

Blueprint planning in neighbourhood renewal: how to make participation work

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Table of content

Summary	3
1: Introduction	4
1.1 Purpose: reviving urban neighbourhood renewal	4
1.2 Scientific relevance and connection to theoretical debate(s)	6
1.3 Research questions	7
2: Theory	8
2.1 A short introduction to neighbourhood renewal	8
2.2 The goal of neighbourhood renewal: sustainability	9
2.3 Participation and citizen initiatives	11
2.4 How blueprints work and what they can do	18
2.5 Multiple streams framework	19
2.6 Conceptual model	23
3 Method	25
3.1 Case selection: NPRZ and Bo-Tu	26
3.2 Research method: semi-structured interviews	27
3.3 Comparability of the neighbourhoods	29
4 Results	31
4.1 Answers to the questions	31
4.2 A maximum to change, a maximum to participation	32
4.3 The potential of a blueprint	33
4.4 The future of participation	34
5 Conclusion	35
6 Discussion	37
6.1 The value of the outcomes for generalization	37
6.2 The findings in this research compared to the literature	37
6.3 Ideas for future research	39
6.4 Reflection on the process	39
Literature	41

Summary

In the contemporary planning debate, the focus is on participation and planning without plans. Also in practice, the art of making great spatial visions seems to have been lost. Instead, the focus is on communicative, bottom-up processes. Blueprints – a strategic spatial vision of an area that shows what could be – are nowadays easily discarded as being not democratic enough or too top-down. The time has come to rediscover blueprints, which are often misunderstood, and further explore ‘participation’ and ‘bottom-up’ vs. ‘top-down’, which are concepts without clear definition.

Blueprints have been used for new residential areas before. Nowadays, the biggest challenges in planning lie within existing neighbourhoods. This research explores what the added value can be of making a blueprint in a neighbourhood renewal process. Especially those processes now often rely on participation, which has led to a situation in which no one takes responsibility. This has a risk of long-lasting, repetitive discussions and also raises concerns about the democratic value of the outcomes.

Six professionals, active in neighbourhood renewal in Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid or Bospolder-Tussendijken, have been interviewed. It turns out that many professionals would be helped with a blueprint, because it provides clarity to all stakeholders and speeds up the process. Although a blueprint could also propose radical changes to a neighbourhood, this is deemed unwanted, as residents are attached to the way their neighbourhoods look. Blueprints can inspire and give clarity on the general direction, but a lot is still to be discussed in a collaborative way.

Keywords: Blueprint, participation, neighbourhood renewal, bottom-up, top-down, strategic spatial plan, multiple streams framework

1. INTRODUCTION

Groningen is one of the towns with a long tradition of neighbourhood renewal. At this moment, four neighbourhoods are being renewed (Beijum, Indische Buurt/De Hoogte, De Wijert and Selwerd). The biggest project is now in Selwerd, called Sunny Selwerd (Gemeente Groningen, 2021a). This is a strongly bottom-up process (Gastkemper et al., 2019b, see also sunnywelwerd.nl). The municipality has started a series ‘Kijk in de Wijk’ to show how the process of neighbourhood renewal is shaped by the citizens (Gemeente Groningen, 2021b). Residents are invited to think, talk and act along with professionals to reshape their neighbourhood. It is still too early to evaluate this process, but it is clear that this process is going to take a long time and is based on the nowadays prevalent idea that bottom-up, communicative processes are preferable. The assumption that these hyper-communicative processes are ‘the way to go’ for neighbourhood renewal (see, i.a., Arnstein (1969), Healey (2003),; Khan & Swapan (2013)) forms the reason for this research, in which the added value of a more top-down, expert-led process is under research. This kind of process has over the last years been propagated by, i.a., Purcell (2009), Roy (2014) and Van Dijk (2018).

1.1 Purpose: reviving urban neighbourhood renewal

In the last years, neighbourhood renewal has been hampered by decentralisation and budget cuts from the national government (Gastkemper et al, 2019a; Ubels et al., 2019). However, as social and physical problems in many neighbourhoods are increasing (or, becoming increasingly visible), we are facing a new urgency for neighbourhood renewal (Wassenberg, 2010). But the best way to do this is not clear at the moment – if it has ever been. There is a growing body of literature on how neighbourhood renewal has not had the desired effects, first being noted in the beginning of the 21st century (Priemus, 2004), then at the beginning of the economic crisis (Aalbers & Van Beckhoven, 2009; Wassenberg, 2010) and recently again (Gastkemper et al., 2019a). The problems most often noted are focus on economic gains, which leads to building a housing stock and sometimes office/industry buildings that do not actually improve the neighbourhood and often lead to dislocating the original residents in the short term and vacancies in the longer term (Bosschaert, 2013). Wassenberg (2010) noted that neighbourhood change and ‘wear out’ over time. This is normal, but when neighbourhoods are not renewed in time and in the right way, they fall into “a downward process in which people who can afford it are moving out and make place for people at the lower social strata, where dwellings and streets are deteriorating, crime and non-social behaviour rise, facilities leave or go out of business and the image is worsening.”(p. 15). This happens more often in neighbourhoods with lower house ownership: where there are more social dwellings, neighbourhoods wear out faster (Schuiling, 2007; Bosschaert, 2013). This is partly due to physical conditions (social housing often has a lower building quality) and partly due to the type of residents living in social housing, who have lower socio-economic status (Wassenberg, 2010).

Also, the ‘craft’ of the neighbourhood renewer (a dedicated professional) is said to be lost (Rijckenberg & Gerretsen, 2020; Schrijnen, 2020). Neighbourhood renewal processes that have recently started, focus on communicative planning: involving inhabitants to come to consensus. But will this be enough to solve the major issues that neighbourhoods face? The motivation behind collaborative planning processes is often the assumption that this kind of process – in which “all relevant stakeholders” get a “an equal say” – is the ‘best’

process and thus will lead to the best outcome, as advocated by the likes of Dinham (2005), Friedman et al. (2004), Head (2004), Arnstein (1969) and Wood (2001).

1.1.1 Exploring bottom-up and top-down

Today's planning is process-oriented. But it can be questioned whether a process can be truly bottom-up, especially in neighbourhoods with many vulnerable people. Not everyone understands the same under a bottom-up process. In this research, bottom-up is linked to the 'communicative' approach in planning. Central to the communicative approach is communicative rationality, which breaks down the dominance of scientific objectivism. Instead, a different kind of objectivity is built based on agreement between individuals, reached through free and open discourse (Allmendinger, 2002, p. 184). According to Healey (1997) the key emphasis of communicative planning theory is the recognition that knowledge has many forms and all of these forms are socially constructed, and that power relations and the social context affect the preferences of individuals, as well as the view that planning is based on consensus-building practices. This means that this form of planning disregards the leading role of technical experts and advocates the involvement of citizens and other stakeholders in any given local community. Healey (1996) developed 'a communicative approach' that was all about creating 'arenas for discussion' and 'new discourses' with all stakeholders involved. She named this the communicative turn in planning, in which she presented "strategic spatial planning as a process of facilitating community collaboration in the construction of strategic discourse, in strategic consensus-building." (p.230). Because of this leading role of local non-experts, it is seen as 'bottom-up' (Pissourios, 2014). In this research, bottom-up is thus seen as the style in planning in which, before any plans are made (or at least shared with the residents), local citizens are involved in the process. This also means that authorities do not make a plan beforehand: the idea is that everything has to be decided together with all involved stakeholders, in an open and free discourse.

Moreover, it can be questioned whether this kind of process actually leads to the best outcome and if the process does not take up too much time and money. Healey (1996) herself realized that collaborative planning meant a long, complex process with many different stakeholders all bringing in their own ideas and knowledge. So if the communicative turn resulted in chaotic processes, why not stick with the old way that advocated a certain hierarchy and technical knowledge on the side of the planners? A collaborative process might sound like an ideal process, but if the aim was to get things done quickly it would certainly be better to apply a more technical and rational process. Lastly: it can be questioned whether governments lost the will and ability to take actual responsibility for these neighbourhoods and hide their lack of competence of interest with the cloth of 'bottom-up is better' (Van Dijk, 2021; Lupton et al, 2013; Lovering, 2009).

1.1.2 Exploring the importance of the outcome vs. the process

The danger of the discussion on top-down or bottom-up, as argued by Burby (2003), is that it is only about the planning process and not enough about the resulting plan. Burby argues that the strength of plans is in the end determined by the "governmental action on the issues they address." (p. 33). He realised that a plan should not be judged by the process by which it came about, but by the results it accomplished. This stance

is one of the reasons for this research: has planning debate not shifted too much towards discussions about just processes? What about just outcomes? It may be time to rediscover the power of plans. Leadership is formulating a vision on the future and sticking to it, which is closely connected to making plans. This thesis also explains what plans are. Are they always the vicious modernist blue prints? As Van Dijk (2018) argues: plans show what else is possible. And, without someone showing what is possible in an area, one cannot expect citizens to join in improving their neighbourhood. Plans show, at any phase in a discussion between stakeholders, what is possible and wise to do. On some things it will show which interventions will happen at which place, on many other things it won't. Discussions is still possible there. As Van Dijk argues, there is a certain value in capturing this information at every moment in the process, to avoid long-lasting or repetitive discussions.

This thesis adds to the understanding of the advantages of re-introducing a blueprint-style planning to neighbourhood renewal. A conceptual framework which integrates blueprint planning into the Multiple Streams Framework (first introduced by Kingdon (1984) but adapted many times) will be used in a case study research to analyse urban neighbourhood renewal processes.

1.2 Scientific relevance and connection to theoretical debate(s)

In today's planning debate, much emphasis is on the complexity of challenges and situations (De Roo, 2015; Boussauw & Boelens 2015). Planning literature has moved from technocratic ideas towards approaches that engage with the increasing complexities of sociospatial systems (Boelens & De Roo, 2016). It is often concluded that the 'old fashioned' style of planning, which involved the making of all-encompassing blueprint plans and implementing them top-down, is no longer suitable nowadays (Friedman et al., 2004; De Roo, 2007; Boelens & De Roo, 2016). Part of this debate is the conception that blueprint planning lacks adaptivity and is not democratic enough. This implies that a collaborative process, which is nowadays seen as adaptive and democratic and thus 'good', results in 'good' spatial plans (Van Dijk, 2020; 2021). This does not necessarily have to be the case however. Different scholars and experts have made the plea for the re-introduction of stronger, comprehensive plans, made and implemented on a high governance level (see, for example, Riek Bakker (Rijckenberg & Gerretsen, 2020) and Louis Albrechts (Friedman et al., 2004)).

The contemporary discussion in planning literature is about the best way to deal with the uncertainty planners face nowadays (Boelens & De Roo, 2016). Decision making under deep uncertainty is understood as the situation in which the decisionmaker does not know, or multiple decisionmakers cannot agree on, the system model, its parameters and/or the value function (Kwakkel & Walker, 2010). Is it best to plan without a plan (see, i.e.: De Roo, 2007; Boelens & De Roo, 2016) or can plans help to overcome the uncertainty?

As Terry van Dijk noted, there is a knowledge gap on the adaptivity of pragmatic blueprints, which are now often regarded as being undemocratic and unable to adapt to changing circumstances. This is an oversimplified way of disregarding blueprints. This research elaborates on the call by Van Dijk (2020; 2021), Bakker (Rijckenberg & Gerretsen, 2020), Schrijnen (2020) and earlier Balz (2018) to move away from the now prevalent collaborative planning towards more all-encompassing visions and creative designs for tackling

the problems planners nowadays face. These challenges are seen in many different fields of planning and locations, but are especially prevalent in neighbourhood renewal.

Too often in planning discussions, authors and ideas are caricatured or only partially read and understood. This is also true for blueprints. This research will also contain a further exploration of what blueprints should look like and how they also allow for debate. To make this possible, a good understanding of a blueprint is necessary. The definition in this research is derived from articles by Van Dijk (2020; 2021) and Balz (2018). Using a blueprint is something different from the old-fashioned, strongly top-down steered 'blueprint planning'. A blueprint, also called 'design planning' or 'strategic spatial planning', is defined as an explorative search for solutions to problems in the built environment. It is a plan that shows, on the macro-level, what a place can look like. It is not a completely filled in roadmap of what is going to happen when. Blueprints combine rigidity of strategies (and thus clearness and inspiration) with pragmatic adaptiveness in their long path towards implementation.

Blueprints are way more than just experts saying "this is how we're going to do it". As Albrechts and Balducci (2013) argue, strategic planning allows for a broad (multi-level governance) and diverse (public, economic, civil society) involvement during planning, decision-making, and implementation processes. It creates solid, workable, long-term visions or frames of reference and strategies at different levels, taking into account the power structures (political, economic, gender, cultural), uncertainties, and competing values. **The aim of this study is to find out how a blueprint can help to improve planning in neighbourhood renewal by offering a guidance and a framework, as opposed to un-steered bottom-up planning seen nowadays.**

This way, it provides a toolkit for planners active in neighbourhood renewal, which can help them to improve the process: make it quicker, cheaper and more democratic. The societal relevance is thus in the contribution of this study to neighbourhood renewal, which is the main instrument for solving the housing crisis and a host of other problems that cities face (socio-economic deprivation, heat stress, water and biodiversity problems...)

1.3 Research questions

The main research question is as follows: **what are the advantages of using a blueprint in urban neighbourhood renewal compared to fully bottom-up planning practices?**

To answer this study, the following sub-questions are formulated:

- How has blueprints been applied in former Dutch policies aimed at urban neighbourhood renewal?
- What are the contemporary challenges faced in neighbourhood renewal and how are they tackled today?
- What are the differences and similarities urban neighbourhood renewal nowadays and in the first two 'waves' of neighbourhood renewal?
- How can blueprints help to improve the process of neighbourhood renewal today, to make a process take less time and money?

2. THEORY

2.1 A short introduction to neighbourhood renewal

Different 'waves' of neighbourhood renewal can be distinguished. First the post-war rebuilding of central parts in existing cities. National governments took the lead in ordering the country and developing welfare states, where housing was considered as a major element of these new welfare states (Levy-Vroelant et al, 2008). In the Netherlands, this was social housing for the working classes. Gastkemper et al. (2019a) and Schuiling (2007) describe this period of 'wederopbouw' as strongly steered by the national government, focusing on solving a direct housing shortage caused by war damage;

The turning point in this approach was the worldwide reaction against the establishment in the late 1960's. Urban renewal came under pressure in the early 1970s. Prestigious large-scale developments, ambitious city-centre plans and high-rise housing construction stopped rather suddenly (Turkington et al. 2004). Large-scale top-down plans were replaced by small-scale neighbourhood renewal, based on bottom-up processes. The wave of anti-establishment thinking led to a new focus on popular demand and social needs: urban renewal became more demand-oriented and focused on provision of social infrastructure, including affordable housing (Wassenberg, 2010).

The third period of European urban renewal starts in the 1990s and is characterised by integrated policy. It was recognised that urban problems could not be solved by physical improvement alone, nor was the addition of social measures enough (Wassenberg, 2010). Urban regeneration gradually became an integrated policy during the 1990s, combining physical, economic and social goals and strategies. This was called the Big City Policy, the *Grotestedenbeleid*. In these programmes increasingly the strategy was to keep the residents in the urban regeneration areas: towards a social mix of the population, to be achieved by a differentiated housing stock. The national governments gradually lost their leading role during this third period of urban renewal, although they still keep the responsibility for urban renewal programmes (in terms of budget and policy development). The municipalities grew in importance, but even more so did the non-governmental actors. Policies were made and implemented in collaboration with a range of actors, in what is generally referred to as a shift from government to governance. These other actors include housing associations, private developers, local service organisations, and not in the last place inhabitants (Wassenberg, 2010; Schuiling, 2007).

Nowadays, there is no national policy on urban neighbourhood renewal. Since the ending of the *Grotestedenbeleid* around 2015, neighbourhood policy is decentralised towards municipalities and bottom-up initiatives (Gastkemper et al, 2019a). It is up to residents, municipalities, housing corporations, wellbeing and care organisations to tackle the challenges faced in (their) neighbourhood. And there are many challenges: the energy transition, urbanization and transformations in social and care policy have given 'the neighbourhood' its place in the spotlights back (Gastkemper et al., 2019b). To tackle these problems, the Dutch government is working on a new spatial planning act known as *Omgevingswet*. This act replaces many laws and regulations, to enable a new form of spatial planning known as 'invitational planning' ('*uitnodigingsplanologie*'). The main philosophy is that the national government enables and facilitates commercial parties and/or citizens to get

their plans developed. As Korthals Altes (2019) notes, this philosophy is at odds with a steering government to provide, for example, sufficient affordable housing. Because the act is not implemented yet, there is still discussion about its intentions, immediate impacts and long-term consequences. One of the topics of discussion is the expectation that the Act will change the way private and public sector actors collaborate in urban development. The shift away from the managerial model of urban governance shift is defined by some scholars as deregulation of national planning which aims to decentralise planning responsibilities and others explain this change as a shift towards entrepreneurial governance which is about enabling the involvement of market actors supported by neoliberal policy agendas in urban development (Tasan-Kok, 2019). It looks like governments will be taking even less responsibility, leaving the biggest part of the process to (commercial) stakeholders. This kind of process will expectedly also influence the outcome: if governments only play a small role, who is going to defend the interests of the not-represented, the weaker socio-economic groups? (Tasan-Kok, 2019; Korthals Altes, 2019).

Many studies (VROM-raad, 2002; VROM-Raad, 2007; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2021) have been conducted evaluating neighbourhood renewal projects: often they look if certain indicators of liveability and welfare have increased (more than in other neighbourhoods) in renewed neighbourhoods. This thesis focusses on the process phase. It evaluates different approaches that have been applied in neighbourhood renewal and compares these approaches, thus finding the advantages and disadvantages of the more top-down blueprint oriented processes that used to be applied but now seem to be disregarded.

2.2 The goal of neighbourhood renewal: sustainability

Urban neighbourhood renewal is formulated as the policies and strategies that are formulated to alter the neighbourhood (Stren & Polèse, 2000; Wassenberg, 2010). Motives can be found in perceived deterioration, or in plans for other uses or functions. Some neighbourhoods are continuously doing well, while others face decline. In the latter case they get branded as ‘problem’, ‘disadvantaged’, ‘deprived’ or ‘concentrated’ area’, low income neighbourhood and poverty district. Different policies have selected different (numbers of) neighbourhoods that had to be renewed, giving different labels. Ministers like Winsemius, Kamp and Vogelaar all made their lists of so-called ‘achterstandswijken’, ‘aandachtswijken’, ‘prachtwijken’ or ‘krachtwijken’ (Priemus, 2005; Schuiling, 2007; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2021).

This refers to a downward process in which people who can afford it are moving out and make place for people at the lower social strata, where dwellings and streets are deteriorating, crime and non-social behaviour rise, facilities leave or go out of business and the image is worsening. Governments develop policies to renew existing neighbourhoods when these do not match with future ideas for the area (Lupton et al., 2013).

The exact goals of these policies often differ per neighbourhood, but the main idea behind neighbourhood renewal is decreasing segregation and improving the socio-economic status of current residents (Schuiling, 2007). This is not about a level of the housing stock per se, although making the housing stock more sustainable is needed anyway and often combined with broader investments. Housing corporations, who have to improve their housing stock to a certain level of sustainability, are thus an important partner in neighbourhood renewal (Van Bortel, 2011).

In their research to find out if and how urban renewal works, Van Bergeijk et al. (2008) use 'social sustainability' as main concept to decide the success of urban renewal. They use the definition of Stren and Polèse (2000, pp. 15-16), who define social sustainability as: "Development (and/or growth) that is compatible with the harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population." This definition stresses the importance of economic and civil aspects, like voluntary connections between people, cultural and social diversity and civil integration. Additionally, they acknowledge the importance of the built environment (like the quality of the urban design, the public space and the houses). Social sustainability leads to better living conditions for all groups of the population (Stren & Polèse, 2000; Colantonio, 2007).

Tasan-Kok (2019) argues that most renewal projects do not have clear targets in terms of outcomes, but mostly in the process. Her analysis: Dutch spatial policy aims to accommodate relations between public and private actors, highlighting the importance of individual and private initiatives in management, use and development of the built environment. This model of governance will not only influence the culture of decision-making in urban planning in the Netherlands, but will also require new forms of participation where each actor will have to actively promote their demands in an entrepreneurial setting, calling for active, entrepreneurial and creative citizenship. It will also lead to fragmented forms of spatial development as prioritising projects will become more complex in this form of governance." (p. 66). Stren and Polèse (2000) also pay attention to the way in which spatial design policies occur: it should be the result of local partnerships between governments, private parties and citizens. This is in line with the goals of the new Omgevingswet, that aims to reduce steering and responsibility of the national government and introduces 'invitation planning' (Korthals Altes, 2019). Korthals Altes (2019) and Tasan-Kok (2019) fear that this will lead to processes in which commercial interests prevail and a vision lacks. When a government has no clear goals, it is hard to have clarity on the topics to be discussed, also in a participative process. 'Creative citizenship' and 'local partnerships' carry a risk of resulting in a situation where the parties with the hardest voice or the most money decide what is going to happen, and no true participation is possible.

The sources mentioned above agree on that the goal of neighbourhood renewal is a form of sustainability. Both in energetic terms (improving the housing stock) and in social terms. In the widest sense a sustainable urban area is functioning according to needs and expectations, and urban renewal is meant to make such a good area. An important characteristic is that a sustainable area doesn't need drastic renewal activities, but has an internal vitality and quality to gradually adjust to changing circumstances over time. A sustainable urban area functions well on physical, social, economic and ecological terms and has enough internal vitality and flexibility to adjust to changing circumstances, use and preferences.

In simple terms, the goal of neighbourhood renewal is to achieve a neighbourhood that does not need renewal. To which targets this leads on a project level, depends on the neighbourhood that is being renewed (Priemus, 2004; Aalbers & Van Beckhoven, 2009). There are some process goals that always apply: governments, local private parties and citizens should all be involved and work on solutions together, as this also leads to better socio-economic conditions in the neighbourhood.

2.3 Participation and citizen initiatives

Resident participation in spatial processes, which emerged in the late 1960's, has continued to influence a wide range of government and non-government services and has given communities a long tradition of organising themselves around local problems (Wood, 2001). From a planning perspective, Arnstein (1969) has produced one of the most influential theories about participation. For her, citizen participation is predicated on:

“The redistribution of power that enables have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future (1969, p. 216)”.

Arnsteins 'ladder of participation' is the basis for many ideas on participation (see Figure 1). The ladder is based upon the degree of participant power: there is a scale of involvement – from providing information to giving them direct control over decisions and outcomes – and every step on the ladder is connected to a type of participation – from non-participation to citizen power.

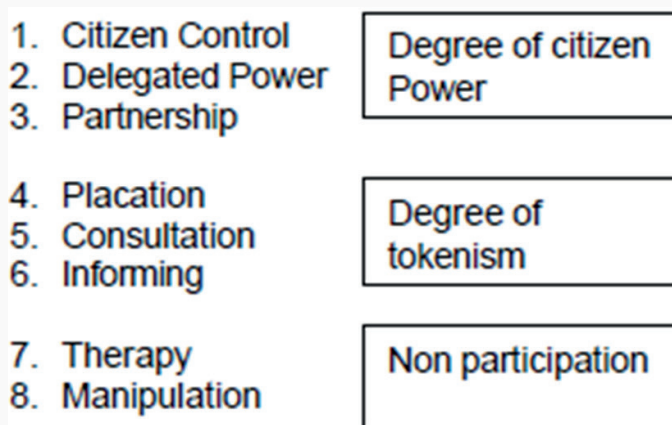


Figure 1: Arnsteins ladder of participation (Wood, 2001) Clement (2006).

Although being influential, it has also been critiqued and mistaken for saying ‘higher is better’ – which Arnstein did not mean. The model can be confusing because it conflates power with process (Cooper & Hawtin, 1998). For example, consultation may permit high degrees of influence if the views received are noted and acted upon, whereas ‘delegated power’ may be severely circumscribed: delegating the responsibility to decide how a small budget is spent may be less empowering than giving residents influence over the way the budget is set. The form of participation does not necessarily determine the final level of influence. Also, it is important to realise that participation of a big number of citizens is not necessarily more democratic than participation of a smaller number (May, 2006; Van de Kamp et al., 2019). Many citizens are not willing or able to join in active participation processes. Those who are, should be embraced, instead of be disregarded as unrepresentative.

Cairncross et al (1997) argue it is impossible to construct a hierarchy because planning processes vary on more than one dimension. They distinguish three types of interaction between citizens and professionals: structures or methods (from letter writing to tenant representation); processes (from providing information to giving control); and objectives, such as better housing and housing management, more choice and power to tenants, tenant satisfaction. John May (2006) argued that citizens differ in the way in which they want

to participate: when topics are discussed that are not urgent to most citizens, only a small group of people (hardly ever a fair representation of all residents) shows up to participate. The classic way of thinking ‘more participation is better’ has led to a paradox: the government wants people to participate, but when they do, their number must be substantial for the government to listen – based on representativeness of big numbers. Often however, only a small group of citizens is enough involved for this. May (2006) designed a ‘participation star’ which projects different forms of participation as equal, and a ‘participation triangle’ that shows that the higher the level of involvement, the fewer the number of residents involved. This is one of the critiques on the interpretation of Arnstein’s ladder that higher on the ladder is better per se. Bottom-up planning is sometimes inevitable and often very sensible, but listening to the public is not always good leadership. It has almost become politically incorrect to suggest that top-down can be welcome too, but different scholars like Purcell (2009), Roy (2014) and Van Dijk (2018) have argued as such. Their main argument is that bottom-up planning is likely to have conservative outcomes, whilst our times need leadership to face the big challenges ahead. They hope to find a middle way in the false dichotomy of top-down versus bottom-up, and start with asking why involving citizens is necessary at all.

In short, it comes down to two reasons: plans can be improved when citizens can be involved, and people have the democratic right to be involved. To make participation work this way, there is no reason to have as many citizens involved with as much responsibility as possible. Different groups of people should be involved in different ways, best representing their willingness and abilities.

2.3.1 The reasons for involving citizens

All these different theories and models mostly show one thing: one could go on forever trying to make new, more all-encompassing or simpler models of degrees of participation. The bottom line will always be that there are many ways in which citizens can be involved, at different stages of the process and with different outcomes. It’s more interesting to get to the reason why residents should be involved and to the best way to do so. Wood (2001) distinguishes two broad sets of reasons for resident participation. The first comprises the managerial or pragmatic benefits of involving local people. This includes the fundamental idea that local people are best placed to identify what is problematic in their locality and therefore what issues should be prioritised. This argument is normally developed to include the view that it is more financially effective to spend resources on that which is deemed to be needed by local people rather than on the perspective of an outsider. This reason also comprises a more strategic perspective. There is an acknowledgement that local perspectives may affect property values: if you can get the local community talking positively about the things that are happening in a neighbourhood, that has a major impact on saleability of properties. This is linked to the indicators of successful neighbourhood renewal, as found by i.a. Priemus (2004) and Wassenberg (2010).

The second sets of reasons might be described as the “citizenship rationale”(Wood, 2001). From this perspective, residents should be involved because it is their political right to influence the decisions that are made about their neighbourhood. Closely associated with this perspective is the notion of ‘empowerment’. That is the view that community involvement encourages people to act individually and collectively to take control of their destiny. For some, the notion extends further to the idea that if local people are ‘empowered’

changes introduced through the renewal process will be more sustainable. This too was found by Wassenberg (2010), although Aalbers and Van Beckhoven (2009) noted that this does make processes more complicated.

In neoliberal countries – the Netherlands can be seen as such since the last ten years (Glenna et. al., 2014; Ubels, Haartsen & Bock, 2019), the national government wants to confine its influence on local issues to a minimum. Instead of implementing top-down policies, developments should emerge from within communities (Springer, Kean & MacLeavy, 2016). John Friedman (1992), a strong supporter of neoliberal policies, makes a plea for a minimum of central policies. He argues that giving room to the emergence of decentralized developments in local communities increases social capital there, as it is a form of ‘empowerment’. Another strong supporter of bottom up, collaborative processes is Patsy Healy (2015). According to her, neoliberalism provides communities with the chance to improve their living area, but also the obligation to do so. More theorists recognize that citizen initiatives have become indispensable (Chakraborty, 2012; Purcell, 2009; Roy, 2014). After all, if citizens do not take matters into their own hands, there may be nobody taking care of their neighbourhood.

Critics like Purcell (2009) and Roy (2014) argue that neoliberal governments leave citizens no choice and practically force them to participate. Governments themselves often point at the empowerment and development of social capital that participation can cause (Skinner et al., 2008). Social capital is a much debated term in planning theory, with many different definitions (Coalter, 2007). One of the best known – and for this research most applicable – definitions is that of Robert Putnam (2000). According to him, social capital is everything connected to informal, social organisations, that undertake actions that have democratic and economic effects. The decisions made by members of these organisations, have consequences for the whole community. In Putnam's definition, social capital revolves mainly around social and political trust of people, and their participation in social networks and community initiatives (Rosenfield et al., 2001). Citizen participation, then, is at the core of social capital, because it adds to mutual trust and engagement of citizens. According to the theory of John Friedman (1992), an increase in social capital in a neighbourhood will improve the liveability there. If people get a political role in their community, they get the chance to ‘flower’, which is more important than having access to (physical and economical) materials and means.

Since Arnstein (1969), there is general consensus among planners on the need for community participation. It is often assumed that true involvement of citizens in decision-making processes leads to better decisions that allow wise planning and management of long term initiatives. Many scholars do not even challenge this view anymore. Khan and Swapan (2013) for example, in an analysis of the (necessary) shift from blueprint planning to ‘democratic planning’ in South Asia, present blueprint planning as undemocratic, top-down, expert-driven and thus old-fashioned. This in itself is an old-fashioned and short-sighted view on blueprint planning. It has become clear that participation and citizen have become more important. The core assumption is that this will lead to better process and thus a better outcome – even if ‘better’ is never defined. This view can and should be challenged and nuanced.

2.3.2 The problems with involving citizens

The theory by Friedman (1992), Putnam (2000) and many others seems fine in theory, but it does not always work out in practice. Nienhuis et al. (2011) emphasize that social relationships are not only a result of participatory planning but a requirement as well. They argue that social participation is related to collaborative planning processes: those who do get involved tend to evaluate participation more positively than those who do not get involved. Participants are not necessarily older or poorer than non-participants, but tend to have lived in their neighbourhoods for longer and to have a greater sense of belonging to their local community. This suggests that collaborative planning has a structural bias towards inclusion of some parts of the community over others, excluding those whose social lives are not concentrated within the boundaries of the neighbourhood.

An often mentioned problem in participation processes is the mobilization of local people. Innes and Booher (2015) acknowledge collaborative planning's emphasis on process, deeming it inevitable as attention for 'desired outcomes would undermine the very commitment' to good processes (p. 206), and stress that the process and its outcome are deeply integral to one another: the properties of the process define the outcomes that drive that process. This means that who participates (i.e. the type of inhabitants joining the process) also influences the outcome. Choices about whom to invite and how to get people involved differ across projects, but almost always there is doubt about the level of representativeness of the group of citizens involved (Wood, 2001; Tasan-Kok, 2019; Korthals-Altes, 2019). Not everyone is willing or able to join in renewal processes and the people who are generally mainly protect their own interest and not necessarily that of their neighbours. Often those residents who are not involved can feel excluded by a dominant group of local activists (Wood, 2001). This can be because of time shortage and other practical problems, language barriers (also including illiteracy), personal problems more urgent than these processes or a lack of trust in authorities.

Earlier in this research it has been established that different groups of people can and should be involved in different ways. Van de Kamp et al. (2019) however found that it is possible for governments to let highly committed participate strongly in a process, whilst offering (and expecting) lower levels of participation from the rest of the citizens in a neighbourhoods. To lead these processes in the right way, an active and adaptive (local) government is necessary and Van de Kamp et al. wonder if municipalities are sufficiently equipped for this.

Furthermore, they distinguish three 'participation paradoxes'. Firstly, 'citizen participation' implies that every citizen gets involved from a well-understood self-interest. Those extra active citizens do so too, but they do much more than that. Municipalities often do not see this and start acting in the 'general interest', which may go against that of the most active citizens. Local knowledge is often disregarded as a result. The second paradox is that municipalities themselves consist of different organisations with different interests. The effect of this is that, although municipalities support citizen initiatives and participation, their input is easily set aside if this is financially detrimental to one of the departments of a municipality. Thirdly: municipalities are split between giving room to citizen initiatives and the incomes of commercial exploitation. Although citizen initiatives are often 'organic', 'circular' and thus 'cuddly', income from selling or renting municipal land is

important too. That is almost always higher when commercial companies are allowed to (quickly) develop areas. Van Dijk and Van der Vlist (2015) found that landownership situations are not very transparent, making citizens unaware of how the private interests of landowners (both public and private) may impact the design and implementation of plans. It is often questionable how open and honest city councils are about this during participation processes. This is a problem more often encountered in participation: the dilemma between being open and not being able to share everything with the public. When Van de Kamp et al. (2019) asked respondents how it might be possible to overcome the cynicism that has resulted from poor experiences in the past many argued that it was important to demonstrate early on in the process of renewal that, as a planner, 'you were genuine'.

In short, there are many paradoxes, dilemmas and difficulties with participation. Speaking of 'participation' is clearly too simplistic. These findings, combined with those of e.g. Cairncross et al (1997) and May (2006) about the different ways in which different people want to participate, lead to believe that the term 'bottom-up' process may not be as straightforward as sometimes assumed.

2.3.3 Rethinking top-down and bottom-up

We have already established that talking of 'participation' hardly ever means 'involving everyone'. People get involved in different ways, or not at all. This also raises questions about the terms top-down and bottom-up. When can one really speak of this type of process? There are different governmental levels, different kinds of 'experts' and different kinds of 'citizens' or 'citizen initiatives'. The majority of Dutch municipalities organise activities on lower levels than on the municipal level (Verloo & Ferrier, 2021). Schaap and Leenknecht (2020) discern three types of organisations: firstly, citizens representing their neighbourhood and advising the municipality about policy or initiatives. Secondly, teams consisting of professionals from social organisations and companies that execute a certain municipal task. Thirdly, there are teams of municipal officers executing a certain task of a municipality. Despite trying to organise local activities this way, Schaap and Leenknecht (2020) found no or only sporadic effects on representative democracy, citizen participation or municipal administrative power. Verloo and Ferrier (2021) additionally found that knowledge about local democracy and participation are incomplete and crumbled, but that one conclusion is shared among most research: people with lower education tend to participate less, whilst 'angry citizens' let themselves be heard strongly. Local governments are advised to broaden their definitions of 'participation' and 'representation' (Verloo, 2019; Karré et al., 2017).

This kind of research in organisations and democracy shows that there is not one layer of 'citizens' and one of 'government'. There are different forms of (local) government and (citizens') organisations, and many forms of democracy. This can be seen as a 'house of cards': at every level, there are different perceptions of what top-down and what bottom-up is. For the Dutch Prime minister, even initiatives from municipalities seem 'bottom-up', whilst citizens experience the same initiative as being imposed 'top-down'. Any self-governance attempt is likely to institutionalise and then it will be experienced as real governance by smaller entities under that self-governance. So, the meaning of self- is in the

eye of the beholder. For example, a home owners' association is self-governance from the perspective of city hall, but residents may feel the need to self-govern within that association as they feel unfree. The bottom-up fallacy is thus an overgeneralised plea for giving the right to the people and making the planner the facilitator who does what the people want. In reality some situations ask for strong leadership and some ask for total resident-led processes. This nuance is not always made in planning practices and scholarly literature. The overgeneralisation has led the debate to collapse all kinds of planning decisions into one category. A project is never one decision. It is a pyramid of abstract straightforward principles (the basis) thrusting ever more detailed choices (Van Dijk, 2018). Keep in mind however, that also national governments sometimes get policies imposed upon them, for example by the European Union or the World Bank.

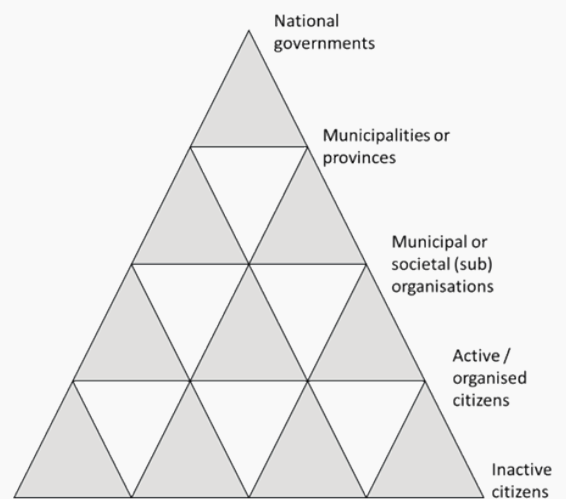


Figure 2: visualization of the different perceptions of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up', for the Dutch national situation.

Belgian management researchers Vandendriessche and Clement (2006) have built a case for seeing change management (which includes spatial planning or neighbourhood renewal) as a conversation between the inevitable two poles: the large and scientific and the small and emotional. They visualized this in their 'management funnel', which shows that managers/policy makers should mainly add value at the strategic level and let the details be filled in at the operational level (by municipal official or residents). Secondly, they show that conflicts often arise about the best strategy/solution (people are often in love with their own solution). It's best to move the dialogue one step higher to decide what the criteria of a good solution are (Vandendriessche & Clement, 2006). The translation

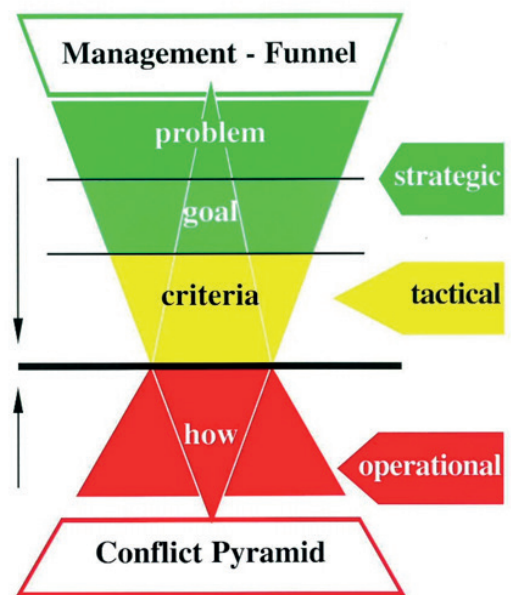


Figure 3: The management funnel by Vandendriessche and Clement (2006).

of concrete steps to take to solve the problem set is the prime responsibility of the community, best to be avoided by the government in order to prevent resistance. The overlap of the two triangles is where the tension is. Here, realities will meet, clash, compete, because it is not always easy to tell what still belongs to the realm of strategy and what is already solutionism. Still: when both parties agree on the areas where they are entitled to take the lead in, there can be mutual respect and clarity on what not to contest. The debate in planning should not be about top-down versus bottom-up, but rather about deciding what has to happen on which level. The reality is: there is always a need for both super-imposed frames and locally designed

solutions at the same time. The concepts ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ are not mutually exclusive. Neither is the one superior to the other. They are mutually stimulating (Van Dijk, 2018). This insight has consequences for the definition of blueprint planning. A blueprint is not an all-encompassing plan in which decisions are made by experts on every detail. It is a plan made on the strategic level, guiding the discussion on the tactical level (the criteria are already given), but the operational level (the detailed ‘how’) can still be filled in by local residents.

2.3.4 How to make Participation work: the power of a plan

The likes of Wittebrood et al. (2011), McCann & Ortega-Agilés (2013) and Normann & Vasström (2012) found that outcomes are often not as hoped beforehand: the necessary ‘synergy’ – as it is often called in scientific planning publications – emerges only when local entrepreneurs, citizens, knowledge centres like universities and local governments can come to an agreement on a shared strategy. Most research on Dutch cases of new policies formed in those broad collaborations has resulted in both positive and negative conclusions. Buizer, Arts & Westerink (2016) for example concluded that policy based on a local initiative is more ‘fundamental’, in that the results have more support among citizens and thus have a positive effect for longer. On the other hand they warn that the outcomes are often conflicting with official (national or European) rules and legislation. Furthermore, the lack of a central instance keeping an overview may result in long processes. Wagenaar (2007) argues that local tasks are often too complex to be solved by the government alone, but also warns that – when the government retreats – there is a risk that only the interests of the people that can participate are looked after. A democratically chosen government must make sure that all interests are protected. This is in line with findings by e.g. Nienhuis et al. (2011). There are different warnings raised about the decreasing role of the government. Tonkens (2015) is convinced that social capital will decrease in a context with a retreating government. After all, participation often does not just emerge, it is the result of a government inviting citizens to participate in processes. Before being able to make participation work, the government needs to take responsibility and bring clarity on the ambitions and possibilities. This is what a blueprint can do (Ganjavie, 2012; Van Dijk, 2020; 2021).

This idea is not new. Henri Lefebvre already published about utopias that could be planned in the 1960’s and 70’s (e.g. Lefebvre, 1961; 1970). Although not a traditional planner, his publications did involve explorations on potential uses of utopian plans for urbanists and planners. He favoured ‘concrete’ explorations of what was possible that were rooted in everyday life and space. Lefebvre interrogated reality in terms of what could be without simply escaping from or belittling the real, as he once accused the surrealists of having done (Pinder, 2013). Lefebvre was obviously writing under different circumstances, in response to different debates and concerns. His publications prove that thinking about the power of plans, and how they can be applied to reality, is not new. A clear plan can be helpful for a process, because it makes clear what the final goal is (the general direction) and about which things discussion is still possible. At every stage of a process, this provides clarity to everyone involved, making it possible to have purposeful meetings and avoid repetition or long-lasting discussions.

2.4 How blueprints work and what they can do

Van Dijk (2018) argues that the average citizen's gut feeling will say something like this: the city as we know it feels our own, it feels familiar and the option to just keep it this way we perceived to be safe. So, if the communicative turn, translated into co-design and self-organisation, means letting people say what they want, it is unlikely that when the neighbourhood community is asked to come up with their wish for the future, they will come up with an idea radically deriving from the present situations. They will ask for improvements to the situation they know and own. Today, everyone will have an idea of what they want. But it should be the goal of planners and governors to think of what the group needs tomorrow. People will want an improved version of the present and will not be able to think of the full potential of an area. This is a shame, and a blueprint – a spatial vision for a desired future – can help to give inspiration (Koning & Van Dijk, 2021; Van Dijk, 2020; 2021). By showing how an area could look, the government takes responsibility in taking certain actions, but also invites people to join in achieving that vision and filling in the exact details together.

Van Dijk (2020) proposes that the best beginning to a process is not necessarily a 'problem' – and the solution to that problem should not necessarily be the process's end-product. Instead of deriving our ambition for the future from what we see in the present, an anticipated future may be a way to begin a coalition. Planning should be driven by desire, not fear (Ganjavie, 2012; Pinder, 2013; Koning & Van Dijk, 2021).

"Regardless of whether this is a disaster scenario or a utopia to strive for, images of the future is what causes people to collaborate. The problem definition is a derivative of that. Future defines present." (Van Dijk, 2020, p. 11). Traditional planning instruments seem to be ineffective because they are designed for situations of stability, certainty and a reasonable clarity on the problem to be addressed (Albrechts & Balducci, 2013). But all these traits are lacking in contemporary cities. This is why, according to Albrechts and Balducci, a more strategic, implementation-led and development-led approach on all policy levels is necessary. Friedman (2004) also noted that 'strategic spatial planning', which may include making a vision or blueprint as basis for planning, helps to make an envisioned future. But this future can be continually updated, revised and reshaped. It is a way of probing the future in order to make more intelligent and informed decisions in the present. Plans offer predictability (they show what tomorrow will be like), hope (they show improvement is near) and ownership (they show who has agreed to contribute how) (Van Dijk, 2018). That public good needs a custodian to prevent the tragedy of the commons from happening. Without structures to coordinate collective action, space will be poorly used. This requires agreement to make places better.

2.4.1 How blueprints are discussed in literature

The past decade has seen an increasing interest in the 'planning without a plan'. The argument is that the modern world is so complex, that making plans is no longer useful. In a 'fuzzy' world, it would be best to accept that we do not know most things and planning cannot be linear (Boelens & De Roo, 2016; De Roo, 2015; Boussauw & Boelens, 2014). It is interesting to see how easily blueprints are discarded in these pleas for not making plans. After all, one could also argue that a blueprint could reduce uncertainty. De Roo (2015) calls blueprint planning "largely blind to the passage of time, adopting an attitude of trusting linear extrapolations from the here and now and all of its difficulties towards the ideal future" (p. 3). Talking about

blueprints always means talking about 'blueprint planning' (which is actually something else, as described in this chapter). That blueprint planning is then put opposite to communicative planning (De Roo & Hillier, 2012; Boussauw & Boelens, 2014). This assumes that there are two opposites: either a top-down process, using a blueprint without space for participation, or a bottom-up process in which citizens get a say about everything and no plan is made beforehand. This is a very limited view: both are possible.

Also when using a blueprint, the process matters very much, but process is still only a means to making a better place. As Friedman (2004) concluded, also long-range planning visions are best conducted with extensive and informed public discussion and debate. This should ease the minds of planners critiquing blueprint planning, like Khan and Swapan (2013). Although they researched South Asian countries, which generally have a shorter history of democratization, it can be concluded that they have a too one-sided view on blueprint planning.

Blueprints are way more than just experts saying "this is how we're going to do it". As Albrechts and Balducci (2013) argue, strategic planning allows for a broad (multi-level governance) and diverse (public, economic, civil society) involvement during planning, decision-making, and implementation processes. It creates solid, workable, long-term visions or frames of reference and strategies at different levels, taking into account the power structures (political, economic, gender, cultural), uncertainties, and competing values. But when these collectively discussed and agreed upon values are not translated into spatial principles and consequences, misunderstandings will continue to exist and closure is never found.

The problems with participation (a lack of urgency to join, conservative outcomes, uneven representation, processes taking a long time) can be tackled by starting with a vision for the future. Because it serves as a spatial visualisation of wishes for the future that makes clear what the general direction is and about which things discussion is possible. It helps to structure the process and avoid repetitive talks. This can be nicely illustrated by using the multiple streams framework, a model for analysing decision making processes. This will be handled in the next paragraph.

2.5 Multiple streams framework

Before seeing what value a blueprint can have on a planning process, first let us introduce the multiple streams framework (MSF) itself.

The multiple streams framework is an influential theoretical framework for the analysis of policymaking processes, in particular agenda setting (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015; Winkel & Leipold, 2016). It was introduced by John Kingdon (1984). This framework uses the metaphor of streams for institutional, material and perceptual elements to analyse agenda setting and policy making. The process necessary to introduce a problem in the public agenda is rooted in the interaction of three streams: the problem, the policy and the politics stream (Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2020). Problems arise in a context in which actors can intervene and solve them or they can be ignored. Then the question emerges: why are some problems addressed and others are not? This question has a paramount importance for decision-making processes.

The MSF has inspired numerous empirical applications, which result in substantially different interpretations, for instance, of what exactly the "streams" encompass, how policy entrepreneurship is practiced, and how

the coupling of distinct streams works. The MSF is an analytical approach to explain agenda setting under conditions of complexity and ambiguity, taking into account limited resources (time, capacities, and materials) of the policymaking system to process problems by means of (responding) policies (Kingdon, 1984; Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015; Winkel & Leipold, 2016; Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2020):

First, the problem stream contains potential problems searching for political solutions. In the problem stream, the perceptions of policy makers are taken into consideration, as they are the ones who need to assume a condition is a problem in order to develop a policy response. These problems are called “streams” because they are constantly transitioning: problems evolve, are connected to other themes or are sometimes replaced by new problems.

Second, the policy stream is a set of policy ideas (like problem-solution strategies) that can potentially be mobilized in the policy systems. The policy stream is linked to ideas and solutions, where actors present alternatives that respond to the problem in the form of instrumental actions. In this stream, it is assumed that subject experts search for solutions to the problem. While these problems are constantly evolving, people still try to put their causes, effects and possible solutions on the agenda. Among them one may find scholars, consultants, and officials with experience or knowledge on the issue.

Third, the political stream encompasses the situational contexts of policymaking to specific events. This includes political parties, electoral processes, the media, interests of civil society groups, companies or public opinion. Constant demands for changes emerge in the public sector, constituting pressure that impacts public agendas and policies. Meanwhile, there is a constant fight for the attention of the people deciding about legislation and financing.

A core assumption of Kingdon’s model—and an important reason for its intellectual impact—is the axiom of stream independence. As Kingdon puts it, the three streams flow independently of each other through the policy system: problems in search of solutions and solutions in search of problems bubble up in separate streams not connected with each other – although in the end, they have to find each other in aligned situations. The seemingly natural expectation that problems and solutions must be tied to each other, is challenged in the MSF.

The three streams shape the basis of the MSF model are thus relatively independent of each other. There are, however, moments of convergence or coupling of the three streams, which gives rise to what Kingdon calls a “policy window”. This is a window of opportunity that regularly has a limited temporality in which the conditions of the three streams are conducive to raising the issue to a point where a government takes it as a problem that must and can be addressed. The process of confluence of the three streams gives rise to the opening of a policy window, which is referred by Kingdon as “coupling.” (Ruvalcaba-Gomez, 2020). Coupling is the process of connecting two or three streams into a compelling whole. Through coupling, a policy problem or solution is made ready for the agenda. The promoters of specific demands or advocates of the proposals in a focused event take advantage of the coupling of the three streams. These actors are known as policy entrepreneurs, who skilfully engage in coupling to launch their proposals onto the policy

agenda. The coupling process is eventually enabled through policy windows, which are understood as emerging opportunity structures. They can evolve in the problem and politics streams. Focusing events and windows of opportunity can elevate policy items from the unofficial or public agenda onto the government one (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015). In other words, when a policy window opens, it can be exploited by policy entrepreneurs to bring together the three streams (problems, policies and politics).

In sum, the framework analyses the emergence of new policies, explained by the convergence of three distinct streams, which are coupled by the skilful manipulation of policy entrepreneurs who exploit emerging policy windows (Winkel & Leipol, 2016). The policy window can be enforced by operating strategically and making clear visions that cadre the discussion. This improves the chance that the streams are coupled and a policy window opens.

2.5.1 Which actors act in which stream, and how do they find each other?

Looking at many different publications about the MSF, it is not certain who the agents in a process are in these problem, policy and politics streams, and how they interact with each other (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015). Kingdon (2011, p.1) was concerned “with what makes people in and around government attend, at any given time, to some subject and not to others?” While Kingdon emphasized the role of certain kinds of actors such as policy entrepreneurs in catalyzing the merging of streams, in general it is not clear in this model who are the actors in each stream (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015). According to them:

“Two major challenges in particular must be overcome if the MSF framework is to provide a useful model of the policy-making process:

- 1) How to operationalize or agentify the various streams of events and activities involved in policy-making in order to be able to analytically distinguish them from each other and analyse their interactions during different phases of the policy process; and
- 2) How to analyse periods of separation and coming together of one or more of the streams before, after and during different phases of policy making activity in terms of these actor relationships.” (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015, p.66).

Cairney and Jones (2016) concluded that entrepreneurs in the context of the multiple streams framework are best understood as well-informed and well-connected insiders who provide the knowledge and tenacity to help ‘couple the streams’, which is needed for problem-solving. Several other scholars have found entrepreneurs to be organizations as well as individuals, to be heavily interlinked and at other times separated, and to take on different roles depending on their problem, policy or politics orientation (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015). The overall argument made by them is that the three streams Kingdon described represent and are composed of the actions of three distinct communities of actors and that it is the interactions of these groups during different stages and activities of policy making, from agenda-setting to policy evaluation which drives policy-making forward, determining its tempo and content. They developed a scheme to show how the different streams move around a problem. The politics stream needs to ‘find’ the policy/solution stream, when the process of finding a wished solution (a program) starts. There are five critical junctures in this process.

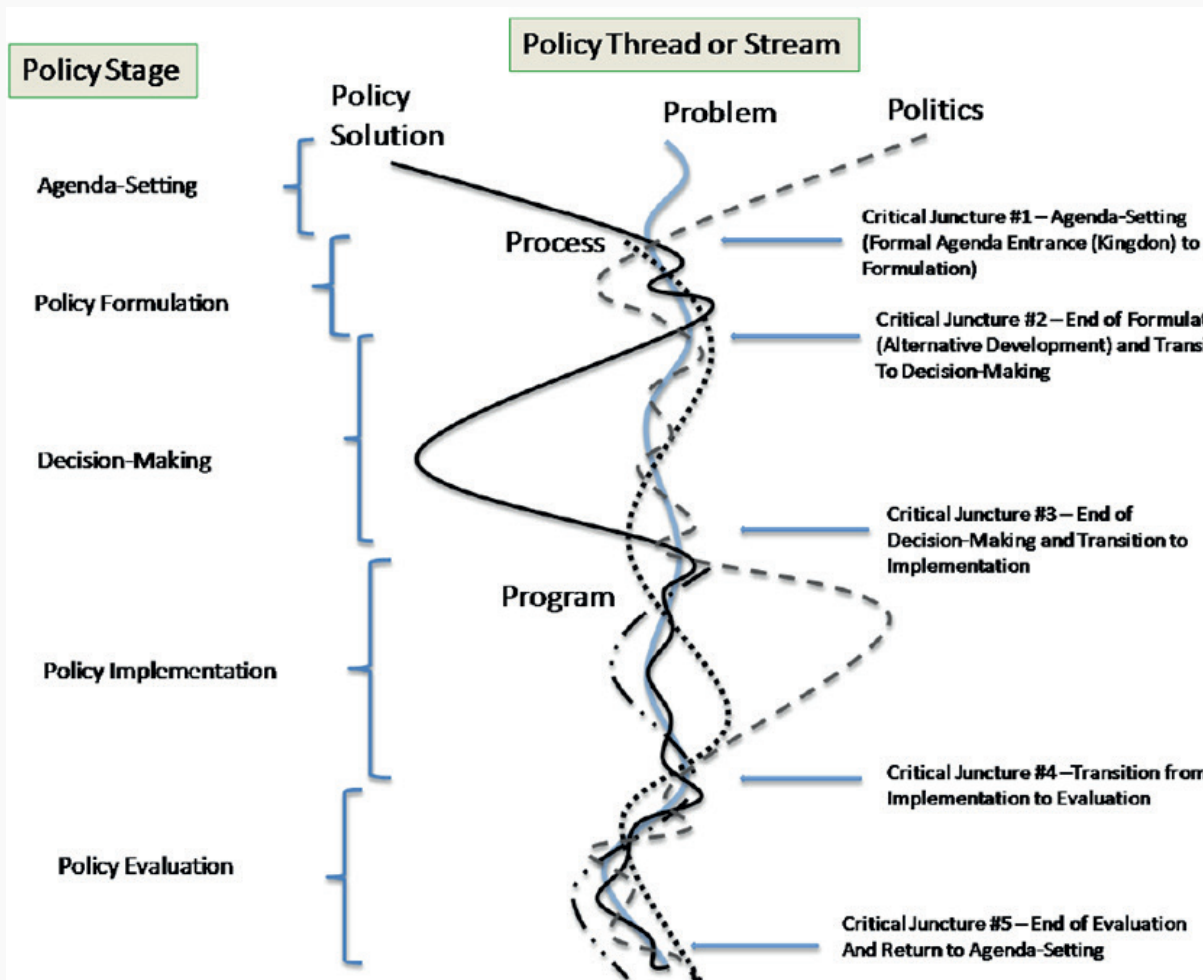


Figure 4: Five policy process “streams” (taken from Mukherjee and Howlett (2015), based on Howlett et al., 2015)

2.5.2 Participation and blueprint planning in the MSF

There is not much theory in which participation is ‘applied’ to the MSF, but the MSF can be used to analyse a wide range of theoretical and structural elements within the agenda-setting process (Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2020). It has been applied not only to the “agenda setting” stage, but also considering decision making on different levels of government – like urban neighbourhood renewal projects. In the politics stream, coalitions are crucial for reaching agreements. And one of the most salient factors guiding the configuration of politics is the activism of pressure groups (Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2020). Participation can thus be seen as part of the politics stream. But it can also be seen as part of the policy (solutions) stream: the stream linked to ideas and solutions, where actors present alternatives that respond to the problem in the form of instrumental actions. In this stream, it is assumed that experts search for solutions to the problem, but this could also be local or non-experts, who are involved not from their profession but because the process involves their neighbourhood. It does not really matter under which stream participation falls: the core is that there is a problem for which a process is started. And it is clear that the politics and the policy stream need to come together to find a solution. In most processes, however, these streams float away from each other many times. This makes the process take longer. Now, let’s look at the added value that blueprint can have, using the Multiple Streams Framework as a model for the process of neighbourhood renewal.

2.6 Conceptual model

Based on the literature discussed above, a conceptual framework for the use of a blueprint on a planning process can be made. Firstly, the Multiple Streams Framework is drawn out, based on the figure by Mukherjee and Howlett (2015), but with the addition of the passing of time. The second model shows what the Multiple Streams Framework looks like when a process is not centred around a problem, but when a blueprint is used as start of a process. In both cases, the bottom of the model is regarded as the end of the planning process, which is not when implementation starts, rather when implementation is finished. Based on the findings by i.a. Balz (2019), Van Dijk (2020; 2021) and Friedman (2004), it is assumed that planning processes – also those in which blueprints are used – continue even after the start of implementation, because plans can still be reshaped for other parts of a plan. That is why the critical junctures that Mukherjee and Howlett (2015) use are not used in this model.

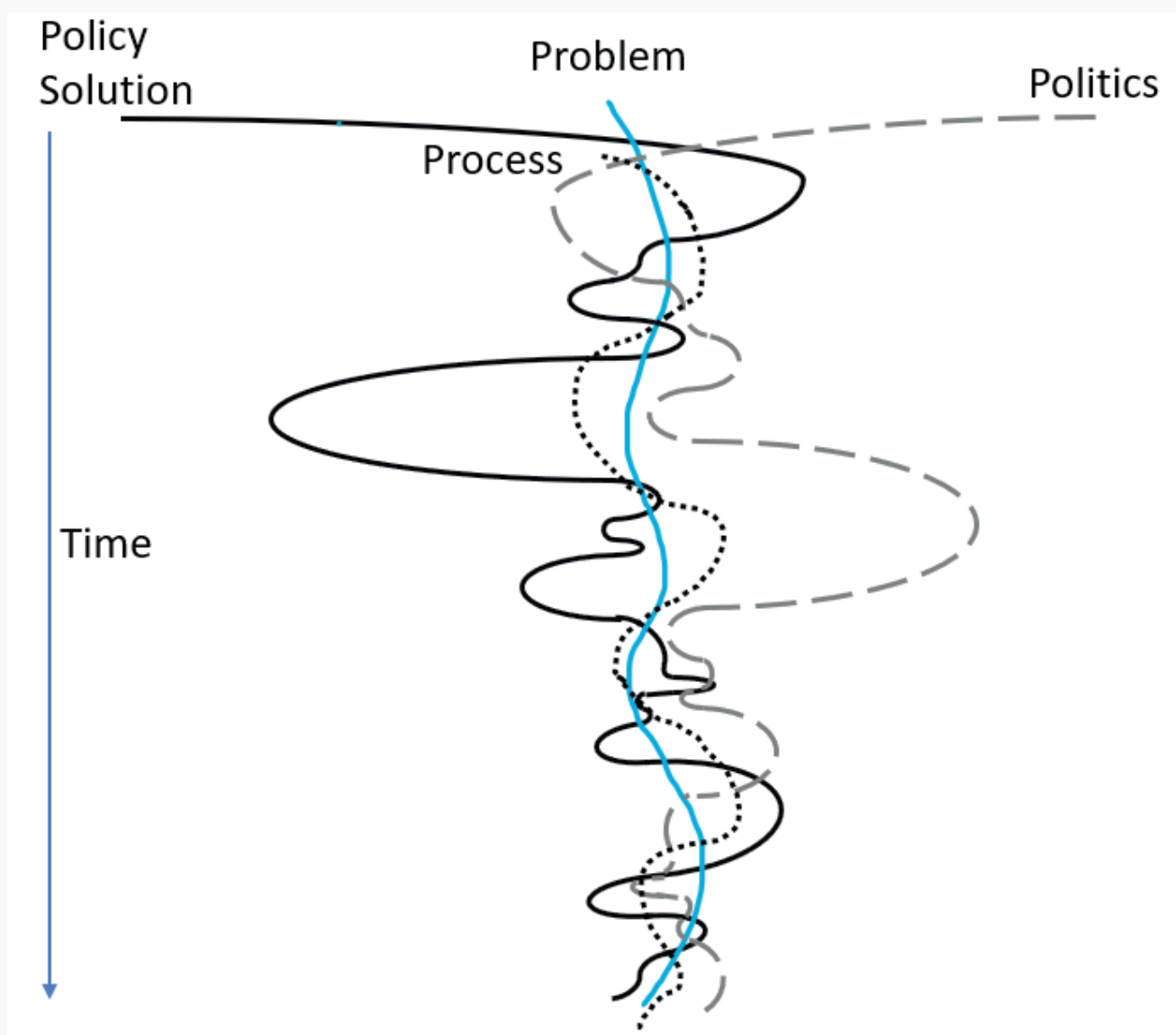


Figure 5: A slight simplification of the Multiple Streams Framework as discussed in Paragraph 2.4. The policy/solution stream and the politics stream revolve around a certain experienced problem. As the streams are floating freely, the process may take long.

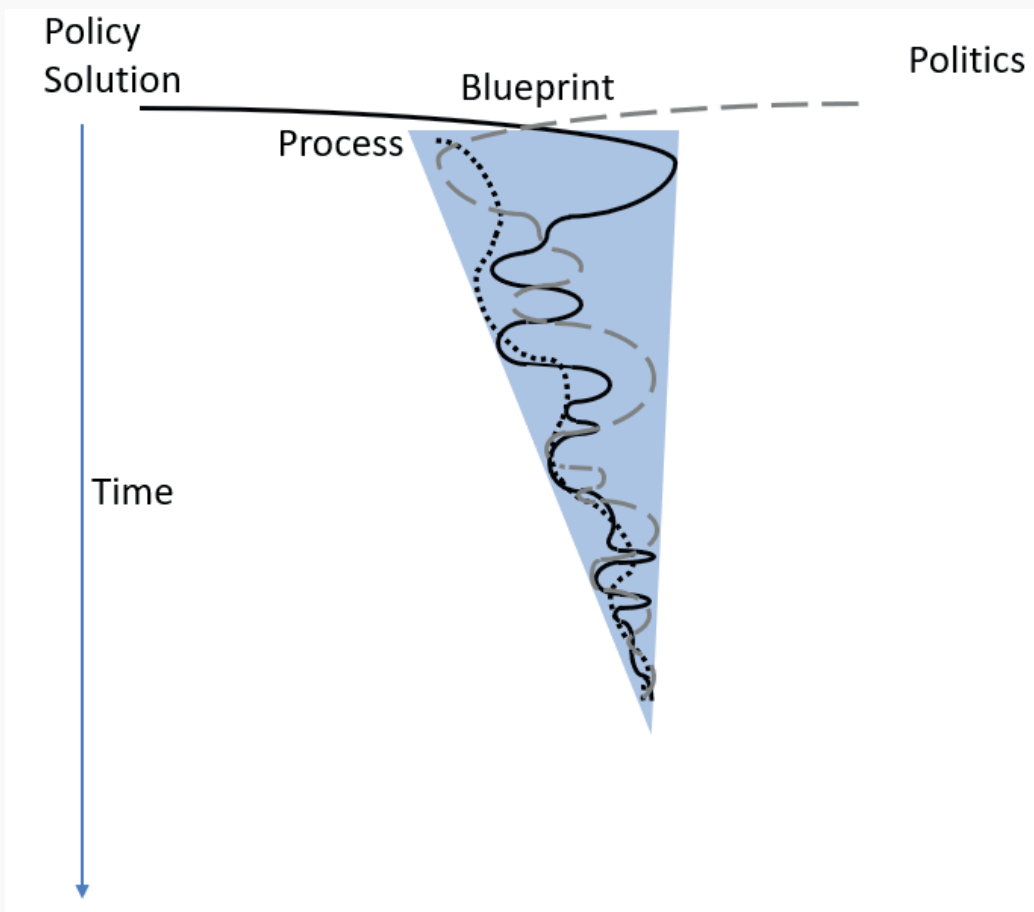


Figure 6: visualization of a process in the Multiple Streams Framework when a blueprint is used, instead of focusing on a perceived problem. Not only does the blueprint help to streamline the process, it may also result in a different outcome.

When looking at Figure 6, it becomes clear that – based on the literature – it is assumed that using a blueprint may speed up the convergence process by clarifying the basic agreements and requirements and removing any cycling and confusions, thus reducing the time needed for a planning process. This is because the blueprint serves as a ‘funnel’. At the start of the process, the vision presented serves as a general guideline that makes clear to all parties involved what is possible in general terms. This prevents the ‘streams’ (the different stakeholders representing those streams) from drifting away and offering solutions that are not feasible. The increased clarity for all stakeholders shortens the decision making phase.

Also, it is shown that the end point of the process lies somewhere else than in the first figure – in this case a bit to the right, instead of in the middle. This is done to visualise how a blueprint helps to find solutions that are not mediocre and conservative. This is what collaborative processes are often accused of, and one of the reasons that urban neighbourhood renewal has not had the desired effects in recent years.

Of course, this model needs to be tested. Furthermore, it still leaves some questions open. Think of: who should be making that blueprint? Politicians? Planners (and from whom do they get that assignment?)? Urban architects? Or could it also be active residents, thinking about their own neighbourhood? At this moment, looking at the literature, there is no reason to exclude any of those groups, nor to pick one. It will be part of this research.

3. METHOD

The aim of this study is to find out how a blueprint can help to improve planning in neighbourhood renewal by offering a guidance and a framework, as opposed to un-steered bottom-up planning seen nowadays. The main research question is as follows: what are the advantages of using a blueprint in urban neighbourhood renewal compared to fully bottom-up planning practices?

This is an explorative study, looking into situations that have not happened often so far. There are different methods of acquiring data in an explorative study. Interviews, both open-ended, semi-structured and focused, are seen as suitable. But also statistics, surveys and sociometric procedures are used (Merton, 1987). The question is whether it is the goal to 'verify, nullify, clarify' on a certain topic, in which case one should use statistical evidence whenever possible. Or whether the goal is to come up with new ideas and hypothesis, in which case interviews and single case studies can also be used (Swedberg, 2020). As long as the rules of using a certain method are followed, many ways of gathering data can be sufficient. Some scholars have argued that different research methods should be combined for as much information as possible (Platt, 2002). However, others have stated that one method may be enough to gather sufficient exploratory data and get to know a certain topic better (Merton, 1987; Swedberg, 2020). If sufficient interviews are conducted, among the right target group, this may yield enough new insights. In future research, the new findings can then be tested through other modes of data collection.

Exploratory research is used to correct data and improve knowledge on a subject that is complex, deep and so far relatively undiscovered. That applies to this research. After all, a blueprint as described in this research has not been applied anywhere in neighbourhood renewal. That is why a qualitative research method is best suited: it looks into the meaning world behind interactions, experiences, feelings, processes and ideas (Maso & Smalling, 1998). Those are exactly the things that we are interested in for this research: how do professionals think a blueprint could work in neighbourhood renewal? According to Stebbins (2001), exploratory research should not use confirmatory mechanisms like hypotheses. It should be qualitative and rely on inductive research methods. This means doing a specific observation to get to general conclusions. Following this reasoning, two critical cases will be researched to see which more generally applicable findings that produces. From these two critical cases, a total of six interviewees have been questioned (see paragraph 3.1 and 3.2).

The aim of this research is not to make statements on all the neighbourhood renewal projects in the Netherlands, following a broad analysis of top-down processes versus bottom-up processes. The aim is to further explore the ideas discussed in the literature. This study does not claim to achieve general knowledge applicable in practice all around the Netherlands. We just want to test how professionals, active in the field of neighbourhood renewal, look towards the discussion between bottom-up processes and the use of a blueprint. By this, we further explore this relatively new idea. That is why, when carefully selected, two cases are sufficient. It has implications for the possible conclusions however, which are presented in Chapter 6 Discussion.

3.1 Case selection: NPRZ and Bo-Tu

A case study will be used as method for data collection, based on the theory by Bent Flyvbjerg (2001; 2006). He argues that the social sciences should not be looking for universal knowledge that comes out of research using big representative samples or even whole populations. That is because, Flyvbjerg argues, this knowledge does not exist in social sciences. In that field, there is a bigger need for concrete, practical, context-dependent knowledge – which can be acquired via a case study. This study in particular looks for that practical, context-dependant knowledge. The goal is to take that knowledge to a higher level and see what a blueprint can add in neighbourhood renewal in general. For this too a case study is very suitable. Flyvbjerg states that as follows: “One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods.” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 12). Even though the context acquired via a case study might be context-dependent, it can still lead to knowledge that can be applied in a more general sense. Most case studies are aimed at finding the features of a broader population. They are about something larger than the case itself, even if the generalization that follows is done in an explorative, predictive fashion (Gerring, 2004). Also Seawright and Gerring (2008) define a case study as the intensive (qualitative or quantitative) analysis of a single unit or a small number of units (the cases), where the researcher’s goal is to understand a larger class of similar units (a population of cases). They too argue that this is perfectly possible, as long as the case selection is done right and suited to the goal of the study.

How, then, are we to choose a sample for case study analysis? Case selection in a case study has the same objectives as random sampling: one desires (1) a representative sample and (2) useful variation on the dimensions of theoretical interest. According to Flyvbjerg (2001; 2006), a useful case study investigates ‘critical cases’, which he calls ‘most likely’ or ‘least likely’. These are cases that give the highest probability of either confirming or disproving a hypothesis. For this method, one case might be enough, but two or more cases can also be compared. Seawright and Gerring (2008) propose the selection of ‘most similar’ cases: cases (two or more) that are similar on specified variables other than X, with X being the causal factor of theoretical interest. In this study, that matter is the use of a blueprint or a strongly bottom-up process. Two neighbourhoods in Rotterdam are suited for this.

These neighbourhoods were found based on a questionnaire among professionals at Platform31, a knowledge institute doing research on different spatial topics – among which urban neighbourhood renewal. A professional at Platform31 was asked if she knew neighbourhoods that are being renewed in either a top-down or a bottom-up way, by explaining her the definitions that were used in this research. She provided (among others) Nationaal Programma Rotterdam-Zuid and Bospolder-Tussendijken as examples of a relatively top-down and bottom-up process. After reading some news articles and other secondary sources about all the suggested neighbourhoods, these neighbourhoods in Rotterdam were chosen. They have comparable problems, are in the same city and are most strongly opposed to each other in terms of the dichotomy top-down vs. bottom-up.

3.1.1 Bospolder-tussendijken

The project in Bospolder-Tussendijken was initiated by the municipality of Rotterdam. The social problems there were clear: illiteracy, unemployment and poverty occurred more often than in other Rotterdam neighbourhoods (being the poorest neighbourhood north of the river Meuse) and much more often compared to the Dutch mean (Van Gils, 2020a; Bosch & Ouwehand, 2019). From the beginning, the aim was to improve the neighbourhood via different bottom-up projects. Residents could apply for subsidies and help from the municipality for their initiative. This aimed to improve the social sustainability and make the neighbourhood more 'resilient' (verhalenvanbotu.nl, n.d.). Combined with these bottom-up projects came investments in houses and utility buildings. Around 2300 dwellings are improved, the aim is to make Bospolder-Tussendijken (partly) gasless by 2025 (duurzaam010.nl, n.d.). New dwellings have also been added, often with a mix of social housing and middle-class owner occupied housing (Bosch & Ouwehand, 2019). BoTu is thus a project that combines investments in spatial and in social improvements, where the municipality invests in bottom-up and top-down processes.

3.1.2 Nationaal programma Rotterdam Zuid

Rotterdam-Zuid is an area consisting of different neighbourhoods in which the social problems are "un-Dutch" in terms of criminality, low school results, high crime rates and bad dwellings (NOS, 2020). That is why, in a period in which the national government let go of almost all steering on neighbourhood renewal, they did start a project in Rotterdam-Zuid: a 'national program' with top-down financing and steering (Zonneveld, 2020). A project group, led by a 'project director' and furthermore consisting of representatives of different organisations involved (the municipality, the housing corporations, care institutions, schools, police and businesses) got to work on tackling the social and physical problems of the neighbourhood (NPRZ, n.d.). This became a top-down steered and financed project, because special perseverance was needed to tackle the problems at hand. Although participation has happened at a small scale, most investments plans are made by those organisations. Part of this is the development of the 'Stadionpark', a big renewal of the area around the (new) stadium of football club Feyenoord. Development of this area should revitalise the whole area. Although the project started in 2012, most large scale projects still have to be carried out.

3.2 Research method: semi-structured interviews

In this research we are looking for possibly new and unexpected opinions and insights. After all, there is a lot of theoretical debate on this topic that we want to test in practice. Because there is not much critical reflection on neighbourhood renewal process in planning practice, it may be difficult for professionals to grasp this idea and to let them think about what else could be possible – different from what they normally do. This makes it important to clearly explain what is meant by a blueprint and by top-down or bottom-up planning, so that the respondents know what exactly the interview is about. At the same time, respondents should not be steered towards certain answers. To come to truly useful, perhaps unexpected insights, it is important to give respondents the opportunity to tell their own story (Silverman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were used

as they allow for the extraction of information from topics that are not well studied or documented (Boeije, 2005). Hereby, an interview manual is used as a guideline and includes a list of subjects that the researcher would like to address, as well as a series of questions that the researcher has prepared ahead of time (Van Thiel, 2014; Adams, 2015). The interview method allowed for probing if this was necessary, if for example something was unclear to the researcher or rules of regulations are mentioned that were unknown to the researcher.

The strategy was to firstly define clearly the definitions used in this research, based on the literature discussed in chapter 2. The next part consisted of questions about the neighbourhood that was discussed (either NPRZ or Bo-Tu), to get better insights in what exactly happened in the neighbourhood renewal process and what the role of the respondent was. Then, they were asked how they reflected on the participation process and the outcomes of that process. This was done to compare if the different strategies used in the two neighbourhoods led to different satisfaction among the respondents: which process functioned better? Lastly, the respondents were asked to reflect on how making a blueprint could have changed the process, how the participation process could be improved and what – in their opinion – the function of a blueprint and participation should be in neighbourhood renewal. Even if there is not much critical reflection and debate about this topic in practice, the interviewees are experienced professionals that are capable of reflection on their own work and philosophising on possible ways to improve it. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1. Note however that this guide has not been followed strictly: extra questions have been added, questions have sometimes been skipped or shuffled, based on the answers a respondent had already given.

Approaching new respondents has continued until the responses make clear that there is not much change to find new insights (Bryman, 1988; Silverman, 2013). The respondents do not need to form a statistically representative sample of a certain population, as this research is about testing theories and not about testing a whole population.

Six interviews were conducted: two amongst municipal professionals involved in the projects as project manager, one with an architect involved in making a spatial plan for NPRZ, one group interview with two professionals of Havensteder, a housing corporation active in Bospolder, Tussendijken and parts of Rotterdam-Zuid, and one with a professional involved in Delfshaven, a social cooperation active in BoTu. Because of the different approaches in both neighbourhoods, there was a need to interview different professionals: in NPRZ, the influence of architects and urban planners is bigger, whilst in BoTu the influence of social workers is more important. Although for comparability it would have been nice to also interview professionals active in the social area in NPRZ and an urban planner active in BoTu, no extra effort has been put in this. This is because after the sixth interview, it became clear that no new insights or data would be gathered.

These have been transcribed and analysed by marking parts in all interviews with colours, based on the topic. This helped to compare interviews that had a completely different order in which topics were discussed. Only interviewing professionals and no residents can, of course, be critiqued as talking about people instead of with people. However, the aim of this research is to find out the (dis)advantages of blueprint planning and participation. Professionals involved in neighbourhood renewal have a much better view on how these

processes work and what choices can be made about the degree and form of participation than most residents. Additionally, they also have a more objective and general view on the outcomes of the project. Although the experiences of residents are of course vital in deciding if a project has been successful, these experiences are generally made through personal experiences and the way in which their living situation has changed. Professionals have a more general view on how a neighbourhood has changed.

Additionally to the interviews, some secondary sources were used to get more insights into the two neighbourhoods. These sources are policy documents on the renewal projects (Mecanoo, 2020; Bosch & Ouwehand, 2019; Van Gils, 2020a; 2020b) or are news articles on what is happening in the neighbourhood regarding the renewal (NOS, 2020; Zonneveld, 2020; Nieuwsuur, 2020).

3.3 Comparability of the neighbourhoods

Nationaal Programma Rotterdam-Zuid is a project started up, steered and financed by the national government. It involves different neighbourhoods, with in total 240.000 residents. Bospolder-Tussendijken has only 14.000 residents. This is a big difference between the two areas that have been compared. This might be a problem when analysing outcomes, because the projects are actually taking place on different scales. This does not need to be a problem: it can also give insight in the best way to use a blueprint and it can say something about the influence the size of the neighbourhood on the process. The areas under research not only differ in approach used, but also in size. As one interviewee mentioned, the differences in approach to this project are probably also because of these different scales: NPRZ involved a bigger area and is thus more fitted for a top-down, government-led approach, whilst BoTu has a relatively small scale, thus making it possible to give residents a bigger role in organising themselves and improving social quality. It is important to be aware of this.

Important to mention is that the problems that exist in both areas are more or less the same, as are the main goals: neighbourhood renewal is not aimed at changing the spatial lay-out or completely renewing the housing stock. It is aimed at improving the lives of residents and solving social problems (Bosch & Ouwehand, 2019; NOS, 2020; Van Gils, 2020a; 2020b). Although scales differ, the themes on the agenda were the same. That is why both projects are sufficiently comparable to get good insights on the influence of either a top-down or a bottom-up approach on urban renewal.

3.3.1 Participation or a blueprint in NPRZ and Bo-Tu

Rotterdam-Zuid was chosen as a neighbourhood for this research, because of the relatively low degree of participation in the renewal project and the strong top-down steering. During this research, however, it became clear that a real blueprint has not been used in the process. Strategic spatial plans have been made (like the vision by [Mecanoo](#)) but they never acquired an official status. Plans are made to replace houses and improve public places at some locations (Nieuwsuur, 2020), but this is not at the level of the whole area. Nor does it totally change the spatial lay-out of the neighbourhoods.

Part of this research was to find out how blueprint planning has been applied in Dutch policies aimed at urban

neighbourhood renewal. In chapter 2, an exploration was made on the history of Dutch spatial planning – that involved great visions at times. But in neighbourhood renewal, the same level of blueprint planning cannot be found. This is no big surprise (it is one of the reasons for this explorative research), but it is good to take in mind that, in NPRZ, results have been gathered about an urban renewal project with low participation, not with a blueprint.

The other project, Bospolder-Tussendijken, was selected as a project in which residents were in the lead. During the data gathering, it was found that this statement had to be downgraded. A small group of residents was given the power to spend a small part of the budget on projects they deemed important, but larger decisions were still made at the level of governments and housing corporations. The neighbourhood renewal in BoTu can be seen as a project with high participation, not completely bottom-up.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Answers to the questions

Six people have been interviewed. They are shortly and anonymously presented here, coded by the neighbourhood they were involved in and the company they work at:

1. NPRZ_M: an architect at Mecanoo, who worked on a blueprint made by that company for NPRZ.
2. NPRZ_H: a project manager at Havensteder, a social housing corporation with dwellings in different neighbourhoods in Rotterdam, working on NPRZ
3. NPRZ_W: the 'Wijkmanager', neighbourhood manager, for the municipality Rotterdam, working on mainly social issues and participation in NPRZ.
4. BoTu_H: a project manager at Havensteder, a social housing corporation with dwellings in different neighbourhoods in Rotterdam, working on Bospolder-Tussendijken
5. BoTu_W: the 'Wijkmanager', neighbourhood manager, for the municipality Rotterdam, working on mainly social issues and participation in Bospolder-Tussendijken
6. BoTu_G: the former 'Gebiedsmanager', area manager for the municipality Rotterdam, who was involved in the start-up of the process in Bospolder-Tussendijken

To all these interviewees, the same questions have been asked. After the introductory questions about their function and role, a few questions have been asked about their experience with, and ideas about, participation and blueprints. Before asking about these topics, they have shortly been introduced using the definition built up in this study in the theoretical chapter. To every question, different answers have been given by different people (of course). But, the answers can be generally divided in two or three categories. For every question, these answer categories have been displayed, including in which category every respondent gave an answer.

Q1: did people truly have a say in this process?		
A1: People have influenced/changed the overall outcomes of the process	A2: People have had a say about a small part of the project	A3: Residents have been informed, but they did not have a say about most things
BoTu_W	BoTu_G; NPRZ_H	NPRZ_M; NPRZ_W; BoTu_H

Q2: how do you value the participation in this process?		
A1: It was alright this way	A2: People should have had more chance to participate	A3: Participation delayed/complicated the process
BoTu_H; BoTu_G; NPRZ_M	NPRZ_W	BoTu_W; NPRZ_H

Q3: what do you think of the chances of a top-down process?		
A1: It can help to speed up the process, when less participation is needed	A2: There is no reason to assume that it results in a better or worse process/outcome	A3: It will probably lead to too much opposition from the residents
NPRZ_H; BoTu_H; NPRZ_M	BoTu_W	NPRZ_W; BoTu_G

Q4: how would a blueprint have helped in this process?		
A1: It can show to all participants what is possible in an area	A2: It gives clarity to all stakeholders involved	A3: It would probably not have helped
NPRZ_M	NPRZ_H; NPRZ_W; BoTu_H; BoTu_W	BoTu_G

Q5: what if a blueprint proposed radical changes that will lead to improvements, but residents are against the plans. Should it be carried out anyway?		
A1: Yes, residents are here only for a relatively short time	A2: No, because a project legally needs 70% acceptance	A3: No, even if it leads to great improvements, the current layout of a neighbourhood is valuable
NPRZ_M	NPRZ_H	NPRZ_W; BoTu_H; BoTu_W; BoTu_G

It is interesting to see that respondents had different ideas of how much participation happened in both neighbourhoods, but that the people who experienced less participation did not per se think this was a bad idea. Also, those people active at commercial parties (Havensteder and Mecanoo) see how more top-down steering can help to speed up the process. This is less interesting to professionals at a municipality. Also, the majority of the respondents mainly saw the advantage of the extra clarity that a blueprint can add, not necessarily because it can be a source of inspiration to everyone involved and show what could be. This is mainly because respondents think that big changes to a neighbourhood are not even wanted: people are attached to the way a neighbourhood now looks. In the next paragraph we will dive deeper into this topic.

4.2 A maximum to change, a maximum to participation

From the interviews it became clear that participation has been limited in both projects. All interviewees agreed that participation should always be limited. As one of the professionals at a housing corporation puts it: “You can ask a lot to many people. They are capable of thinking about the future of their own house. But if we want to make a planning that fits everyone, it would never work. (...). Furthermore, once you ask people to not only decide about their own house but also that of the neighbours, it gets tricky.” Residents should not have a too strong say in the strategic plans of corporations. Partly because this involves technical choices, but also because this involves making sometimes difficult decisions about houses of people they know. It might lead to tensions in neighbourhoods: having ‘the expert’ or ‘the municipality’ as the (sometimes evil) decision-maker is probably better for the neighbourhood. There is a maximum to what can be asked of people: in time, in knowledge, and in authority.

Something remarkable that was found in the interviews and the secondary sources (NOS, 2020; Zonneveld, 2020) was that the main investments were not put into the physical surroundings. Social factors, like schooling,

social work and safety. Projects involving rebuilding houses, other buildings or re-arranging public places have been secondary to that. Furthermore, those were the projects that generated the biggest opposition (NOS, 2020). As one of the respondents said: “People are attached to the way their neighbourhood looks and functions. The spatial lay-out shapes their daily routes. Even if you could massively improve an area in terms of traffic flows, one could wonder if you would make current respondents happy.”

All interviewees agreed that urban neighbourhood renewal is mainly aimed at improving the social structure of a neighbourhood and the living conditions of current residents. This automatically means that their wishes are seen as the wishes of the residents: also when renting their house, current residents are the owners of an area – not the future residents.

This shows that there are limitations to what experts can plan and implement. Housing corporations have an obligation to get agreement of 70% of the residents involved in a renewal plan. Should they not reach that, their plans will probably not be accepted by the government or (if necessary) the judge. Both from the interviews and secondary sources, it became clear that there is a maximum amount of change a neighbourhood can undergo.

4.3 The potential of a blueprint

A truly blueprint-led project in neighbourhood renewal does not exist, nor does a completely bottom-up project. In the earlier chapters of this research, the lack of blueprint planning was sometimes ascribed to a lack of vision by policy makers and experts. When analysing two different neighbourhoods however, the results from the interviews make clear that blueprint planning in neighbourhood renewal may not be desirable. Even if a blueprint does not mean that there is no room for flexibility or participation. The changes that a strategic spatial plan triggers, will probably lead to opposition.

This does not mean that a blueprint has no function. It can still help to make clear what is going to happen in an area: it is a guideline for professionals and residents alike. All interviewees agreed that this would help them in structuring the process and the talks with residents. Although some of the respondents argued that people should have the right to decide about what happens in their neighbourhood, the most agreed that participation often means long meetings in which a lot is said, but not much is done with the things that are said. After all, many residents use these opportunities for participation to spill their experiences and complaints to a professional, hoping they can solve their problem. Most of the things discussed there, are not planned or possible to be changed.

Following this, the respondents agreed that a workable blueprint should already be quite detailed. Otherwise, residents might get the impression that a many things are still debatable. The whole goal of a blueprint is to make clear what is not debatable. Residents are “in the end, mostly looking for clarity. They want to know what is going to happen and when – although that can be tricky to promise.”, as one of the interviewees put it. If the spatial changes that a blueprint foresees are not too big and people still recognise ‘their’ neighbourhood, the risk of opposition is low: both at the start and during the process. Having experts making a plan helps to get the framework and conditions right – somethings with which the interviewees would be very much helped in their work, they stated. This plan should just not differ too much from the current situation

4.4 The future of participation

What then, can be asked to residents? Even in socially weaker neighbourhoods, they can and should be involved in a project. As one of the respondents said: “In every neighbourhood there are some smart people who are able and willing to think along, also at the larger scale and not only about their own street. Of course there are! Neighbourhoods can have a few thousand residents – you cannot talk to everyone, but you should find those local experts that can help to improve your plan.” This group can be involved from the beginning, they could even be the ones making the blueprint. Why not? None of the respondents had clear ideas about who should be the one to make a blueprint – nor who should be the one who appoints the one to make a blueprint.

Among the interviewees there was consensus that participation nowadays often goes too far. People are invited to join at moments in the process from beginning to end, often making the process longer, more labour-intensive and more difficult, as all the different opinions have to be taken into account in some way. Different respondents have experienced how residents were disappointed by participation: how their wishes were not acknowledged and how they could not talk about some topics.

So how could the future of participation look, when a blueprint is used in neighbourhood renewal? The “smart people” can thus be involved from the beginning when making the blueprint – the phase in which nothing is impossible yet. This form of participation is aimed at using local knowledge when making a blueprint, something which has proven to be very important. Not everything can or should be changed after all. What about the other residents? Of course, they should be informed well about every step. Sharing the blueprint with everyone is a good start – often better than the nowadays common ‘nothing has been decided yet’-approach. They should only have a say later in the project, when it comes down to details on street level.

Of course, people might be disappointed by what has been decided ‘for them’ about their neighbourhood. People get disappointed nowadays too however, because it is not certain if their opinions are shared by enough other residents to become reality. It seems to be a choice between some people being dissatisfied with decisions made by (municipal) professionals or some people being dissatisfied with what is done with their opinions.

One question remains: who decides who those “smart people” are and how can they be found? Often, there are municipal professionals active in neighbourhoods – especially the socio-economic weaker ones. They get to know a lot of active people there and will thus be able to make a selection. However, if this necessarily leads to the best and most democratic outcomes remains unclear from the results in this research. It can be topic of future research.

5. CONCLUSION

The main research question is as follows: what are the advantages of using a blueprint in urban neighbourhood renewal compared to fully bottom-up planning practices?

To provide an answer to this question, the debate in literature has been tested on practical experiences and opinions of professionals. The most important advantages found for making a blueprint are the clarity it can bring to a process. A blueprint does not limit the possibilities for involving citizens; participation is still possible. What it does, however, is changing the way in which participation happens throughout the process. Different people can better be involved in different ways, best fitting their ability and willingness to participate. The 'smart people' that every neighbourhood has can be involved from the beginning, when making the blueprint. They add local knowledge and can make sure that the changes that a neighbourhood does not change too much. In this research it was found that changes should not be too big: people are attached to the way their neighbourhood looks and functions. In that aspect, a workable blueprint in neighbourhood renewal differs strongly from the blueprints used in the 20th century for the Flevopolder or city growth plans. There is a strong difference between using a blueprint in neighbourhood renewal or for making 'new things' like new neighbourhoods or even polders. The rest of the neighbourhood can be involved when filling in the details of their street. By that time it is already clear when the big changes are going to happen and what is not debatable anymore. This speeds up the process strongly.

If it is the government making the blueprint, this adds the advantage of a government taking responsibility and committing itself to instigating certain changes. It could also be other parties making a blueprint, like Mecanoo in Nationaal Programma Rotterdam-Zuid. The advantage of this is that there are no costs for a government – it saves public money. The municipality – the institution that should be taking the lead in neighbourhood renewal – can still adopt the blueprint. Maybe changing it a bit, but not necessarily. The question who should be making a blueprint, or who should be deciding who can make a blueprint, remains unanswered in this research. Although it is the local government that should take the lead in the process, they are not necessarily the party to make a blueprint. It is very well possible that other (commercial) parties are better equipped to make a blueprint. Those companies should also feel welcome to make a blueprint on their own initiatives. Waiting until the government hires a consultancy with spatial planners and architects carries the risk that creativity and opportunities are not put to good use. Companies should also feel welcome to make a blueprint by themselves, although this might raise questions about democratic values and double agenda (who's gaining the most out of this neighbourhood renewal?).

Will using a blueprint lead to better functioning neighbourhoods, or better neighbourhood renewal? This is the expectation, yes. The nowadays prevalent bottom-up processes lead to unnecessarily long processes, a lot of talk and 'poldering' and conservative outcomes. This potential problem was already discovered in the theoretic framework and has come back in the results. Many plans in neighbourhood renewal lead to strong opposition as well: people get a chance to have a say and use that chance to halter the process, trying to achieve that as little as possible will change. Making a vision, an admired future, can change this practice

entirely. We have to temper the expectations on what a blueprint can do however: there is a maximum to change that will be expected. There are laws and regulations on how (many) inhabitants have to agree on a plan. This will probably not change. It means that a blueprint can be used to speed up a process and come to maybe unexpected outcomes, but it still has to take the present situation in mind. For existing neighbourhoods, we might have to expect that the new situation will be more or less the same as it was.

6. Discussion

6.1 The value of the outcomes for generalization

The outcomes in this research are based on interviews among professionals active in two neighbourhoods in Rotterdam. This might raise questions about representativeness. This is solved by selecting cases via experts, in this case at research institute Platform31. As Seawright and Gerring (2008) say about this: “A complication in selecting cases is that of representativeness. Cases must be representative of the population of interest. (...) Deductive logic—expectations about the causal relationships of interest and the case of choice—are sometimes more useful than purely inductive tests.” The ‘deductive logic’ in this research concerns asking an expert to provide a few possible cases, and then choose the most comparable from that list.

Although no two neighbourhoods are the same, the problems and possible solutions are often comparable. Furthermore, the interviewees were – although selected because of their involvement in one of the neighbourhoods under research – active in more different neighbourhood. Most of their answers will be based more on their general experiences and opinions, not on either NPRZ or Bo-Tu. This makes the outcomes presented in this study also valuable for other neighbourhoods.

However, let us keep in mind that this is an exploratory study. The goal of which is not to present finding that can be applied to all neighbourhoods in the Netherlands, but much more to explore the topic of using a blueprint in neighbourhood renewal. Some new insights have been collected based on two carefully picked cases, these insights can be tested further in future research. The true generalization of outcomes in this research is not about the way it can be applied to other neighbourhoods, it is about how the results presented here are useful for exploring the (as of yet undiscovered) planning with a blueprint. This can be done with sufficient confidence, based on the careful selection of critical cases and expert interviewees.

6.2 The findings in this research compared to the literature

In chapter 2, literature about the advantages and disadvantages about both participation and a blueprint have been discussed. The biggest critiques found there on participation have also been found in this research. Problems with fully bottom-up processes include:

- Not involving everyone the way they want to be involved
- Risk of tokenism: people get the impression they have a say, but in practice this is not the case
- Bottom-up processes can lead to ideas that are not possible to carry out because they go against laws/regulations.

These core problems were also found by the interviewees. Some ideas to tackle these problems have been proposed, and solutions can (indeed) often be found in using a blueprint.

The literature on blueprint planning does have a different view on neighbourhood renewal than the interviewees in this research. The literature assumes that the highest goal is to have the best possible outcome (i.e. the best functioning neighbourhood), hardly influenced by the current situation. However, this

research has shown that many residents and professionals alike do not necessarily want big improvements. The current situation is also important and dear to them. This can be seen as conservatism or a lack of vision, but one could wonder if there is anything wrong with liking how things are at this moment and wanting to keep it more or less that way, with only small improvements. Urban planner should always ask: what makes a neighbourhood a nice living area? And they should ask if anything will be left of that in the case of a complete make-over. Even if that new situation is theoretically a 'better' area in terms of traffic, housing, climate robustness and many more aspects. It also has to be a recognisable area.

Furthermore, different professionals have opposed to the idea that residents would be unable to look at and think about their neighbourhood as a whole. Although for the vast majority it is indeed the case that they are only interested in their house and the street it is on, every area has smart residents able and willing to think on a higher scale and think along with professionals – even socially weaker neighbourhoods. This connects to the idea of e.g. Van de Kamp et al. (2019) that different residents should be involved in different ways. Experts like municipal professionals, architects and urban planners are very suited to make creative and sound strategic spatial plans, but when trying to implement that in a neighbourhood they should always involve that group of 'frontrunners' living in the area they make plans about. These people are able to think strategically, envision a better future and improve a blueprint. Involving this group does not happen to show how much participation has happened (it is no tokenism), it is truly to improve the plan. Furthermore, when taking decisions at a somewhat lower level (for example about renewing or replacing houses), it is better not to involve these citizens anymore. At that point, they start deciding about their own living situation and that of their neighbours, which is much more difficult. Different residents should be involved in different ways, academic literature could invest more time in finding out how diverse resident groups are and how diverse participation processes thus should be.

From the interviews, it became clear that professionals think that changes in the spatial layout of a neighbourhood should not be too big. People are, after all, attached to how their neighbourhood now functions. This is, according to the respondents, more important than the possible bigger improvements that could result from bigger changes. One might say that professionals nowadays are not daring enough. But on the other hand, grasping the idea of big changes in an existing neighbourhood cannot be asked of them – nor can it be of residents. This is in line with the idea of a blueprint as proposed by Van Dijk (2020; 2021), Ganjavie (2012) and Pinder (2013). They state that planning with a blueprint is not the same as blueprint planning, which is the strongly top-down way of planning in which all details are already filled in. Something like that is not wanted by anyone.

When looking at the conceptual model that was made based on the literature, it can remain intact for the biggest part. The function that a blueprint can have in a neighbourhood renewal process is still clear. However, the model had the outcome shifted somewhat away from the middle. This was to show the possible unexpected outcome, away from the conservative middle. This can still be the case when using a blueprint, but the findings in this research have also shown that the outcome should not be too far away from that conservative middle. Many people living in a neighbourhood have the tendency to get attached to how it

looks and functions. The interviewees have made clear that this should be respected too: taking the present situation as guideline for the future is always necessarily, whether residents get the chance to participate or whether experts make a blueprint.

6.3 Ideas for future research

Spatial planning is a field that will continue to evolve. There are no clear outcomes, no hard true versus untrue, and there will be room for different opinions as there are no natural truths 'out there' to be discovered. The same will probably be true for the discussion around blueprints. This research makes a strong plea for re-inventing blueprints: do not see them as the old-school top-down way of 'blueprint planning', but as visions for the future that are adaptable and still give room to participation. It also makes a strong plea for making blueprints as the start for a neighbourhood renewal project.

Some things have not been completely cleared up however. For example who should be making a blueprint, or who should be appointing the one to make a blueprint, is a topic for future debate. There is no reason beforehand to exclude anyone from making a blueprint, but when a group of active residents does this, it may lead to the same problems that fully bottom-up processes nowadays face. However, one can also say that this is the summit of democracy: people taking the initiative themselves, improving their living conditions. To take this debate to a next level, it is interesting to know what the exact implications are when a certain group of people make a blueprint. How do bottom-up, expert-made or government-made blueprints differ, for example?

Another topic for future research is on the difference between 'smart people' and the rest. Who is that group of people? How can they be found? How democratic and fair is it to give people who are willing and able to say more, this bigger say? It could also lead to undemocratic outcomes or even repression. Who knows?

Following the type of research method (exploratory, using only a few interviews as method for data collection), the outcomes of this research are hard to apply to other neighbourhoods. For more general knowledge of what works in neighbourhood renewal, more data could be collected and more experiences compared. In short, a research that takes this exploratory research to a study that can more strongly confirm or disprove the findings presented here, can take the discussion away from being fundamental and philosophical towards having a strong basis, grounded in empirics.

6.4 Reflection on the process

This research has a relatively big 'philosophical' component to it. It is exploratory and contemplative, and not so much data-driven. That is why it relies relatively heavily on a theoretical debate. It has been difficult to find the best way to test the theoretical findings in practice. What kind of data could be used to test something that does not really exist, like a 'modern day' blueprint as discussed in this research? Of course, a blueprint has been used for certain projects, but not in neighbourhood renewal. Furthermore, these projects have already been discussed in other papers (see, for example, Van Dijk, 2020; 2021).

Options of data collection considered were using quantitative data on the functioning of the neighbourhood. There are statistics on socio-economic status, housing quality and liveability – the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of both renewed neighbourhoods could be compared. However, it was decided that there are too many other factors influencing these statistics. For truly informative new insights on exploring this topic, qualitative methods should work better.

Eventually, it was decided to use interviews among professionals as a way of comparing two neighbourhoods. This method has quite a few snags: it appeared difficult to find comparable neighbourhoods and willing professionals to interview. Because this is a relatively unknown topic that asks a lot of reflection and deep understanding of what professionals do, it also turned out to be difficult to find professionals that had enough knowledge of and experience with this topic to be able to say insightful things about a blueprint.

Although data collection took a long time this way, I believe it has resulted in new insights that help to add something to the otherwise merely theoretical debate. Even if only six interviews have been carried out, this research has helped to bring the theoretical debate towards the practice, and the other way around. That the process has taken such a long time, will not have influenced the outcomes or made the results any less robust. Respondents are evaluation on a period that took many years, they are not merely looking at the present situation. A ‘present situation’ can change heavily in a few months, yearlong experience cannot.

In the end, it is the researcher’s opinion that a robust research has been done, looking critically at both literature and practice, challenging existing ideas and testing my own.

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