results might contain sensitive information creating the opportunity for tensions and possibly harming the actors involved in the research. To prevent this from happening data was treated carefully. The recorded data was safely stored individually on a device protected with a password. All interviewees were anonymised and personal details were left out. This was done by taking out all names and specific functions of employment. If the interviewees feel uncomfortable with using their data after the interview, they have a right to deny permission to the researcher to use the collected data as was stated in the provided consent form (Appendix D). The informed consent form asked for permission to record the interview for transcription as well as it stated the interviewees' rights. Before the interviews, the consent form was sent to the interviewees via email and should have been read and agreed upon before the interview. The interviewee could agree to the consent form by either verbal expression during the interview or written agreement via email or through signing the form. To ensure that this happened, the consent form was shortly discussed at the start of each interview. The consent form was signed by the researcher as a mutual agreement. The interview results were only used for this research and were not shared for other external purposes. Answers were not modified and the researcher adhered to what was promised to the interviewee and what is stated in this paper. Once the data was used, all raw files were removed from all devices.

Results

Table 1 provides an overview of the interviewees' jobs, in which organisation they are employed and to what degree they are involved in citizen participation. The organisation of the Floriade consists of two entities: the municipality of Almere and the Floriade BV. The municipality of Almere is, among others, responsible for creating the road to the Floriade, also known as the making-of, as well as for the area development of the event terrain as defined in the master plan (interviewee 1; interviewee 2). After the finalisation of the master plan, it was chosen to create the Floriade BV, which is responsible for the actual organisation of the event. This includes: inviting countries to collaborate, inviting exhibitors, creating the attractions and launching the Floriade brand (interviewee 1). However, the Floriade BV and the municipality work closely together (interviewee3; interviewee 5). Table 2 presents the reader an overview of the main interview results. The table shows statements that were derived from the interviews and for each interviewee, it is specified how many times they mentioned this statement during the interview.

Table 1 Overview of research interviewees (Author, 2021)

Interviewee number	Job title	Organisation	Involvement in citizen participation
Interviewee 1	Communication advisor	Municipality of Almere	High*
Interviewee 2	Program manager	Municipality of Almere	High
Interviewee 3	Program secretary	Municipality of Almere	Moderate**
Interviewee 4	Initiator Floriade Academy	Floriade BV.	Low ***
Interviewee 5	Project manager communication	Floriade BV.	Moderate
Interviewee 6	Council advisor of the Registry	Municipality of Almere	Low

** High = being involved in the organisation of citizen participation, contact with actors, leading role during participation process*

*** Moderate = present during participation process*

**** Low = aware of participation process, involved but positioned on the sideline*

Table 2 Overview of interview results (Author, 2021)

	Interviewee number						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Statements	**Times mentioned during interview**						**Total**
Informing residents is an important aspect of mega-events	3	1	2	-	-	-	**6**
Collecting knowledge is an important motive for citizen participation	-	1	1	-	2	-	**4**
Consulting and co-deciding is important as residents should profit from the mega-event	3	-	1	-	1	-	**5**
The Almere principles are an important motive for citizen participation	1	1	-	-	-	-	**2**
Citizen participation leads to better results and decisions	-	-	1	-	-	1	**2**
I experience a power boost through citizen participation	1	-	-	4	1	-	**6**
I experience demotivation through citizen participation	1	-	-	-	1	-	**2**
I experience the creation of a we-feeling, engagement and support because of citizen participation	5	1	1	-	1	-	**8**
I experience tensions due to high residents' expectations	2	1	1	-	2	1	**7**
I experience the spreading of positivity surrounding the event because of citizen participation	-	1	-	1	-	-	**2**
10 year process of the mega-event is a challenge for citizen participation	-	-	1	-	-		**1**

The time pressure and strict deadlines during mega-events are a challenge for citizen participation	1	-	3	-	-	1	**5**
Clarity is often lacking in citizen participation	4	2	3	-	5	1	**15**
Involving diverse population groups in citizen participation is challenging	2	1	1	-	-	-	**4**
I would like clear targets for citizen participation	-	-	-	-	4	-	**4**
I would like to use existing structures	1	2	1	-	-	-	**4**
I would like to involve residents with a constituency	1	-	-	-	2	-	**3**

Forms of citizen participation in the Floriade

Informing, consulting and co-deciding

From the municipality side, it became clear that informing residents is often seen as a first step that needs to be made (interviewee 1; interviewee 2; interviewee 3). Examples of ways to inform residents were the publishing of a regular newspaper, gatherings for all residents in the city's theatre and separate neighbourhood meetings for neighbourhoods adjacent to the Floriade terrain (interviewee 5). Furthermore, consulting and co-deciding also takes place. Four focus groups were created: the general focus group, the inclusiveness focus group, the mobility focus group and the reside focus group. These focus groups consist of residents from Almere who are either experts in a particular field or living in one of the adjacent neighbourhoods. Worth mentioning is the movement in the city which runs parallel to the theme of 'Growing Green Cities' and is initiated by the municipality as part of the making-of. This movement consists of multiple activities for the citizens in order to make them aware of the relevance of 'Growing Green Cities' or what they can do themselves to contribute to it (interviewee 2; interviewee 5).

Considering the role of the Floriade BV, employees of this organisation are present during neighbourhood and/or focus group meetings. Furthermore, the Floriade BV also has its own initiatives, however, these relate to creating job opportunities, networking and engaging in dialogues about United Nations targets (interviewee 5). The Floriade BV also created the Floriade Academy. This initiative of the Floriade BV is meant to involve young talent from the region through internships, projects and assignments. By collaborating with study programmes youngsters get the chance to gain practical experience in the broad play-field that a mega-event has to offer while simultaneously the organisation of the Floriade is strengthened (interviewee 4).

Intentions and motives behind citizen participation

Almere principles and core values

In 2015 the city council finalised the execution policy for the Floriade, which resulted in the masterplan. One of their starting points for organising the event was that there should be a large degree of citizen participation. However, how this exactly needed to be realised was not formulated (interviewee 6). This was also emphasized by interviewee 1 who explained:

> "...we were going to (...) ask the people something. But we didn't know what the aim was. Yes, participation. But we didn't really know what that meant. So that is pretty complicated." (interviewee 1).

On the other hand, it was also argued that the Almere principle 'people make the city' played a role in why the council decided to give citizen participation such a prominent position in the development of the event. Even despite what it would mean.

> "You can think whatever you want as a government, but if you say 'people make the city', then you need to talk with them. Then you have to participate with them, then you have to start listening, then you have to implement and then you have to let them decide. That is simply what you imposed on yourself." (interviewee 1).

Informing and collecting knowledge

Besides the Almere principles and the framework provided by the city council, a motive for involving residents was to inform. According to interviewee 1, it was found out after 4 years that many residents did not know what the Floriade exactly was. Interviewee 2 also explained that often from within the municipality it was expected that residents in Almere were well informed about the Floriade. However, when this appeared to not be the case, initiatives were set up to inform the residents about the Floriade and to make them more aware of its message.

Nonetheless, this was not only done in order to share information, it was also about collecting information from the residents themselves. Interviewee 5 explains that residents can be seen as experts of their own living environment and that they provide them with knowledge the local government employees cannot experience themselves. Therefore, it is very useful to collect their experiences and concerns.

Floriade is for the city and its residents

A reason why collecting information from residents is experienced as important is because the government employees "...hope that the people will profit from it *(the Floriade)* (...) what would make them proud if we talk about the Floriade in two years?" (interviewee 1). Interviewee 5 explained it as the following:

> "...building (...) and realising an Expo means something. It means that things will be changing. You do it for something, for an advantage, but the thing itself can be a disadvantage for the entrepreneur or for residents. (...) it is also really good to involve the opinion of the residents, or the expert I would say, (...). How does a resident experience what will happen when there will be stores or not in the urban neighbourhood?" (Interviewee 5).

Also, interviewee 3 explains that the Floriade is held in order for the city and the residents to profit from it, which makes it important to involve the residents and let them think along about how to establish this. Thus, this results in more attention being paid to aspects that residents find important (interviewee 5). Furthermore, it was also indicated that "citizen participation contributes to better results and better decisions" (interviewee 6). This is the case as, through investing in a dialogue, an overview of all interests can be formulated, which enables the government to balance all advantages and disadvantages and to make a well-informed tradeoff.

'We' did this

Next to this, citizen participation also intended to create a 'we-feeling'. As mentioned by interviewee 1: "Informing, consulting, and decision making on some aspects. But the creation of the 'we-feeling' works so much better than 'them from the municipality'". This creation of the 'we-feeling' also relates to the experience of the interviewees that citizen participation contributes to the engagement and support for the event among the residents of Almere (interviewee 2; interviewee 3; interviewee 5). Interviewee 5 emphasises that more engagement arises when people are involved in the Floriade "as they become part of it" (interviewee 5).

> "It is very simple, (...) I think it is just as important that the people that live here, and grow up here and do their things here, say 'we did a good job together'. You know? And not only the people in the city hall, but we did it together. I removed a tile from my garden and replaced it with a plant because I am convinced it will contribute to the improvement of the world. I didn't buy a dirty scooter, but an electric scooter because I think it is better. And that is what I hope to achieve with each other." (interviewee 1).

<u>Experiences of citizen participation and improvements</u>

Power boost and demotivation

Overall, the interviewees experienced citizen participation activities as pleasant. Residents that participated were rather positive and sometimes their ideas and input gave the local government employees energy and made them ambitious (interviewee 1; interviewee 2; interviewee 4). Interviewee 5 as well indicates that during meetings there was no negative atmosphere or rebellion. Contrarily, "people can also really complain. Like really complaining. It makes you think 'how can you come up with this?' (...) sometimes this is an enormous cause for demotivation" as explained by interviewee 1. This feeling was often linked to the experience that citizen participation created high expectations among the partaking residents.

> "...it sometimes creates expectations that are absolutely impossible to realise. Also from the participants' side there is expected that, because you partake, all your requests will be satisfied. So then a 'no', firstly, it is not always clearly given as an answer, and secondly, the 'no' is difficult to accept. 'We are already participating for so many years, so I am right to expect this…', 'no, sorry'." (interviewee 2).

Interviewee 5 emphasises this by indicating that dealing with these situations demands explanation and preparation which costs a lot of time and energy and is experienced as a pity.

Spreading positivity

A frequently mentioned aspect is that citizen participation was experienced to contribute to high community involvement and the building of local support for the event through the spreading of positive experiences (interviewee 2; interviewee 4). For example, interviewee 4 experienced how youngsters who partake in the Floriade Academy "show to their environment that it is not only negative but that it also brings positive things" (interviewee 4). Especially the negative media attention was mentioned as an issue where citizen participation can function as a counteract.

> "...when you listen to the media you actually only hear the worrisome stories (...). And the public actually only reads about financial holes and the enormous risks for the city. But if you

> start a dialogue you will talk about a lot more aspects. Which makes it easier to see what the bigger meaning is of such an event for your city." (interviewee 2).

Time pressure and deadlines

An aspect that caused a limited implementation of citizen participation was the high time pressure and the strict deadlines in the beginning phase of the development of the Floriade. This meant that especially in the spatial development it was experienced as very difficult to involve residents and thus this happened in a very limited way (interviewee 1; interviewee 3; interviewee 6).

> "...from the council's perspective, it was experienced as a pity that the project was behind schedule all the time which caused that participation didn't take place at moments that matter the most. Because all important decisions about spatial development were already made before the focus groups were created. The development plan was already fixed, the destination plan was already fixed, so actually, all the things that you would want to have influence on as a resident were already there." (interviewee 6).

Involving diverse population groups

A challenge that was mentioned multiple times by the interviewees was the difficulty of involving certain population groups to participate in the Floriade. First, the involvement of young people, especially in the 'making-of', was not experienced as successful as this remained limited (interviewee 2; interviewee 3). Second, reaching and involving residents with different ethnicities appeared to be challenging as well (interviewee 1; interviewee 3).

> "The angry white man will come forward, the boomers, the angry white woman will come forward and also the interested white man or woman can be involved. But more than half of the people in Almere have an ethnic background. It is really difficult to get them involved if they come from a group like that, from a culture, or background. And I think that is really unfortunate, I would like to participate even more. But you can't reach everyone." (interviewee 1).

When asked how this could have been approached differently both interviewees 1 and 2 indicated that they would have wanted to work more with already existing structures such as schools, sports clubs and religious communities. By doing this, focus groups would potentially contain more representatives with a constituency instead of (resident) experts without a constituency (interviewee 5). This would, according to interviewee 5, potentially contribute to the further spreading of local support for the event. Another approach that was referred to by interviewee 1 is to conduct more research on how to reach and involve people with different ethnicities or people coming from younger population groups.

Clear targets are needed

Finally, an aspect that appeared to be important was the lack of clarity about what is expected of citizen participation in which phase of the process. In an early phase of the development of the Floriade, citizen participation was formulated as something that needed to play a significant role. However, it was not determined how this exactly should be realised. Interviewee 1 explained, "we had the participation policy note, we had the core values, but how do we apply this to a large project?". The city council had created a guiding framework but the municipality had no experience with implementing citizen participation in such a large project (interviewee 1). This meant that it was, and still is, unclear when the citizen participation is done or when it has succeeded. According to

interviewee 1, council members or civil servants tend to prefer working on something with a clear start and a clear end. Thus, citizen participation in this context was experienced as “a little scary” (interviewee 1). Likewise, in the current stage of the development of the Floriade, the unclearness led to difficulties.

> “Now, (...), I feel that this is the moment that it is unsure what we still have to offer each other. If we don’t solve this in the short term then it will become difficult. Because then you get annoyed by each other.” (interviewee 5).

According to multiple interviewees, the organisation of the Floriade has now reached a point in which it is unclear what the local government employees and the residents still have left to offer each other (interviewee 2; interviewee 3; interviewee 5). Interviewee 5 mentioned that it would have been preferable if it was clear from the start what the targets were. It also needs to be clearly stated what is expected from each other in each phase of the development to prevent this from becoming “an obstacle for your work” (interviewee 5). However, organising the Floriade is a lengthy process “you just don’t know (...) when you start in 2012 what processes you have to go through” (interviewee 3). Interviewee 3 explained that it is difficult in a project like this to look two or three years into the future and formulate what space you will have for residents in which they can think along and make decisions.

Discussion

When analysing what forms of citizen participation were or are being implemented in the development phase of the Floriade the Participation Ladder of Arnstein (1969) is appropriate to consider. According to the explanation of local government employees, one could argue that the degree of citizen participation implemented in the Floriade aligns with ‘degrees of tokenism’. The types of citizen participation that belong to this degree are informing, consulting and placation (Figure 1). From the data, it became clear that informing and consulting are priorities among the local government employees. However, when talking about participating in decision-making it became more challenging. The municipality intended and wanted to let residents co-decide, which can be seen as a higher degree of participation than ‘placation’ but not so much higher that it becomes a ‘partnership’. This is because the participating residents have no access to genuine bargaining power but are able to influence the decision-making process of some aspects and initiate actual change. However, it became apparent that for other aspects, such as the spatial development, decisions were already fixed before the residents were invited to participate. This was emphasized by Silverman et al. (2020) and Ferreira et al. (2020) who both argued that citizen participation in urban planning remains limited and citizens are often notified or invited to partake when most plans are already finalized.

Regarding the current motives for involving residents in the Floriade, the answers of the interviewees aligned with the findings of Wang (2001). Wang explained that citizen participation leads to the satisfaction of public needs, public trust and building support for governmental decisions. This coordinates with the local government employees experiencing that the implementation of citizen participation contributed to creating a ‘we-feeling’, an increase of local support for the mega-event and taking into account public needs. Consequently, the implementation of citizen participation functioned as a rebuttal tool for negative media publicity. Informing appeared to be an important aspect to overcome the existing knowledge deficit. Furthermore, the interviewees mentioned the importance of Almere’s core values and principles as a motive for implementing citizen participation. However, this principle resulted in a guiding framework that aimed for a high degree of involvement

while it was not clearly stated how this should be implemented. This coincides with the shift towards radical incrementalism as explained by Groot et al. (2018). Groot et al. argued that governments tend to set wider and larger scale goals, such as the guiding framework and the core values, instead of implementing blueprint policy. Although this accommodates for a people-centred approach as it aims to enable residents to partake in the decision-making process, in this case, it led to unclear targets and a feeling of not knowing what to expect from each other. One could argue that to some extent a more technical rationale would be preferred during times of discomfort to provide a more straightforward approach and more certainty. However, a mega-event can still be considered a very complex situation where it is reasonable to have uncertainty. In order to deal with this uncertainty, a communicative approach is therefore necessary (De Roo & Voogd, 2019).

Conclusion

This research aimed to answer the main research question:

"What are the prospects for citizen participation during the pre-phase of mega-events based on the experiences of local government employees?"

Based on the results I can conclude that, with regard to the prospects of citizen participation in mega-events, multiple lessons could be derived from the experiences of local government employees. In relation to the experienced difficulties with involvement of younger residents and residents from different ethnicities, for future procedures, it is recommended to work from existing structures in society and to involve representatives that have a constituency. The latter is expected to enlarge the local support within specific communities. Another aspect mentioned was the lack of clear targets throughout the development process with regards to citizen participation. During the early stages of the process, combined with high pressure and strict deadlines it resulted in limited citizen participation. However, during the current phase of the process, it results in not knowing what participation should still be used for. At this point, residents are used for a long period of time to participate while on the other hand, the organisation wants to continue with finalising the event. This situation causes tension and annoyance among the actors involved. Thus, it is recommended that at the starting point of developing the event it is clearly stated and integrated within the event development planning in which phases citizen participation is implemented, in which topics residents are invited to participate, and what is expected from them. The latter could prevent residents from having high expectations which cannot be fulfilled, and consequently, prevent experienced demotivation among the local government employees. To give an insight into the possible prospects of citizen participation in mega-events, through working with existing structures, participating with representatives who have a constituency and adding more clarity, targets and aims, negative aspects could be diminished as well as the positive impact of mega-events could be optimized.

For future research, I would recommend applying this research to other cases in order to compare the results. Each mega-event is context-specific and the findings of this research are primarily based on just one mega-event. Thus, it will be relevant to research more events to investigate which aspects coincide. Furthermore, to gain more knowledge with regards to the functioning of citizen participation it may be beneficial to conduct research on the experiences from a resident's point of view. Finally, considering the message behind the Floriade and its 'green theme' it could be interesting to find out if this push for sustainability and liveability has played a role in the importance of involving residents.

When reflecting on the research process, conducting interviews with more people higher up in the decision-making process of the Floriade would have added additional value to the research results. As it could result in a better overview of the intentions behind the implementation of citizen participation. However, I am convinced that the six interviewees provided me with valuable knowledge from multiple perspectives ranging from high involvement in citizen participation to low involvement. Moreover, this research has been a circular process which means adaptations, such as modifying research questions, have been made throughout the project in order to strengthen the research process.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

Introduction

1. Can you introduce yourself?
    a. What is your current role within the organisation of the Floriade?

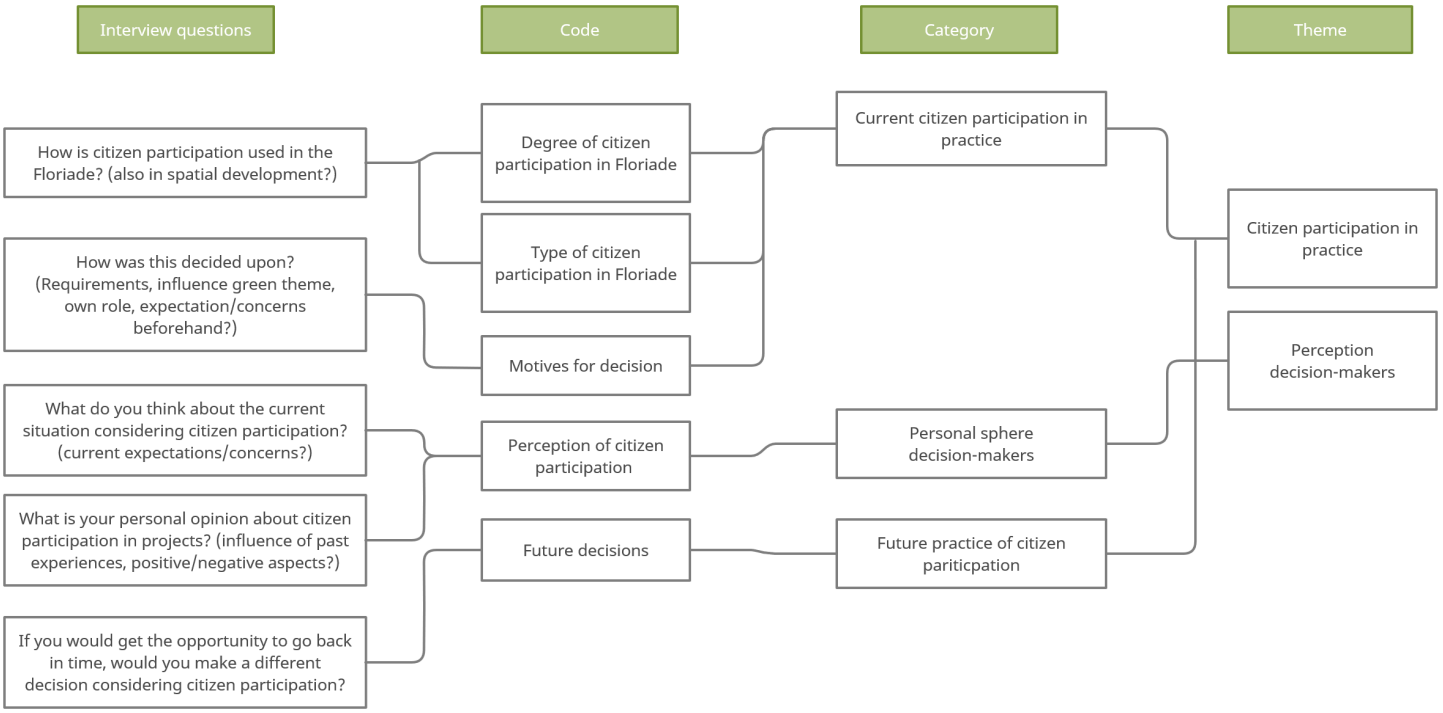
Topical questions

1. In what ways are citizens invited to participate in the development of the Floriade?
    a. Is citizen participation specifically used in any spatial developments?
2. How was this decided upon?
    a. Are there certain requirements for having citizens to participate?
    b. Did the green-theme of the Floriade play a role in this decision?
    c. What was your role or contribution to this decision?
    d. What were your expectations beforehand?
3. What do you think about the current situation considering citizen participation?
    a. Did your expectations change since participation started?
4. What is your personal opinion about citizen participation in projects?
    a. Do you have past experiences with citizen participation?
    b. What do you think are positive aspects of citizen participation?
    c. What do you think are negative aspects of citizen participation?

Closing questions

1. If you would get the opportunity to go back in time, would you make a different decision considering citizen participation?
2. Is there something you like to add to this interview?
3. Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Appendix B: Deductive coding tree



Appendix C: Inductive codebook

Accompanying subquestion	Code group	Code
Subquestion 1	Current citizen participation	Degree of citizen participation
		Type of citizen participation
	Background	Own role
		Reason for organising Floriade
		Role of Floriade BV
		Role of municipality
Subquestion 2	Motives for decision	Intentions
		Requirements
Subquestion 3	Experiences	Negative
		Positive
		Both
		Uncertain
Subquestion 4	Challenges	10 year process
		Clarity
		Diversity
		Limiting possibilities
		Time pressure
	Future	Future decisions

Appendix D: Consent form

university of groningen

Toestemmingsformulier

Human Geography & Urban and Regional Planning

Vak: Bachelor Project 2021

Toestemmingsformulier voor het onderzoeksproject: 'Experiences of local government employees on citizen participation during green-themed mega-events'.

Dit onderzoek is gericht op het onderzoeken van de verschillende ervaringen van werknemers van de gemeente Almere of de Floriade BV met burgerparticipatie tijdens de ontwikkeling van mega-events met een groen thema. De resultaten van dit interview zullen alleen worden gebruikt voor dit onderzoeksproject. Daarnaast wordt persoonlijke information geanonimiseerd. De verzamelde data wordt veilig bewaart en zal na analyse worden verwijdert.

1. Ik heb geluisterd naar de informatie over het onderzoeksproject
2. Ik geef toestemming voor het opnemen van het interview
3. Het was mogelijk om vragen te stellen en mijn vragen werden voldoende beantwoord
4. Ik heb genoeg tijd gehad om te beslissen of ik wilde deelnemen aan het onderzoek
5. Mijn deelname aan het onderzoek is vrijwillig
6. Ik kan mij terugtrekken van het onderzoek op elk gewenst moment zonder een rede te hoeven geven
7. Ik geef toestemming voor het gebruik van de interview resultaten voor de volgende doeleinden: educatieve doeleinden

Ik ga ermee akkoord om deel te nemen aan dit interview.

Naam en handtekening van deelnemer in onderzoek. Datum.

Ik verklaar dat ik de deelnemer heb geïnformeerd over het onderzoek. Ook zal ik de deelnemer op de hoogte houden over zaken die hem/haar zouden kunnen beïnvloeden door deelname aan het onderzoek.

Naam en handtekening onderzoeker. Datum