

# Citizen participation around housing plans

*a theory testing case study in Groningen*



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## **Abstract**

Since the Netherlands have to deal with a housing problem due to among others urbanization and population growth, urban regions have to build houses. The municipality of Groningen plans 20.000 houses until 2035. Therefore, the municipal executive has selected several sites which will be extended or revitalized in both the inner city and outside the city. Housing projects ask for a customized citizen participation approach, since it influences citizens' place specific perspective. Support for housing plans in a certain urban region depends among others on citizen participation. However, not much is known about differences in citizen participation between certain urban regions. Where in literature advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation are given, there is a gap how this is perceived in different urban regions. Groningen strives for being a compact city, while urban sprawl arises at the rural-urban fringe. Understanding the roles of place perspective in a certain urban form and well-being are important points of interest in debates on environmental and social sustainability of cities. Unless the pressure to build houses on both urban sites, citizens are involved in such participation processes. There are conditions for successful participation, which have been the basis for this thesis. This thesis is done to see to what extent a mismatch exists in citizen participation between inner and outer city neighbourhoods in Groningen. For both urban planners as citizens this research could be interesting which indicators contribute to citizen participation and to deal with them in case of housing plans.

**Keywords:** citizen participation, place perspective, compact city, urban sprawl, housing plans, municipalities.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Societal relevance

“Build, build and build again, that is the solution to the housing crisis” states Trouw (2021) about the Deltaplan to “build 220.000 houses extra” in the northern provinces and municipalities. And NOS (2021) highlights “building in green areas outside cities is inevitable” when the Netherlands wants to build 1 million houses. This crisis is, among others, caused by the increased urbanization and a growth of one-person households by over 25% has resulted in housing shortage in the Netherlands (CBS, 2020).

In order to solve the housing problem, both the compact city policy as urban sprawl have been commonly used in the Netherlands (Buitelaar & Leinfelder, 2020; Dieleman et al., 1999). In other words: building in the city and at the rural-urban fringe. With compact city policies policy makers strive to make cities among others more dense, green and with a wider supply of facilities and less pollution (Dieleman et al., 1999; Driessen et al., 2013). By this compact city policy municipalities strive to (re)vitalize the inner city with strong dependency on the local situation and stakeholders (Hamers & Piek, 2012). However, with urban sprawl cities extend at the rural-urban fringe (Hamers et al., 2013). According to Hamers (2020), there is still enough space to build in the inner city on former industrial areas which could be revitalized. But, as mentioned in the same report for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL in Dutch), to build outer the city usually is cheaper and easier to develop. However, urban developments ask for support of citizens by citizen participation to realize houses in their environment.

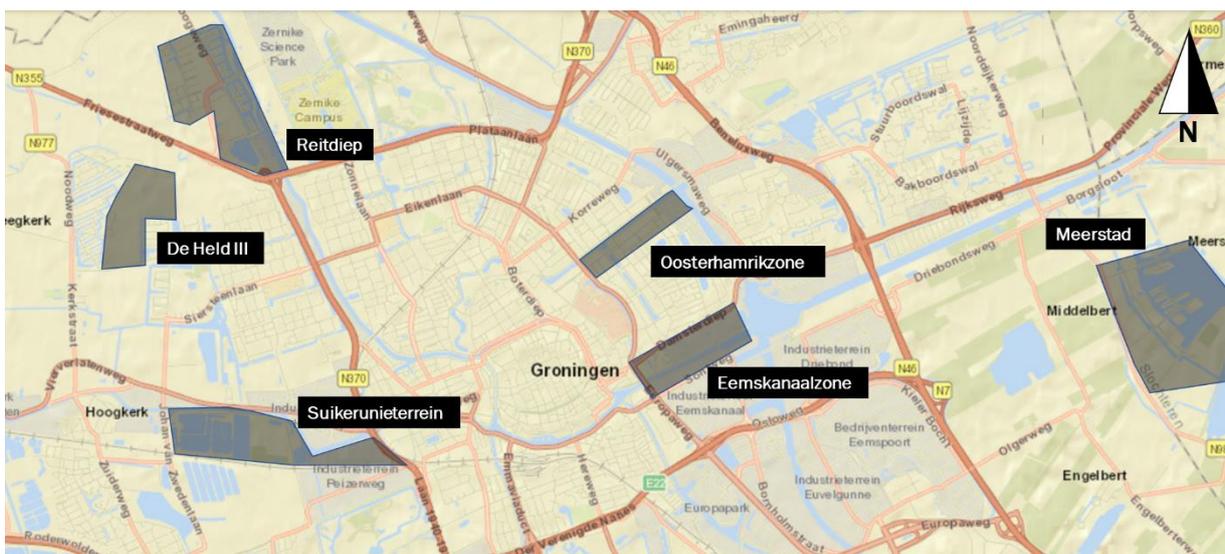


Figure 1 Overview of the most common development sites in Groningen until 2030 (Author, 2021)

For this thesis, Groningen is an interesting case for doing research on housing plans and citizen participation, whereas the city has around 200.000 inhabitants in 2021, 250.000 inhabitants are forecasted for 2035 (NextCity, 2018). Both statistics show the urgency to build houses in Groningen, because the growth puts spatial housing plans under pressure. The most recent environmental vision (Omgevingsvisie in Dutch) The Next City (NextCity, 2018) argues that the municipality of Groningen plans 20.000 houses until 2030. Therefore, the municipal executive has selected several sites which will be extended or revitalized in both the inner city and outside the city. The Next City (NextCity, 2018) argues that the municipality strives to keep the city mainly compact, while one-third of the housing plans exist on the rural-urban fringe. Most common development sites, shown in figure 1, are the De Held III, Eemskanaalzone, Meerstad, Oosterhamrikzone, Reitdiep and Suikerunieterrein (NextCity, 2018; Woondeal Groningen, 2019). To realize housing plans on these areas, the municipality of Groningen increases citizen

participation since 2016 by involvement in such spatial visions of the city to share their opinion about several spatial cases (NextCity, 2018; Woondeal Groningen, 2019),

During such processes of housing plans like in Groningen, citizens are involved (Hamers et al., 2013). Therefore, governments like the municipality of Groningen are not in the position to take decisions about housing plans on their own (De Roo, 2000). Spatial planning in the Netherlands becomes more integral with more direct involvement in the participatory planning process by several stakeholders, like citizens and their neighbourhood associations (Artmann et al., 2019). According to De Roo (2000), all parties must be included in the planning process to avoid conflicts. Due to the several interests of all stakeholders, they all have to take part in the decision making process to improve effectiveness and efficiency. This is the basis for taking consensus and citizen participation into consideration. The advantages and disadvantages of this citizen participation will be discussed later.

## **1.2 Scientific relevance**

Starting point of this thesis are two knowledge gaps. This thesis aims to contribute to the literature on both gaps. First, numerous papers, among others Abelson et al. (2003), Van Buuren et al. (2019), Van der Heijden & Ten Heuvelhof (2012), Laurian & Shaw (2009), Morf (2005), De Roo (2000) and Roovers & Van Buuren (2016), give an overview of advantages and disadvantages of successful citizen participation. On the other hand, e.g. Bibri et al. (2020), Dieleman et al. (1999), Driessen et al. (2013), Hamers (2020) and Neumann (2005) discuss what compact city policy is, while among others Hamers (2020), Hamers et al. (2013), Hamers & Piek (2012) and Buitelaar & Leinfelder (2020) defined urban sprawl. However, there is a lack of insights out of practice on both advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation versus compact city and urban sprawl in literature. For both urban planners as citizens it is relevant to identify which advantages and disadvantages are commonly perceived in a certain region in practice to improve further participation processes. Therefore, this research compares the conditions for successful participation between theory and practice in compact city sites versus urban sprawl sites.

Second, according to Friedmann (2010) and Hanssen & Saglie (2010), a customized citizen participation approach per housing project in a certain area is necessary instead of a standardized blueprint. Citizen participation is not one-size-fits-all, because it depends on the place specific perspective. According to Mouratidis (2019), understanding the roles of place perspective and well-being are important points of interest in debates on environmental and social sustainability of cities. He claims citizens living in compact cities do mostly have a positive influence on physical health and personal relationships, while residents living in smaller or sprawled areas are mostly happier. As a result of primarily emphasis on citywide level concerning spatial plans, Hanssen & Saglie (2010) says that local concerns are mainly about spatial quality of local areas. According to Friedmann (2010), local people do not speak the language of urban planners when it comes to the planning processes to improve their neighbourhood, for example in case of housing plans. So, all papers beforehand suggest place specific perspective is influenced by among others urban form, which could have influence on the perceived conditions for successful citizen participation.

## **1.3 Research statement**

The aim of this research is to test to what extent a mismatch exists between theory and practice in citizen participation for urban planners and citizens in the compact city and urban sprawl. Hereby, perceived differences of advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation and knowledge about it by urban planners and citizens are tested. Therefore, this thesis contains a case study of neighbourhoods in the inner city and outer city of Groningen where housing plans exist. For both urban planners as citizens this research is of interest to improve such processes for a successful cooperation between both in order to contribute to the housing shortage in Groningen.

The main research question is as follows:

*To what extent does a mismatch exist between theory and practical regarding the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in compact city policy and urban sprawl in Groningen?*

The following sub questions form the theoretical framework and the conceptual model;

1. What are the main differences in terms of planning between compact city policy and urban sprawl?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in spatial planning processes?

These last sub-questions will be answered through empirical research:

3. How do citizens participate in participation processes around housing plans in or around their neighbourhood?
4. How does the municipality of Groningen perceive citizen participation in and outside the city?
5. How do citizens perceive participation towards extending or revitalizing their neighbourhood?

#### **1.4 Reading guide**

Chapter two consists of the theoretical framework, which contains the three most relevant concepts: compact city, urban sprawl and citizen participation. The third chapter is an explanation about the applied methods. In the fourth chapter the results will be discussed, before the conclusion and recommendations will be given in the fifth chapter.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1 Compact city

The compact city policy is widely used by urban planners in the Netherlands since the 1980s to compact urban growth (Dieleman et al., 1999). Numerous papers defined the compact city. Bibri et al. (2020) starts with key aspects like mixed-use of cities, density, diversity, sustainability and urban green space. They said, by striving for sustainability in their neighbourhood and having influence on that process, citizens strengthen their knowledge about ongoing projects. In line with Bibri et al. (2020), Driessen et al. (2013) explains that in compact urban areas autonomy of local authorities is high as a result of their local knowledge and interests, which can be helpful to avoid conflicts between different stakeholders during the planning process.

According to among others Dieleman et al. (1999), Driessen et al. (2013), Hamers et al. (2013) and Neumann (2005), it can be characterized as a green and mixed-use city with relatively high amount of facilities, population-density, activities and cultural diversity. It is energy efficient, limiting use of materials for building and infrastructure and less polluting as a result of focusing on extended public transport networks and focusing on cycling and walking. In contrast to those mixed-use zones and variety of facilities, Buitelaar & Leinfelder (2020) and Foord (2010) claim street patterns and general view in compact areas are mostly the same and more structured. This influences citizens' well-being in the inner city. Finally, Artmann et al. (2019) claims that effects of compact city policy on local scale must be considered to improve perceived densification, urban green spaces and further positive impacts.

### 2.2 Urban sprawl

While compact cities focus on the inner city, the phenomenon of urban sprawl could be seen as 'new urbanism' as an effect of increased affluence, personal car mobility and changed lifestyles according to Dieleman & Wegener (2004). Among other differences as shown in table 1, to give an answer on the sub-question which differences exist between compact city and urban sprawl, urban sprawl is often defined as uncontrolled and unplanned (Buitelaar & Leinfelder, 2020). Hereby, individual preferences are more important than cohesion, while you can see cars rather than public transport. And, as they claim, the only solution to limit this sprawl is more comprehensive planning. However, Hamers & Piek (2012) explain that the tempo in which housing plans must be accomplished nowadays is taken under pressure by the trend of urbanization in urban regions in the Netherlands. They suggest some spatial plans in the Netherlands are less 'firm' in sense of strict rules and regulations, which could result in even more urbanization in fringe areas.

Compact city	Urban sprawl
Mixed-use area with lot of facilities	Mixed-use area
Concentrated pattern	Cluttered pattern
High density	Lower density: more open space
Various activities and interaction	Much green space
Sustainable: limited pollution	Connection to inner city
Green zones	More focus on the car
Extended public transport	
Focus on cycling and walking	

Table 1 Overview of differences in qualities between compact city and urban sprawl (Author, 2021)

In essence, these aspects of urban sprawl are totally different in comparison to a compact city. The rural-urban fringe is mostly an interesting, but cluttered zone for planners which has a lot of opportunities for mixed land-uses, facilities and innovative connections to the inner city (Dieleman & Wegener, 2004; Hamers et al., 2013). According to Dieleman & Wegener (2004), lower density gives opportunities for urban green spaces, which has a positive influence on well-being in neighbourhoods (Hanssen & Saglie, 2010).

**2.3 Citizen participation**

According to Friedmann (2010), Hanssen & Saglie (2010) and Mouratidis (2019), citizens’ perspective of place and their neighbourhood is of influence on their local concerns. These concerns are mainly about the spatial quality of local areas, like playgrounds and green zones. However, as researched by Hanssen & Saglie (2010), these concerns are not directly of interest for urban planners in the debate. The role of these concerns and debates increases, according to De Roo (2000). Besides, citizen participation is on the national agenda when it comes to spatial plans (Hamers, 2020). Van Buuren et al. (2019) elaborated several paths for both urban planners as citizens to create participation.

Van Buuren et al. (2019) distinguish five types of citizen participation. Two of them are used through urban planners by inviting citizens top-down: capacity or legitimacy-driven participation. Capacity-driven participation is meant to strengthen governance capacities by empowering stakeholders, while legitimacy-driven participation focuses on ensuring support for policy actions.

Besides, Van Buuren et al. (2019) distinguish three bottom-up types of citizen participation for citizens: project, action or policy driven participation. With project-oriented initiatives citizens developing own projects as alternative plans to prevent governments realizing their own proposals. Besides, action-oriented initiatives are focused on organizing and managing actions to realize an initiative that adds public value. Finally, by policy-oriented initiatives citizens change existing or initiate new rules and regulations to start a policy-oriented lobby.

Moreover, papers have shown conditions for successful citizen participation, which is important for the people’s place perspective and the planning process. Hereby, the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation are given to answer the second sub-question. The advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation, shown in table 2, will be explained afterwards.

<p><b>Advantages</b>          Acceptance          Democratic rate and legitimacy          Fairness and power sharing          Knowledge and information          Transparency</p>	<p><b>Disadvantages</b>          Expectations          Balance: power and knowledge          Representativity          Time-consuming and complexity</p>
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Table 3 Overview of the advantages and disadvantages for this thesis (Author, 2021)

**2.3.1 Advantages**

Several scientists have done research on the advantages of citizen participation. First, Abelson et al. (2003) described principles of public participation processes. Hereby, among others legitimacy and representativity of the selection process and transparency of citizen participation are key factors for a successful participation process. With legitimacy they mean: degree of sufficient control and input by citizens into the consultation agenda. Their point of transparency is about gaining information by citizens about spatial plans which are going on in their neighbourhood. Furthermore, Laurian & Shaw (2009) share more or less goals and practices of citizen participation, where transparency, inclusiveness and fairness and power sharing are some main indicators of successful participation. According to them, inclusiveness means all views and opinions of the participation process are weighted, while fairness and power sharing were explained as fair rules

and decision-making with equal opportunities to each group of stakeholders. Finally, Roovers & Van Buuren (2016) shared lessons learned from planning in water management. In addition to Abelson et al. (2003), they state democracy and legitimacy enhances the participation process. Furthermore, by involvement of several stakeholders into the participation process, acceptance of the decision-making processes increases, while participants during these process can improve their social capital: skills and knowledge. All papers above contributed to the discussion about which advantages of citizen participation exist. In short, acceptance, democratic rate and legitimacy, fairness and power sharing, knowledge and information and transparency are the advantages relevant to this thesis.

### **2.3.2 Disadvantages**

In contrast to the advantages, explanations of perceived disadvantages elaborated by among others Van Buuren et al. (2019), Van der Heijden & Ten Heuvelhof (2012) and De Roo (2000). First, Van Buuren et al. (2019) have done research to participation process practices in spatial water management. According to them, local governments experience difficulties by managing expectations of participants during such participation processes. Authorities have to balance their formal tasks and create space for participation in a legal and accountable way. Moreover, as explained by them, by including many stakeholders the participation processes can become time-consuming and complex. They can prolong the process and increase the costs by doing that. However, De Roo (2000) says all stakeholders and their interests must be involved in the process to avoid conflicts and stimulate its efficiency. But, Van der Heijden & Ten Heuvelhof (2012) explain in their paper the language of given information could be vague for especially citizens, which results in a time-consuming process to inform all involved parties about the desired goals. Furthermore, Van Buuren et al. (2019) claim an imbalance of power and inequality of arms and resources delaying the participation process. Empowerment is necessary for an equal process, which is difficult. Finally, they explained an experienced dilemma is the representativity of the local citizens. Not all initiatives are supported by anyone, which is problematic for local authorities. Summarizing, expectations, balance of power and knowledge, representativity, time consuming and complexity are the disadvantages relevant to this thesis.

### **2.4 Conceptual model**

The conceptual model (figure 2) gives an overview of the relevant concepts, which are presented in the theoretical framework. The model shows the possible mismatch between theory and practice between compact city and urban sprawland how these urban concepts relate to the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation. Finally, it shows how these theories lead to a possible mismatch between theory and practice in terms of the conditions of successful perceived citizen participation and both two urban forms.

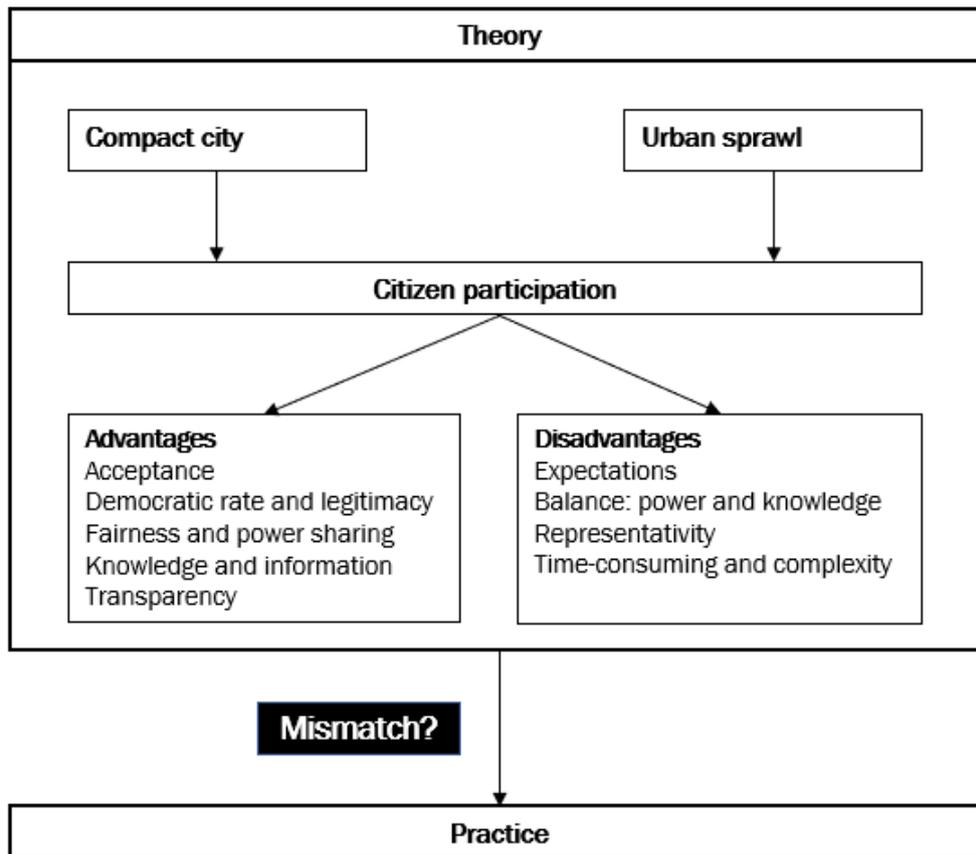


Figure 2 Conceptual model of the thesis (Author, 2021)

### 3. Methodology

To give an answer to the research question ‘*To what extent does a mismatch exist between theory and practical regarding the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in compact city policy and urban sprawl in Groningen?*’, both primary and secondary data were used. The literature-based conditions for successful citizen participation were tested in practice to the perceived differences between the inner city and the outer city. Afterwards, recommendations can be given for improvements. The primary data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. However, this was done digitally due to the current COVID-19 regulations. The secondary data that are used are peer-reviewed research papers which have been published in academic journals and policy documents as the basis for the theoretical framework.

#### 3.1 Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to test the literature and give an answer on the main research question. The semi-structured interviews offer some structure to the data collection by the opportunity to ask the same set of questions to respondents. Moreover, it gives the researcher the opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on the answers given by the interviewees. This enables more opportunities to get in-depth answers and so information, which provides more room for discussion (Longhurst, 2016). This has been useful to get further insights from interviewees about their experiences with help of multiple examples. And, this way has helped to see emotions and ascertain facial expressions of the interviewees, which lead to better understanding of the given answers and examples (Clifford, et al., 2016). The interview guide was the backbone of the interviews and can be found in appendix 2. Finally, the guide has been helpful to do further analysis by coding, which gives useful data for answering the research questions (Dunn, 2005; Punch, 2014).

Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed to provide the analysis process. The interviews were done and transcripts were made in Dutch with help of OTranscribe. To avoid colloquial language and improve its accuracy, the transcripts were edited by the researcher. The transcripts were labelled, after which deductive codes were created and categorized with help of Atlas.ti. The code tree with the deductive codes can be found in appendix 1. These codes are based on the theoretical framework. These codes are used to analyze the data. This structured way of data collection helps to come up with the results and finally conclusions towards answering the main research question (Cope & Kurtz, 2016).

### 3.2 Case selection

By doing interviews to test the literature of conditions for successful citizen participation, participants of both the municipality as neighbourhood associations were chosen to compare perceived differences in citizen participation. Two municipal executives of the municipality of Groningen both worked on housing plans in and around Groningen, while being involved in citizen participation processes. Besides, five neighbourhoods and its deputies of the neighbourhood associations were selected by looking at two key factors: a neighbourhood which is directly involved in housing plans in or around its site and the existence of an active citizen association. Three of these neighbourhoods are located in the inner city: Damsterbuurt, Hortusbuurt-Ebbingekwartier and Oosterpark. These sites have among others to deal with the new housing plans along the Eemskanaal, the Oosterhamrikzone, Boterdiep, Ebbingekwartier and Oosterparkkwartier. Furthermore, two selected sites are located outside the city: Gravenburg and Meerstad. Next to Gravenbrug De Held III will be built, while Meerstad is one the biggest housing plans of Groningen. In short, all selected sites will be extended or revitalized according to the compact city policy or urban sprawl. An overview of the participants can be found in table 3 abbreviated with Mun1 and Mun2 and Cit1 to Cit5, while a map shows each neighbourhood in figure 3.

Participant	Date	Function (in Dutch)	Neighbourhood	Reference abbreviation
B. Popken	07-05-2021	Concerndirecteur Ruimtelijk Domein (gemeente Groningen)	N/A	Mun1
M. Smit-Bos	19-05-2021	Omgevingsmanager in opdracht gemeente Groningen	N/A	Mun2
R. Bish	04-05-2021	Voorzitter Bewonersvereniging Damsterbuurt	Damsterbuurt	Cit1
J. De Graaf	17-05-2021	Secretaris Bewonersvereniging Oosterpark	Oosterpark	Cit2
T. Dijkhuis	24-05-2021	Bewonersvereniging Hortusbuurt-Ebbingekwartier	Hortusbuurt-Ebbingekwartier	Cit3
M. Post	10-05-2021	Voorzitter Dorpsbelangen Meerstad	Meerstad	Cit4
A. Kelholt	21-05-2021	Wijkraad Gravenburg	Gravenburg	Cit5

Table 3 Overview of interview respondents

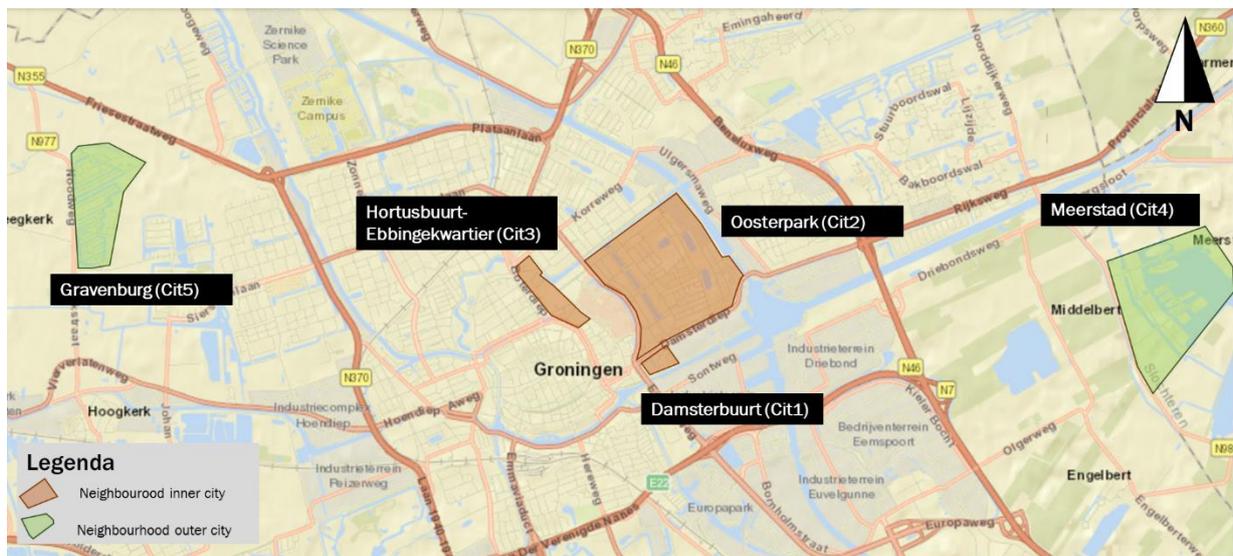


Figure 3 Overview of the selected neighbourhoods including abbreviation of the interviewee (Author, 2021)

### 3.3 Ethical considerations

In order to act properly in an ethical way, the interviewees were prepared by filling in a form of consent, which can be found in appendix 3. Through this form, interviewees confirmed their participation in the research and whether or not they prefer to stay anonymous. However, all of the participants agreed to use their names. Furthermore, the form explains the educational purpose and aim of this research, the way how the data has been collected, right to withdraw from the research and further research integrity principles. Via the form the researcher confirms objectivity and their information was only used for this research and not to serve commercial or political interests. Only with the agreement of the interviewees the researcher used their information with help of the transcripts for the data-analyzing process. In the process of transcribing some data could be misinterpreted by the interviewees by reading the thesis afterwards as a result of translating their words from Dutch to English. This has had no consequences for the quality of the data. The form is based on the ethics committee of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences.

## 4. Results

In this chapter the results of this research are discussed. The results are structured according to the previously mentioned types of citizen participation initiated by citizens and the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation. For each part a table is provided which shows how the municipal executives and citizen association perceived that specific part. This table is then followed with a more elaborate discussion and comparison of the results. These results are based on the conducted interviews and the gathered policy documents, all of which were analyzed with the same codebook.

### 4.1 Invitation in the participation process

The five types of participation invitation, given in the theory by Van Buuren et al. (2019), are used to see how both urban planners as citizens perceive the way how they participate during housing plan participation processes in Groningen. First, the municipality of Groningen invites citizens to take part in the participation process, according to both Mun1 and Mun2. Groningen is a frontrunner in sense of citizen participation in the Netherlands (Mun1). They must balance requirements given by the local council, while they want a legitimated participation process as well. As mentioned by Mun1 and shown in table 4, the municipal executives are the decision makers and must be honest about what to expect towards citizens. He states, the municipality must deliver dedicated information, but to act legit they have to balance the information and scenarios to avoid delay and which concerns they take into consideration. In line with Hanssen & Saglie (2010), not all concerns are directly of interest for urban planners. Also, Mun1 says main differences in the amount of stakeholders are between revitalized and already existing neighbourhoods. In accordance with Hamers et al. (2013), Mun1 states balancing power in revitalized neighbourhoods is much easier, since there are less stakeholders involved. In addition, Mun2 says balancing these interests is key in participation processes. She says the municipality wants a fair debate where knowledge will be shared. Via this way, both urban planners as citizens are empowered, which could strengthen their sense of place.

However, citizens perceive this process from the other way around to get a position in the debate

	Capacity-driven participation	Legitimacy-driven participation
Mun1	Municipal executive is professional, but deliver dedicated information to citizens	Describe the most realistic scenarios to be aware of delay: be honest, municipality decides
Mun2	Equal debates by involving people with a certain level of knowledge	Balancing of interests: e.g. green buffers accepted, but not in each case the right solution

Table 4 Overview of experiences by the municipality in case of participation invitation (Author, 2021)

and participate. Via the three types of created participation given by Van Buuren et al. (2019), they are involved in the debate about spatial plans, which could be seen in table 5. All three initiatives are relevant in the selected cases in Groningen, were only action-oriented initiatives less of interest in comparison to the others. For example, Cit4 does not have experience with action-oriented initiatives, whereby citizens organize actions to realize something which adds public value, since Dorpsbelangen Meerstad is quite a young organization. However, in contrast to the point of Hanssen & Saglie (2010) that not all concerns are taken into consideration, Cit4 from Bewonersvereniging Damsterbuurt feels all concerns and problems are taken into consideration by the municipality, unless they are quite young. Furthermore, as described by Cit2 and Cit3, only little spatial interventions usually are taken into consideration by the municipality, which is in line to the idea of customized citizen participation (Hanssen & Saglie, 2010). Because, they suggest municipalities focus on interventions on citywide levels In contrast to the statement of Hamers (2020), who says citizen participation is always on the agenda during spatial processes, Cit5

explained: “Pro-activity is necessary to force early participation and involvement by supplying desires on a lower, subplan level”.

Besides, Cit2, Cit3, Cit4 and Cit5 are mostly acting as delegation of their neighbourhood as a citizen association by supporting citizens initiatives. In common, they are not taking initiatives themselves, which is important for improving their well-being in their neighbourhoods (Mouratidis, 2019), except for some little interventions like implementing a playground. They mainly support citizens with knowledge and experience. Hereby, mobilizing and sharing opinions via action or policy-oriented initiatives in some cases is not excluded. Cit2 gives an example in which Bewonersvereniging Oosterpark takes the lead by a project-oriented initiative where they came up with an alternative for parking spots. In line with the literature (Friedmann, 2010; Hanssen & Saglie, 2010; Mouratidis, 2019), Cit2 states local concerns in the Oosterparkwijk have influence on citizens’ perspective of place. Some families with more than one car had concerns about getting only one parking license in a certain street in the Oosterparkwijk. Therefore, Cit2 shared an idea to remove a parking spot and use this one for three electric cars which can be shared and citizens still able to use a car. Afterwards, he concluded the municipality wants to take some financial risk and meet citizens after a clear consultation with the citizen association, if they have clear arguments.

In contrast, Cit1 states Bewonersvereniging Damsterbuurt arises just from dissatisfaction and concerns about housing plans in and around its neighbourhood, while they are really trying to get a voice in the debate with all stakeholders.

	<b>Project-oriented initiatives</b>	<b>Action-oriented initiatives</b>	<b>Policy-oriented initiatives</b>
<b>Cit1</b>	Initiaves arised from dissatisfaction and concerns	Initiaves arised from dissatisfaction and concerns	Initiaves arised from dissatisfaction and concerns
<b>Cit2</b>	For example: paid parking places: to deal with limited parking space, take three shared cars for the neighbourhood. Coming togehter to a plan	Little spatial interventions: municipality is open to that. E.g. a playground. However, on city level not	For example: during the Oosterhamrik participation processes citizen were protesting and were aimed for media attention to strnegthen their opinions
<b>Cit3</b>	Especially focussing on the effects of spatial interventions which are planned	Little spatial interventions: e.g. to build a playground..	Mostly, this type of taking place in the debate to lobby. Not a problematic neighbourhood, so less facilities
<b>Cit4</b>	Play a role in spatial visions towards both the city and Harkstede. Focussed on desires Meerstad has	Not applicable.	Mobilizing citizens and getting support to point out what is going wrong in their opinion
<b>Cit5</b>	In debate about which plans the municipality has, for example around the existing De Held III neighbourhood	Looking for signals and things which could be done via the citizen organisation	They act as a hatch: taking actions taken by citizens itself seriously and supply support if necessary

Table 5 Overview of experiences by citizens in case of participation invitation (Author, 2021)

In short, to answer the third sub-question: the way how citizens participate differs per interviewee. The older citizens associations have more experience, but all citizens state they undertake actions to participate. The municipality is aware of all interests citizens have, but they must balance desires

of citizens and requirements by the local council. As decision-makers they are in the lead, but to avoid delay they share a certain amount of information. In addition, citizens use different strategies to participate in spatial debates. In general, early involvement is required to seriously share their opinions and initiatives. Depending on the interests they have, they choose a certain strategy, in line with the types by Van Buuren et al. (2019), to share opinions with the municipality in Groningen.

## 4.2 Advantages and disadvantages

To answer the questions about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in Groningen, the conditions for successful citizen participation were given to the participants. The advantages and disadvantages are differently perceived by both urban planners and citizens as shown in table 6. The table shows whether the interviewees agree with the given condition or not. When an interviewee agrees with the given advantage or disadvantage, it is marked green with a '+'. If they disagree with a given condition, a red '-' is used. And, when they do neither agree or disagree with the advantage or disadvantage, it is marked orange '+/-'. Where all participants perceive the advantages of democratic rate and legitimacy, fairness and power sharing, transparency is more of interest in line with the most common advantages by Abelson et al. (2003). Both Cit3 and Cit4 perceive no transparency during the participation processes. Cit4 of Meerstad says "there is lack of transparency, since we heard about new spatial plans via the media" about the existence of transparency. Furthermore, Cit3 states "much deals are already made, before we were asked to share our opinions". He is mainly curious about transparency by project developers and says about it: "When the debate is about land owned by the municipality, they have less limits towards participation. But, when a certain area is in possession of project developers, there is more lack of transparency". In addition, Cit 2 has some doubts, since he is involved in the Oosterhamrik planning process where the municipality has not been transparent about the plans

Where the given problem of third parties and project developers was not clear in the literature, Cit1, Cit3, Cit4 Cit5 say this is all about is money. They claim in some situations deals are already made between project developers, while citizens are not really involved anymore. Besides, Cit2 is curious about "having a double agenda" and "what are their other motives?" of the municipality. Not all information about exciting deals is given beforehand, causing a worse position for citizens in the participation debates on a higher level. This means: cases which are of interest to the whole city, as stated by Hanssen & Saglie (2010) as well.

In contrast to the advantages, participants shared their opinions of the perceived disadvantages. Especially the condition of time-consuming process and complexity cannot directly be seen as a disadvantage. Where Cit1 says "It is the normal procedure, it cannot be faster", states Cit5 that "participation process costs time itself and could help avoiding further procedures, but third parties and external stakeholders make such processes complex". Cit2 suggests, in line with the statement from Van der Heijden & Ten Heuvelhof (2012) that information given about housing plans could be vague for citizens, that shared documents by the municipality could be vague for citizens of lower income and studies. This could result in delay. As mentioned earlier at the point of transparency, involvement of external stakeholders like project developers delaying participation processes by lack of transparency about early deals.

Finally, participants made some recommendations which could contribute to successful citizen participation. Hereby, earlier involvement by citizens in the participation process, an opener debate with all stakeholders and involving experts like architects in an early stadium together with citizens to hear opinions of citizens are strongly advised by them (Cit1, Cit2, Cit5). Especially the late phase wherein citizens involve was not elaborated as disadvantage by among others Van Buuren et al. (2019) and Van der Heijden & Ten Heuvelhof (2012), while this is a frustrating aspect on citizen participation nowadays.

To answer the questions how both citizens and urban planners perceive citizen participation, in short the most important findings. The given conditions of citizen participation are differently perceived by participants of the municipality and citizens. Where urban planners, Mun1 and Mun2, perceive citizen participation in Groningen positively, citizens are moderately positive. Their main concerns are the phase in which they are involved, transparency and the deals which are made beforehand. In contrast to the given disadvantages in literature, external stakeholders, like project developers, make this process even more difficult according to the participants.

Condition		Mun1	Mun2	Cit1	Cit2	Cit3	Cit4	Cit5
<b>Advantages</b>	Acceptance	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Democratic rate and legitimacy	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Fairness and power sharing	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Knowledge and information	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	Transparency	+	+	+	+/-	-	-	+
<b>Disadvantages</b>	Expectations	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
	Balance: power and knowledge	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Representativity	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Time-consuming and complexity	+	+/-	-	+	+	+	-

Table 6 Overview of the perceived conditions of citizen participation of all participants (Author, 2021)

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Conclusions

This last chapter contains the conclusions and recommendations based on the results as discussed in chapter four. Furthermore, recommendations for further research will be offered and a reflection on the thesis will be discussed. In order to answer the main research question *'To what extent does a mismatch exist between theory and practical regarding the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in compact city policy and urban sprawl in Groningen?'* the results as discussed in chapter four are compared to the theory in chapter two. According to the conceptual model, this thesis provides empirical insights of citizen participation in different urban forms.

In general, to solve the housing problem housing plans in the municipality of Groningen exist in both the inner and outer city, which correspond to the compact city and urban sprawl concepts. The realization of houses in Groningen asks for citizen participation to gain support, which is commonly used according to both the literature (Woondeal Groningen, 2019; NextCity, 2018) and the interviewees. There are several ways how citizens getting involved in the participation process, in line with the types of Van Buuren et al. (2019), but there are no clear differences in the way how they participate between the inner and outer city. The main issue in here is that citizens must be pro-active to be involved in an early phase.

However, according to the interviewees Cit1 – Cit5, the positive point is citizens of several citizen associations of Groningen know how to participate in debates about housing plans. The literature has given the conditions for successful citizen participation (e.g. Abelson et al., 2003; Van Buuren et al., 2019; Van der Heijden & Ten Heuvelhof, 2012; Laurian & Shaw, 2009; Morf, 2005), which has mainly been recognized by the interviewees. As stated by Mun1 and Mun2, urban planners aim for a transparent process of participation, while they are balancing all interests. On the other hand, citizens perceive some shortcomings there, because they are not always perceive transparency during the participation process. According to Abelson et al. (2003), transparency is a key factor for successful citizen participation, but especially Cit2, Cit3 and Cit4 do not or do mainly not perceive this.

Furthermore, where literature (Hamers et al., 2013; NextCity, 2018; Woondeal Groningen, 2019), suggests citizen participation increases, among others acceptance and democratic rate, citizens especially perceive increased knowledge and know-how about spatial planning. Besides, the main concerns of citizens in Groningen according to the interviewees are done deals before they are involved in the participation process. External parties, like project developers, cause this mainly, which could frustrate citizens (Cit2). However, not much is known about the role and influence of external parties in citizen participation in literature yet. Also, the stage wherein citizens asked to participate is a point of interest according to Cit1, Cit2 and Cit5.. Also, participation on a higher, city broad level is not possible yet. Bigger housing plans, like Meerstad and De Held III, are too big to involve citizens in an early stage (Cit2, Cit3 and Cit4). Finally, as suggested by the municipality (Mun1 and Mun2), the biggest differences in planning are not just between the inner and outer city, but between revitalized and already existing neighbourhoods. This is caused by the amount of stakeholders in such areas.

In short, there is not really a mismatch between theory and practical regarding the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in compact city policy and urban sprawl in Groningen.

Differences exist, but these differences in how these conditions towards successful citizen participation were perceived do not result in a mismatch. The perceived main issues out of this thesis, like the phase wherein citizen getting involved, transparency and done deals by third parties are not related to a specific place in either the inner city or at the rural-urban fringe in Groningen.

Therefore, this thesis is not that useful for the whole city of Groningen or other Dutch cities. The number of participants is too low to obtain a general conclusion about a mismatch between theory and practice of differences in citizen participation in a certain city region. Besides, Groningen is a frontrunner in sense of citizen participation, However, some aspects of this thesis, like the conclusions drawn from the results, could be useful for urban planners and citizens somewhere else. Furthermore, some findings in this thesis are in line with existing literature, but there are some recommendations to do for further research about this subject.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Further recommendations which can be done on this subject are the role of third parties or external stakeholders, like project developers, around housing plans. According to this thesis, it influences the process, since transparency is not guaranteed. Also, they could delay the participation process, since not all information is disclosed. Besides, it could be interesting to do further research on the role of the media in participation processes. According to the municipality this role has changed overtime, while it could help by informing citizens. Finally, the degree of citizen trust by doing citizen participation will be interesting.

## **5.3 Reflection**

During the process of writing this thesis, the main focus of the subject changed many times. For me personally, it was challenging to find the right focus for the thesis, while it is relevant too. Since I started thinking about 'something with housing plans', many ideas have passed by. However, this stayed my main struggle: getting focus on a certain subject. Until two weeks before the final deadline was there, I had no real clue. That has been a good lesson for myself, although my supervisor hammered on 'keep it simple, it is only a bachelor thesis'. Moreover, because of the lack of having a clear subject and goal, my theoretical framework was not there to be in time for conducting interviews. I contacted many people of both the municipality as citizens associations via LinkedIn, mail and Facebook, but getting in contact with them was quite hard, since all must be done online. During the bachelor project, I learned a lot about academic writing. However, I experience still some issues with too long sentences and coming to the point. In short, I learned a lot about the subject, citizen participation, and how to conduct interviews. For me, that was the most useful and entertaining part of this course; interviewing.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Code tree

	<b>Invitation</b>	Capacity-driven participation
		Legitimacy-driven participation
		Project-oriented initiatives
		Action-oriented initiatives
		Policy-oriented initiatives
	<b>Advantages</b>	Acceptance
		Democratic rate and legitimacy
<b>Citizen participation</b>		Fairness and power sharing
		Knowledge and information
		Transparency
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	Expectations
		Balance: power and knowledge
		Representativity
		Time-consuming and complexity

## Appendix 2 - Interview guide

<b>INTRO</b> Woningnood in Stad	In hoeverre bekend: algemeen en in de wijk
<b>PARTICIPATIE</b>	Vroegtijdig betrokken?
<b>PERSPECTIEF</b> Uitgenodigd of gecreëerd, gebaseerd op literatuur	Uitgenodigd of gecreëerd?
<b>Top-down: invited</b> gemeente	<b>CAPACITY:</b> vergroten capaciteiten overheid door deelnemers te ondersteunen met skills op bijv. milieu technisch aspect
<b>Top-down: invited</b> gemeente	<b>LEGITIMACY:</b> interesses aanhoren en afwegen op basis van wetten/gevoerd beleid
<b>Bottum-up: created</b> burger	<b>PROJECT:</b> eigen project-alternatieven (controversieel)
<b>Bottum-up: created</b> burger	<b>ACTION:</b> eigen project voor 'publieke ruimte'
<b>Bottum-up: created</b> burger	<b>POLICY:</b> activistisch door mensen te mobiliseren door agenderen en lobby
<b>MATE</b>	(TOP DOWN) Informatief – Consultatief – Samen beslissend – Samen opereren – Ondersteunen (BOTTUM-UP)
<b>VOORDELEN</b> Gebaseerd op literatuur	Acceptatie
	Mate van democratie en legitimiteit
	Eerlijkheid en machtsspreiding
	Kennis en informatie
	Transparantie
<b>NADELEN</b> Gebaseerd op literatuur	Verwachtingen scheppen
	Tijdrovend en gecompliceerd
	Inbalans van kennis en macht
	Representativiteit
<b>ZELF ERVAREN</b>	Ervaringen in kort
<b>GEBREKEN</b>	Gebreken in kort
<b>AANBEVELINGEN</b>	Aanbevelingen richting toekomst

## Appendix 3 – Consent form

### Overeenkomst van deelname

**Onderzoeksproject:** bachelor scriptie Technische Planologie door Jorrick Scholte

**Onderwijsinstelling:** Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

**Titel:** “To what extent does a mismatch exist between urban planners and citizens regarding the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in compact city policy and urban sprawl in Groningen?”

**Doel:** Het doel van het onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in het verschil in de onderzochte voor- en nadelen bij burgerparticipatie bij zowel de gemeente als inwoners tussen binnen- en buitenstedelijk gebieden in Groningen met betrekking tot het huizentekort in Groningen  
Geachte heer / mevrouw,

Bedankt dat u mij wilt helpen met mijn onderzoek naar stakeholder participatie en verschil tussen hierbij. Met deze brief informeer ik u over het verloop van het interview.

Vanwege de huidige ontwikkelingen omtrent het coronavirus, zal het interview **online** plaatsvinden. Het gesprek zal 30-45 minuten duren. U kunt op ieder moment aangeven te willen stoppen, of een vraag niet te willen beantwoorden. Het interview kan door de open structuur ook uitlopen wanneer u extra toelichting wenst te geven.

Het interview zal worden opgenomen met een audiorecorder en vervolgens worden getranscribeerd. U heeft de mogelijkheid het transcript te controleren en waar nodig aan te passen op feitelijke onjuistheden. Het transcript zal worden gebruikt om de informatie uit het interview nader te analyseren, om zo de onderzoeksvraag te kunnen beantwoorden. Het audiobestand zal verwijderd worden wanneer het onderzoek is afgerond. De gegevens die tijdens het interview worden verzameld zullen vertrouwelijk worden behandeld. De gegevens, evenals het transcript, zullen worden gedeeld met mijn begeleider Koen Bandsma. Daarnaast zal de scriptie worden opgenomen in het archief van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Het transcript zal niet in de scriptie worden opgenomen. U heeft de mogelijkheid anoniem te blijven indien u dit wenselijk acht.

Met het ondertekenen van deze overeenkomst verklaar ik dat:

- Het mij duidelijk is waar dit onderzoek over gaat.
- Ik begrijp dat deelname aan dit onderzoek vrijwillig is en ik het recht heb om individuele vragen niet te beantwoorden.
- Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname aan het onderzoek vertrouwelijk is en dat, zonder mijn schriftelijk bezwaar hiertegen, materiaal (algemeen of in de vorm van quotes) in de rapportage kan worden gebruikt.
- Ik begrijp dat alle informatie die wordt verkregen vertrouwelijk zal worden bewaard, zij het op een met wachtwoord beveiligde computer of bestand.
- Ik begrijp dat de data die voortkomt uit het interview gebruikt kan worden in artikelen, hoofdstukken van boeken, gepubliceerd en ongepubliceerd werk en in presentaties.
- Ik begrijp dat ik na afloop van het interview mijn antwoorden slechts kan aanpassen op feitelijke onjuistheden.

Voor verdere vragen kunt u contact opnemen met:

Jorrick Scholte (student) en Koen Bandsma (begeleider)

[f.j.scholte@student.rug.nl](mailto:f.j.scholte@student.rug.nl) / [k.v.bandsma@rug.nl](mailto:k.v.bandsma@rug.nl)

*Wanneer u akkoord gaat met bovenstaande, graag invullen:*

Ik geef toestemming tot het opnemen van het interview JA / NEE voor verwerkings- en coderingsdoeleinden

Ik wens anoniem te blijven binnen dit onderzoek JA / NEE .

Wanneer NEE:

Mijn voornaam kan worden gebruikt binnen dit onderzoek JA / NEE

Wanneer JA:

Er kan een pseudoniem naar mijn keuze worden gebruikt JA/NEE  
(Bijvoorbeeld: 'respondent \*nummer\*')

Naam deelnemer interview:

Datum:

E-mail:

*(indien u wenst een transcript van dit interview te ontvangen om te checken op feitelijke onjuistheden)*

Handtekening: