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Involving Local Residents in Decision-Making Processes: Urban regeneration in multi-cultural neighbourhoods

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SUMMARY

>> Participatory spatial planning approaches aimed to empower local communities in multicultural neighbourhoods tend to fall short due to their cultural blindness. Thinking along the lines of Hall and Hickman's (2011) theory on citizen participation, migrant participation in neighbourhood spatial planning decisions remains notably at best reaching the consultation level, but being far off from actually achieving citizen empowerment. These approaches fall short as they lack to capitalize on the locally present assets of the migrant community (capacities of inhabitants, such as knowledge and skills). Instead, most government initiatives focus on a particular service question, a particular 'need' to be able to meet a specific 'demand'. With this needs-based approach to community development, the community actually tends to become dependent on government institutions, rather than gaining empowerment from within. A promising alternative towards community empowerment is the asset-based approach to community development, which fosters self-sufficiency of the community.

This essay discusses local resident participation in the context of the redevelopment process of a multicultural urban neighbourhood, highlighting the relevance of intercultural literacy and community empowerment. The highly culturally-diverse setting in urban neighbourhoods of large cities brings the chance of intercultural misunderstandings, which is why an intense and ongoing dialogue between local stakeholders is essential to achieve community empowerment and participation. This essay also reflects on the *intercultural planning perspective* (e.g. Qadeer 1997), applied to a specific neighbourhood in the Bijlmer, Amsterdam, called G-buurt Noord. Through interviews with local stakeholders, varying from residents to government officials and other relevant actors, an encompassing picture of the actual situation in this neighbourhood emerges. The accompanying central research question is: *How can intercultural planning contribute to equity-based, participatory urban planning approaches that enable community empowerment in the Bijlmer, Amsterdam?*

Key words: resident participation, community building, empowerment, urban redevelopment, decision-making processes, planning policy, multicultural neighbourhoods, cultural diversity, globalization, cities

Summary in Dutch

Participatieve benaderingen op het gebied van ruimtelijke ontwikkeling die gericht zijn op empowerment van lokale gemeenschappen in multiculturele wijken, schieten vaak tekort vanwege hun culturele blindheid. Als we denken volgens Hall en Hickmann (2011) over burgerparticipatie, dan is de participatie van migranten bij beslissingen over ruimtelijke ontwikkelingen in de wijk hoogstens van consultatieve aard, maar ver verwijderd van daadwerkelijke empowerment van de burger. Deze benaderingen schieten tekort omdat ze de lokaal aanwezige krachten en hulpbronnen van de gemeenschap, de assets, niet benutten. In plaats daarvan richten de meeste overheidsinitiatieven zich op een bepaalde servicevraag, een bepaalde 'behoefte' om aan een specifieke 'vraag' te kunnen voldoen. Met deze op behoeften gebaseerde benadering van gemeenschapsontwikkeling heeft de gemeenschap de neiging om afhankelijk te worden van de overheid en diens regelingen, in plaats van dat het mensen in staat stelt om meer zeggenschap te krijgen over de eigen situatie. Een veelbelovend alternatief voor empowerment van de gemeenschap is de Asset-Based Community Development benadering, die de zelforganisatie van de gemeenschap kan bevorderen.

Dit essay bediscussieert de participatie van lokale bewoners in de context van het herontwikkelingsproces van een multiculturele stadswijk, en benadrukt de relevantie van interculturele geletterdheid en empowerment van de gemeenschap. De zeer cultureel diverse omgeving in grootstedelijke buurten brengt de kans op interculturele misverstanden met zich mee. Daarom is een intense en voortdurende dialoog tussen lokale belanghebbenden essentieel om empowerment en participatie van de gemeenschap te bereiken. Dit essay reflecteert ook op het interculturele planningsperspectief (bijv. Qadeer 1997), toegepast op een specifieke wijk in de Bijlmer, Amsterdam, genaamd G-buurt Noord. Door interviews met lokale stakeholders, variërend van bewoners tot ambtenaren en andere relevante actoren, ontstaat een overkoepelend beeld van de actuele situatie in deze wijk. De bijbehorende onderzoeksvraag luidt: *Hoe kan interculturele planning bijdragen aan participatieve benaderingen in de ruimtelijke ontwikkeling die zorgen voor gemeenschappelijke empowerment van de burgers in de Bijlmer, Amsterdam?*

1   INTRODUCTION

>> Amsterdam has always profiled itself as a tolerant, inclusive and diverse city. The city has been a refuge ever since the 17th century and halfway through the last century it became a real migration city. This shows in numbers: at the end of 2021 Amsterdam housed 172 different nationalities, which makes the city one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world (OIS Amsterdam, n.d.a). The Bijlmer, part of city district Zuidoost, houses a mostly low-income population. When zooming in on the neighbourhood of the case study, it can be seen that G-buurt Noord has a large share of inhabitants with a 'non-Western' migration background at 86.1 per cent (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2021a) and consists for 38.8 per cent low-income households (OIS Amsterdam, n.d.b).

In the past decades, the neighbourhood has experienced a process of urban decline, in which spatial degradation coincided with increasing socio-economic and ethnic segregation. Through the years a large share of the more affluent native population has left the neighbourhood and was replaced by migrant households from lower socio-economic backgrounds, an urban segregation trend that is commonly seen across European cities (Tammaru, Musterd, Van Ham & Marcinczak, 2016). Even though socio-economic and ethnic segregation are notably different, Andersen (2019) points out that different social and ethnic groups tend to live in separate parts of cities as groups or communities. This often results in large groups of migrants with lower socio-economic background residing in the more decayed urban neighbourhoods of a city, those that have a particular need for urban regeneration.

Urban regeneration measures aim to upgrade the spatial environment of the area in order to counter the downward spiral of urban decay. The role of the municipal government in this is to adjudicate in these plans by designing an overall spatial plan and allocating building permits accordingly. Through urban regeneration measures, it is argued that segregation can be reduced, so that differences between neighbourhoods or cities do not further increase because of migration patterns – as neighbourhoods become more attractive to live in for people from all backgrounds and socio-economic levels (Wassenberg, 2013).

This, however, is easier said than done, since representing all backgrounds in urban regeneration processes is a challenge. As the European Commission (2020) recently pointed out, acknowledging the particular struggle of migrants to participate in community life and local decision-making is key in order to understand and develop ways of how to include residents in regeneration of neighbourhoods – so that a particular neighbourhood becomes more attractive and accessible to a wider 'audience'. The concept of inclusive planning is relevant here, and is defined as: *"plan-making and implementation processes where all community members feel welcome to participate and are confident that their participation can positively affect outcomes"* (Morley, 2019, p.2).

Inclusive intercultural planning is still in its infant stages, particularly in less-developed countries where social exclusion is even more prevalent than in the Netherlands. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017), Common Basic Principle No. 9 states that the participation of immigrants in decision-making processes and policies that affect them enhances their sense of belonging. When that is the case, their involvement in public participation processes can increase.

In Dutch cities, the share of non-Dutch residents has steadily been rising over the past decades and by now, multiculturalist urban living has become the norm rather than the exception in most Dutch cities. This paper uses the definition of Ivison (2015) and defines multiculturalism as *"the state of a society or the world in which numerous distinct ethnic and cultural groups are seen"* (p. 22). For the neighbourhood of study, the challenge is large; how to achieve resident participation in the multicultural neighbourhood Bijlmer-Oost that counts 179 nationalities?

From participating in social neighbourhood events to public citizens' platforms, resident participation is a growing concern of municipal planners worldwide (Paardekam, 2019; Plekkenpol & Simmelink, 2019; Puttens Weekblad, 2019). The struggle in this ambition lies in shaping the participation process. For decades already, there have been official options for residents to speak up when it comes to problems and opportunities in neighbourhoods, however these options are only used by a small segment of the local population. These are residents, who are willing to do so, feel able to do so and furthermore are well-aware of the relevant procedures of the municipality. The major problem for municipal planners lies in reaching those who are (seemingly) unreachable for municipal officers, due to for example a language barrier, cultural difference, or negative experiences with government officials in the past. The aim of equity-based participation (see e.g. Thompson & Arceneaux, 2019) is a bottom-up, community-led and people-centred approach to citizen participation that aims to activate all neighbourhood residents to participate in decision-making processes, so that improvements not only concern residents who are either more involved, have a better understanding of (Dutch) language and/or culture, or other factors.

Furthermore, it still often comes down to the political will in the final steps of the decision-making process (Yung & Chan, 2011). According to Yung and Chan's research in Hong Kong, a lack of effective public participation mechanisms and a supportive government framework leads to power disparities. These disparities can trigger the feeling of being powerless among residents, resulting in their absence in future decision-making processes. Especially among (young) migrants, socio-economic exclusion leads to decreased engagement and participation (Eurofound, 2015).

The large share of population with a migration background and the many low-income households in the Bijlmer have not only created a stigma for the neighbourhood, but also have influenced life chances for its inhabitants because of that – which is of course a societal problem. The aforementioned neighbourhood composition of low-income households in the Bijlmer relates to high levels of unemployment, and residents living on assistance benefits. It furthermore relates to social problems, with the neighbourhood lacking social cohesion. Through processes of resident participation, the municipality tries to involve the residents more in their planning processes regarding urban regeneration, but they are struggling to reach all residents – especially harder-to-reach groups such as the youth or the illiterate (Jongsma, 2019). This essay tries to understand the level of actual power that residents have in the case study of this research, and how this could be altered through policy and practice.

This study contributes to the scientific body of knowledge in several ways. First, it adds to the study of Permentier, Kullberg and van Noije (2013), who evaluated the Bijlmer regeneration approach for problematic urban neighbourhoods implemented under former Dutch minister Vogelaar (the so-called Vogelaar neighbourhoods approach). The authors concluded that this approach was only partially successful in enhancing the local living situation of residents in the Bijlmer and in particular this approach failed to involve residents who are difficult to reach in participatory planning processes. The findings in this essay will also reveal the complexity of municipal planners' challenge to involve this multicultural population in processes of neighbourhood regeneration.

Our study furthermore applies the concept of citizen participation to the context of urban regeneration in multicultural neighbourhoods. In this way, the study promotes the asset-based community development approach (Nel, 2018) that to date is scarcely implemented in participatory planning trajectories for urban regeneration initiatives. This approach, often dubbed as ABCD, stresses that sufficiently working communities can only be formed when they are built on the strengths of local people. These residents in turn acquire a certain feeling of empowerment through their participation, realized in their willingness to contribute to change.
Finally, the authors try to offer a novel theoretical framework connecting theories on participatory planning and community building to theory on an intercultural approach to policy-making and participation.

In relation to the essay series Transitions in Planning, this essay focuses and elaborates on process-related themes for planning. It shines light on aspects such as renewed citizen engagement, democracy, culture and creativity, social (in)justice, divides and inequality, as well as governance on multiple levels. In this way, the essay covers transitions in the area of participation, socio-cultural transitions, and roles in planning. More specifically, the present study aims to

bring the concept of asset-based community development (ABCD) more to the forefront, a perspective in which the residents – in this case in a multicultural neighbourhood – are more actively partaking in decision-making processes. When residents feel they are being heard and seen, the appreciation for the municipality's efforts is more likely to increase, thereby facilitating easier communication and cooperation or support (Spierings et al., 2021).

This signifies a transition in the field of planning, as this approach requires more input from local residents, based on their capacities, interests, ideas and desires. Joint effort developments and initiatives in the neighbourhood are more likely to happen because of that. As a result, urban regeneration processes can become more accessible to a wider public through this ABCD approach, potentially decreasing the need for people to move elsewhere - limiting the extent of segregation in a neighbourhood or city.

Through delving into ways how local residents can be reached more effectively, and at the same time become more included in participation processes, this essay aims to elaborate on the possibility of intercultural planning to contribute to more equal participation opportunities among residents, leading to developments that are jointly accomplished. The idea is that participatory processes in urban planning approaches enable community empowerment in neighbourhoods, such as in the Bijlmer in Amsterdam, with a special focus on cultural literacy and the intercultural approach.
The central research question of this essay relates to this: *How can intercultural planning contribute to equity-based, participatory urban planning approaches that enable community empowerment in the Bijlmer, Amsterdam?*

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Resident participation in urban regeneration of multicultural neighbourhoods

In light of the often disadvantaged socio-economic position of migrants and their underrepresentation in important institutions, the present incapability to successfully incorporate migrants in local communities increases the risk of social uprisings – as previously experienced in other European cities in recent years (e.g. Birmingham riots, Paris riots in banlieues, and to a lesser extent in the Bijlmer, Amsterdam). The large share of population with a migration background and the many low-income households in the Bijlmer have not only created a stigma of the neighbourhood, but have influenced life chances for its inhabitants as well.

The urban policy and planning regarding the regeneration of Bijlmer-Oost is an approach to create more spaces for all Amsterdam residents to live, to give everyone a place in society, both poor and rich. This is for example done by building 7.500 dwellings per year, of which 2.500 have to be social housing corporation dwellings (Coalition Groenlinks et al., 2018, p. 32).

The challenge is to include migrant communities in a better way in processes of urban regeneration. This can be seen as a form of citizen participation, and at the same time integration. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017), ways of stimulating this participation and generating mutual understanding could be reached through structured dialogue between migrant groups and governments.

Participation of both individuals and communities or collectives furthermore relates to a sense of efficacy and empowerment, on multiple levels. Direct needs of citizens can be addressed in a more effective way, while assets of people who previously might have been absent from participating in their neighbourhood (or in society) come to the forefront as well. Examples of these assets are education, skills, knowledge, personality, (work) experiences, amongst others, and can be seen as an advantage or resource (Nel, 2018).

Participation and consultation of residents is required in making new urban plans in Amsterdam (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2018). Every new plan must have a separate section on how the participation of the residents was secured. However, as there are many levels of participation that can be envisaged here, this risks remain a paper exercise without having much bearing upon the everyday reality of residents; without the intrinsic motivation to make a change in the neighbourhood, this exercise can actually result in low levels of collective efficacy and empowerment for the residents.

2.2 Community building and empowerment

The concept of efficacy is coined due to the fact that both individual and collective efficacy are required to successfully include people in planning processes and eventual community development. Self-efficacy is conceptualised as the perception of how an individual can reach his or her goals and how (s)he can do so independently: it is linked to personal capabilities. High levels of self-efficacy are noticeable when people sense they can change a situation themselves, without necessarily needing much support from others or a governmental body (Bandura, 1997, 477, cited in Watson, Chemers & Preiser, 2001).

Collective efficacy "represents a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (Bandura, 1997, 477, cited in Watson, Chemers & Preiser,

2001). This means that the feeling of being capable of achieving change as a group are important in making the change itself. Self-efficacy therefore plays an important role in achieving collective efficacy as a community. In the present paper, community is defined as a group of people, living in a particular geographically bounded area, with similar characteristics – for example in terms of background, education, income, attitudes or interests. It is possible that multiple communities exist within a certain neighbourhood (Awan & Blakemore, 2013).

In order to understand how communities are build, it is necessary to grasp the concept of community development. In this essay, the definition of Schenck, Nel, and Louw (2010, p. 6) is used: *"a people-centred change process facilitated with a community of people to take action to increasingly actualise their fundamental human needs to enhance the quality of their own lives and those of the wider community that they are part of"*. We make a distinction here between two approaches to community development or building, the needs-based and the asset-based approach (Nel, 2018, 35). Where the former focuses on the power of institutions that help citizens who are in need, the latter focuses on the actual strengths that are already present in a particular community. Asset-based community development (or ABCD) is seen by Mathie and Cunningham (2003) as an alternative to needs-based approaches of development. Solving the problems is not with institutions, but within the residents' power and perseverance to change and help each other. The preference of the authors is expressed in the following: *"ABCD rests on the principle that a recognition of strengths and assets is more likely to inspire positive action for change in a community than is an exclusive focus on needs and problems"* (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, p.477).

The common approach to resident participation in processes of urban regeneration is the needs-based approach, which entails that the municipality supports and funds people in need instead of focusing on their assets, thereby only asking for their participation in planning processes based on consultations – as many decisions have already been made in this stadium (Hall & Hickman, 2011). According to Hall and Hickman (2011), this can be seen for example when buildings are being upgraded in the neighbourhood. The downside of this approach is that local residents are not really involved in decision-making – as the municipality tends to focus on what residents need instead of what they can contribute. This approach does not support empowerment, on either an individual or collective basis, which is also an indicator for lower levels of participation in a neighbourhood. With this needs-based approach to community development, the community actually tends to become (more) dependent on the government institutions, rather than gaining empowerment from within. With the aim to empower migrant communities, applying an asset-based approach fostering on the community's self-sufficiency would seem a more promising alternative.

Community development programmes are planned to end poverty, create employment and satisfy the basic needs of all people so that their living conditions improve and they can live in a self-sustaining way. This is in line with the definition of empowerment, since the latter is in this research defined as: an increase in power so that individuals or collectives can improve their lives in terms of meeting basic needs, generating income and participation in society through increased agency. Developing communities through improving the residents' capabilities, social capital - including improved networking skills and business partnerships - and bargaining position is one of the targets of community empowerment (Muljono, 2011).

Through ABCD, the community becomes a more self-sufficient community and works more using its own strengths. ABCD is however harder to implement since its success is critically dependent on people's willingness to make a change and help others in their community, so their collective efficacy must be higher. With a strong community present, the participation process can be substantially influenced by the residents. This mostly has to do with the fact that socially disadvantaged people do not feel their voices are heard in society; participatory action is a helpful instrument in identifying common problems and finding appropriate solutions, because in this way people feel they can make a difference because of collective power, leading to increased belief in successful contribution to local developments (Muljono, 2011).

According to Khan (2012), *"poor people's involvement in local associations and intercommunity cooperation mechanisms can contribute to social empowerment by improving their skills, knowledge and self-perception"* (p. 27). Local associations are said to act as self-help mechanisms through which poor people organize their economic activities and potentially upgrade their entrepreneurial skills. This is something that would certainly appeal to government officials and planners, besides the benefits that local residents and communities could gain.

2.3 Intercultural competences/approaches of urban planners

The Multicultural or intercultural planning is part of a long tradition of normative ideas on ethnic diversity and the city. We use here the definition of Qadeer (2008, p.13): "it is not a distinct genre of urban planning, instead it is a strategy of making reasonable accommodations for the culturally defined needs of ethno-racial minorities on the one hand, and reconstructing the common ground that underlies policies and programmes on the other. A set of policies is recommended for making urban planning more inclusive".

It is therefore hard to disentangle the analysis of actual multicultural planning experiences from its close embrace with such normative ideas, especially those indicated with the label multiculturalism (Van der Horst and Ouwehand, 2011). Much research has been carried out on issues related to multiculturalism and

accompanying migrant participation in society, looking at various domains as work, education, political representation and from various perspectives such as socio-cultural and structural integration. For example, Duxbury, Hosagrahar and Pascual (2016, p.13-14) wrote that *"within a sustainable development context, local cultural policies put community development at the core: culture is both a key tool and a core aspect of the social fabric, promoting cohesion, conviviality, and citizenship."* They describe that culturally informed urban development is able to inspire more participatory processes, as cultures provide knowledge about our existence as inhabitants of our cities and as citizens of the world. In particular, a culturally sensitive and gendered approach can empower marginalized individuals and communities to participate in cultural and political life.

With regard to migrant participation in the neighbourhoods they inhabit, most research has taken an 'action' perspective, studying various cultural and leisure activities and collective efforts to improve the quality of life and neighbourhood management (Hall & Hickman, 2011). However, the migrant participation literature is rather thin on the 'decision' perspective, defined as 'the group of actions organised and financed with the goal of linking the persons most directly affected to the conception of realisation of a complex project'. (Hall & Hickman 2011, p.828). In other words, there appears to be an omission in the literature related to the role that migrants have in the actual decision-making on processes of neighbourhood spatial transformations within the urban spatial planning system. Despite a growing interest among spatial planning scholars in participatory approaches of spatial planning, it seems that these participatory approaches are culturally blind and lacking to account for the growing urban reality of multicultural societies. Multiculturalist, targeted policies popular in the past century have been replaced by universalist, mainstreaming policies that disregard intergroup differences (ibid.). Due to cultural difference and language barriers, people feel largely left out by planners. As a result, spatial planning decisions remain disconnected to the persons most directly affected by these spatial changes in multicultural neighbourhoods, as standard Dutch perspectives are universally applied on a country-wide scale in The Netherlands.

There is a growing need for making the use of space more democratic and culturally inclusive. Because ethnic groups use space in different ways, Sandercock (2010) suggests the best way to incorporate this difference into urban design is through a participatory design approach. This can be accomplished by incorporating collaborative planning and alternative dispute resolution into the local planning process as part of the greater goal of establishing a multicultural vision for the city (Sandercock, 2010). Where in the past, policy was targeted towards different groups in society, this is "not done" in current policy, since people cannot to be captured under a single label. Also, civil servants might be personally biased, not adequately taking the residents' opinions and experiences into account.

As the Amsterdam Bijlmer neighbourhood is a highly multicultural neighbourhood, cultural literacy is key in the understanding and realization of local developments, mediated by civil servants of the municipality. The theory of interculturality by Wood and Landry (2008) is used here as the underlying framework. When the municipality would be more culturally literate, aware of diversity in the local population and open to innovative ways of participation, more improvements might be possible for both residents and the neighbourhood as a whole. The assumption here is that the intercultural approach is a prerequisite for actual resident participation, which in turn has to be facilitated and integrated by the municipality, its officials and other stakeholders. Of course, this is something that cannot be changed overnight, but the mindset of learning to understand each other comes first, after which concrete developments or change are more likely to follow.

To adequately form policy in cities with high cultural diversity, cultural literacy is required (Wood & Landry, 2008). People filter any information coming in through their own cultural filters and cultural literacy is "the ability to read, understand and find the significance of diverse cultures and, as a consequence, to be able to evaluate, compare and decode the varied cultures that are interwoven in a place" (Wood & Landry, 2008, 250). The social construction of reality varies between different people but is partly grouped in communities of belonging. When the community of belonging for residents is different than that of the civil servants, this can lead to misunderstanding. In case of ignorance of other cultures (a lack of cultural literacy), resident participation will not reach its targets.

For civil servants, it is harder to reach residents who seemingly do not want to be reached. The residents might not care what happens to their building in terms of restructuring, as long as they can remain living in their residence. When the civil servants also do not speak the language of the residents, literally and figuratively, this leads to friction at both sides. A lack of contact between residents and civil servants can also be the result of negative past experiences. Having no or little connections with civil servants can reinforce feelings of low individual and collective efficacy among residents.

In this regard, it is highly beneficial for a professional to speak the language of the migrant or that (s)he is familiar with the cultural background of migrant residents; this is not only a necessary condition for effective communication, but also for mutual understanding, for instance about local problems. For these residents, it is key that the society they live in also bridges these gaps, such as through policies and professionals (Fahham, Beckers & Muller-Dugic, 2020). Also important is the diversity of planners' backgrounds; it ensures appreciation of cultural and racial differences. In the same vein, representation of minorities among elected and nominated executives at local and provincial

levels is a necessary condition for bringing a multicultural perspective to public decision-making bodies (Qadeer, 1997). People's diverse cultures are beginning to be acknowledged at the procedural level, and their concerns are being aired as a part of the planning process. (ibid.). To conclude, multiculturalism in planning is pre-eminently a matter of awareness of ethnic diversity and culture among planners and public officials.

3   METHODOLOGY

>> This section elaborates on the methodological grounds of the research, on which the fieldwork in this essay is based. It not only shines light on the research approach, also the data collection and analysis are elaborated upon in terms of how the research was conducted and the data has been analysed.

3.1   Research approach

This research focuses on *"exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem"* (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). Meaning and construction of meaning cannot be measured as accurately by means of quantitative research compared to conducting qualitative research, since they require more in-depth exploration of people's subjective and nuanced experiences. Qualitative research also has a better potential in capturing complexity and processes (Beeson, 1997, p.22). Therefore, the preferred strategy in the present study is that of qualitative research, using in-depth face-to-face interviews with diverse local stakeholders.

3.2   Selection, collection and analysis

Case selection

Present research entails a single case study: G-buurt Noord, a neighbourhood located in Bijlmer-Oost in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The right side of figure 1 illustrates the placement of Bijlmer-Oost on a city-wide map, whereas the left side illustrates the location of the neighbourhood within Bijlmer-Oost; the green marking is G-buurt Noord. The neighbourhood holds the only two remaining traditional honeycomb flats of the Bijlmer.
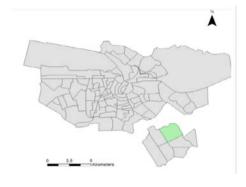

FIGURE 1
Geographical location of G-buurt Noord.
Jongsma (2019)

The Bijlmer was newly built in the 1960's and imagined as a place for large numbers of people to live together within an abundance of green space (Wassenberg, 2013). Because the high-rise buildings are all social renting houses, the neighbourhood is accessible for (almost) everyone. However, in the past native Dutch people often did not want to live in the district since many immigrants lived there, criminality rates were high, and the liveability was low (Kuiper, 2016).

Nowadays, according to Dutch news channel AT5 (2018), resident participation in Bijlmer-Oost is not satisfactory for either municipality nor residents at this point; residents feel too little involved in decision-making processes, especially people with a migration background. For example, efforts in the adjacent K-buurt have led to a public uprising of residents against the local government in which they demanded a re-doing of the participation process. A main reason was the municipal plans for the public square in the neighbourhood, which conflicted with the ideas of the residents, who were not given a voice in this process (AT5, 2018).

The G-buurt Noord used to be known as the flats Gliphoeve I and Gliphoeve II. However, the municipality changed the name to Gravestein and Geldershoofd in 1984 due to image problems and a low socio-economic resident composition. The neighbourhood consists of these two flats, the petting zoo and a district centre (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2018). Important for the neighbourhood is the development of small-scale shopping area Ganzenpoort. In terms of urban development and living, most data from OIS Amsterdam (n.d.a & n.d.b) is available for 2021, providing mostly percentages instead of concrete numbers. In this particular year, the residents of G-buurt Noord gave the neighbourhood a 6.4 on a scale of 1-10. The appreciation for the dwellings in the neighbourhood was higher; a 6.7 on a scale of 1-10. This ranks the G-buurt Noord at the 297th place of 315 neighbourhoods in Amsterdam. All the housing is corporation-owned, and the neighbourhood has 952 dwellings.

The Municipality of Amsterdam's database shows that 1.774 people live in G-buurt Noord in 2021 (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2021a&b). The online databank (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2021b) shows that in this year 24.6 per cent of the residents was under the age of 18 and 7.1 per cent was over the age of 65. The percentage of under 18 is higher than the city's average of 16 per cent, and the percentage of over-65 is lower in G-buurt Noord (Amsterdam-wide percentage: 13 per cent). There are considerable disparities in terms of household composition. Furthermore, the number of residents has stayed rather stable since 2008, which is likely due to the absence of interventions in the buildings. In G-buurt Noord, 90.1 per cent of the inhabitants has a migration background, of which 4.5 per cent originates from 'Western' countries. The dominant migrant groups in the resident population are of Surinamese

(34.6 per cent) and Antillean (7.3 per cent) origin, signalling much ethnic diversity, as their accumulated share in the neighbourhood population accounts for 41.9% (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2021a). The category of 'other non-Western migrants' accounts for 41.9% of the population of G-buurt Noord as well, consisting of one more person than the sum of residents from Surinamese and Antillean origin. The names of categories 'Western' and 'non-Western' were chosen by the municipality.

There is a large share of social housing in Bijlmer-Oost, also in the case at hand, G-buurt Noord. This type of housing gives a home to people who are not earning enough money to rent privately and need government funding to support their livelihoods. In Bijlmer-Oost, large regeneration projects have started to make it a more lively, liveable and integral part of the city, whilst not pricing out current inhabitants. In 2017, the municipality of Amsterdam appointed 32 "development neighbourhoods" (NL: *ontwikkelbuurten*) requiring more attention and budget for their regeneration. Here the municipality works together with resident platforms and housing associations to create a safer and more liveable city (Municipality Amsterdam, n.d.).

Data collection

Our aim was to understand which theories of participatory planning, community building and intercultural planning are applicable in the case study. The empirical research included a qualitative analysis of literature and (policy) documents and 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The results of this content analysis can be found in the following section. The respondents were found through contacts at the city district's office and were then emailed or called about participation with a brief explanation about the research. Initially, 20 people were approached, of whom 15 persons were interviewed in May 2019.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with (1) six civil servants of Zuidoost and (2) six active residents of the neighbourhoods while (3) three employees of related institutions were interviewed as well. The positions of civil servants within the municipal organisation differed: assistant project manager, project manager, neighbourhood broker, communication advisor, area manager and programme manager of democratisation. The selection of resident respondents was done through the contacts co-workers at the municipality had. The ages of the respondents differed, as well as the gender and their household mix. Unfortunately, no so-called 'invisible' residents were reached, people that remain off the radar when it comes to participation; only the more active residents were interviewed. Besides these respondents, three other relevant stakeholders in the participation process were interviewed.

For the content analysis, policy documents and data about the cases were thoroughly analysed. Policy documents on the social domain, diversity and

(neighbourhood) development plans were used, as well as statistics from the central city (Municipality of Amsterdam) and data from 'OIS': research, data and statistics (Dutch: onderzoek, data en statistiek) Amsterdam. In the databases of the OIS, we searched for numbers and figures on the living situation of the residents of the neighbourhoods. The policy documents were studied to find out how the democratisation and participation was supposed to be put into practice. The historical analysis was supplemented by analysing literature about the construction of the Bijlmermeer and the problems the neighbourhood faced in later years.

Data analysis

The programme Atlas.TI was used to implement open and axial coding of the transcribed interviews. Where open codes function as labels for all data analysed, axial coding is used to categorize the set of codes (Allen, 2017). Axial coding furthermore reveals insight into causal conditions, context, strategies, and consequences, foundational for the arguments that are made. The data was analysed using the theoretical concepts discussed in the above literature section as guidance towards answering the research question. Discovering patterns in the way questions were answered by respondents led to the categorization of codes during the analysis. In total, 28 codes were uses for the analysis, categorized in five code groups: 'Characteristics neighbourhood', 'Community building', 'Intercultural approach', 'Municipal organisation' and 'Participation'. The authors do not opt for generalizability in this paper. Instead, the aim is to capture different perspectives of stakeholders involved.

4   ANALYSIS

>> In order to determine how intercultural planning can contribute to equity-based, participatory urban planning approaches that enable community empowerment, in this case in Amsterdam, but potentially on a wider scale, this section sheds light on the connection between practice and analytical framework. It connects the main concepts in present study through thoroughly analysing the perceptions of interviewed respondents, categorized in three sub-sections: 'urban regeneration and resident participation', 'community building', and 'intercultural planning'. Every sub-section contains information shared by three particular groups of respondents: 'residents', 'civil servants' and 'other stakeholders'. Furthermore, every sub-section contains a discussion on these different perspectives, which are then connected to the analytical framework.

4.1   Urban regeneration and resident participation

During the interviews with residents concerning their participation, local residents explained the different ways of their participation in planning processes. There is an active neighbourhood platform (NL: *bewonersplatform*),

concerned with the entire G-buurt and there is a core team consisting of four people, as part of this platform. Both blocks of single flats have a resident committee, the one of Geldershoofd being in existence for a longer period than the other one, Gravestein. Besides these ways of grouping, there are also multiple WhatsApp groups in which residents share events or concerns about their living environment or neighbours.

The bond between the municipality and residents is seen as one in which the municipality approaches the residents in times of trouble, signalling the step of consultation on the participation ladder. For example, one respondent said: *"I'm being approached 80 per cent of the time, 20 per cent is the other way around"*. Platforms to participate are mainly organized by the municipality, but there are also examples where the initiative comes from the residents, and where residents and civil servants work together. Such activities are financed through the neighbourhood budget or separate grants are requested for organizing events such as the celebration of Mother's Day or a neighbourhood cook-out.

The civil servants working at city district Zuidoost signal that the residents of G-buurt Noord have a dependent attitude towards the municipality. The general sentiment of the civil servants is that people actually do not want to live in G-buurt Noord, but are living there since they cannot afford better quality housing and have no other choice – something that is not correct according to residents.
Reality and perception are two separate issues as shown in this neighbourhood. Some civil servants felt the need to enlarge the influence of residents on local developments, where others did not see the need for this. This perception of particular civil servants indicates that it is hard for residents to move beyond the phase of consultation and become more included in decision-making instantly, as they are only consulted at a late stage in urban regeneration projects. This also has to do with the assumption of civil servants that local residents in G-buurt Noord do not possess the skills and capacities that are needed, but that is uncertain. This claim is supported by Van Der Hulst (2021), who writes that it is hard to get rid of stigmas, something that is applicable to almost every (migrant) nationality that is present in the Bijlmer.

Opinions from other stakeholders differed substantially; two respondents working for social foundations and one person working for a social housing company were interviewed. The former two were predominantly positive about the residents and their assets. The latter, employee of the social housing company, was more outspoken about the negative aspects of the resident group living in the neighbourhood. This clearly shows that perceptions about local residents vary quite a lot, due to biases among stakeholders involved, or based on experiences in dealing and communicating with these residents.

There also seems to be a mismatch between the perception of local residents of G-buurt Noord about their living environment and those of non-residents. Residents of G-buurt Noord said to be content living there, though some improvements to their environment could be made. Most non-residents on the other hand reflected the sentiment that the residents would like to move elsewhere. The civil servants who were interviewed frequently stressed the low qualities of the neighbourhood instead of its richness in possibilities, contributing to the predominantly negative image of the neighbourhood. The municipality is currently failing in fulfilling their basic role of serving the residents in their needs and desires. Respondents said that the municipal organization works inefficiently and is not effective and that the residents are not sufficiently listened to. The municipal system is mostly blamed for this, while in fact the distance between residents and civil servants might be more important.

In relation to the main concept of resident participation, the current status quo of how and when plans are presented to residents on the one hand, and the intended outcomes on the other hand, the following conclusion can be drawn. Residents of G-buurt Noord are not really included in decision-making processes, since they are consulted from time to time, not directly leading to concrete neighbourhood improvements. An illustrating quote from one the residents was: *"I would like to be informed, but I'm not sure if I can join in on everything. I'm not 20 anymore"*, referring to her actual willingness to actively participate even though she is ageing; however her voice remains absent from decision-making processes most of the time.

This irregular consultation, rather than structural participation, is a seemingly clear example of a needs-based approach. This is also in line with Hall and Hickman's (2011) claim that the needs-based approach is more commonly used in processes of urban regeneration. Often residents are only involved in planning processes via consultation, in a stage when many plans and decisions have already been made. This relates to lower levels of empowerment among residents, as well as lower levels of participation (Hall & Hickman, 2011).

4.2 Community building

When it comes to a needs-based or an asset-based approach to community development, residents did not specifically favour one of the two approaches over the other. Some residents signalled a clear needs-based approach, where the focus is on help of the municipality when problems arise.

Generally, the resident respondents felt uncertain about the ability to create change as a single individual in the planning processes. Residents felt more confident about their collective efficacy, probably due to the existing resident committees that speak up for the majority. One respondent particularly focussed on the successes of the resident platform, committee and core group; *"we were approached to write the action plan, we were free in that. We wrote it, people*

thought it was a great piece". This example was often cited when the respondents were asked about their collective efficacy. They felt that as a group they were more likely to induce change, but that this effectiveness was still dependent on the influence allowed by the municipality – and thus by institutions.

Civil servants characterise their attitude towards residents as predominantly asset-based. Residents would ideally take action to organize events or write plans, and the municipality would assist them where necessary. One respondent, a district manager stated: *"that's how many people think: the civil servants are good. They have expertise. For living and physical you have to have expertise. What residents can signal is that they want more room to manoeuvre, and you can take this into account".* "Living and physical" refer to the two different domains within the municipality. Another respondent said: *"they do not know how to get from idea to plan, but they do have ideas. In that we, as a city district, have to take initiative and organize it for them".* This illustrates the civil servants' opinions about the lack of abilities of the residents to execute ideas themselves, indicating a needs-based approach.

Residents were seen to be more reliant on institutions because of their dependency on what the municipality would offer them, in terms of their representation in development plans as well as the offered funding. According to the civil servants, this was seen as the unwillingness of residents to organize activities themselves, but in fact it was mostly due to the residents' opinion that the procedures of planning processes take too long before concrete actions happen. This led to frustration among them, especially when residents are only asked to react on pre-made plans that are not in line with their ideas, preventing them from active participation. Examples of resident initiatives are a football pitch between flat buildings and the organization of a yearly winter activity for the neighbourhood, but these plans were put aside at the time of this research.

Though civil servants claim to adhere to an asset-based approach to community building, focussing on the strengths of local residents, the resident respondents experienced the opposite, and signalled a needs-based approach focussing on problems. There is a difference between the ideology within policies and the reality in terms of citizen participation. A large dependency of institutions is present, caused by the existing institutional mechanisms, since high levels of collective efficacy are noted as well. The self-efficacy of residents in G-buurt Noord may not be that high, but people are actually contributing to change in the neighbourhood as a collective as much as possible.

Through their collective efforts and conversations, residents potentially can successfully contribute to local developments, when they see concrete change based on collaboration. According to Muljono (2011), this is a powerful indicator for empowerment, both individual and collective, and could bring residents of a neighbourhood closer to each other. More collective efforts, e.g. neighbourhood

activities, and conversations could occur more frequently in G-buurt Noord, as they are beneficial for connecting residents, which makes residents more self-sufficient – two things that the municipality would definitely appreciate.

4.3 Intercultural approach

Many interviewed residents indicate that the ignorance of the civil servants about their living situation and cultural backgrounds stood in the way of equal relations. Even though residents are generally positive about the awareness of municipal officers of different cultural backgrounds in the local area, they are dissatisfied about with how this affects municipal activities. In particular, civil servants do not sufficiently connect to their world and are lacking cultural literacy skills, in their opinion. One of the respondents mentioned: *"They have a distorted image of the people from the Bijlmer, especially people of colour from the Bijlmer. [...] People seriously have the idea that, we as black people don't work, don't go to school, that we're all single parents, drop-outs, and who knows more negativity. While that is simply not the case"*. This critique was directed more towards the municipality as such, rather than to individual civil servants working on the ground at the neighbourhood level.

The majority of the interviewed civil servants was prone to thinking in target-groups and they were in most cases aware of doing this themselves. For example, one of the respondents mentioned: *"Dutch people think in boxes, we have it in us"*. Another respondent, while acknowledging target-group thinking among civil servants, saw this as the right approach and as a signal of awareness of different cultural groups. This statement shows existing ignorance of diversity in cultural backgrounds and the presence of target-group thinking, therewith assuming all people from a particular broad ethnic group are the same, wanting and needing the same things in life.

Other interviewed respondents, those who work for social foundations, were positive about the direction the municipality is heading with regard to its residents. These respondents acknowledge that there are difficulties, but say that civil servants try their best to fix them. The respondent for the social housing company for example mentioned the need for target-group policy. He recommended that the municipality should install a local civil servant of Surinamese or Antillean background – the largest resident groups in G-buurt Noord, which signals a current lack of cultural literacy on the side of the municipality. This might have a negative impact on residents' participation in the future as well, because again, people from different backgrounds have different needs and desires.

Overall, we conclude civil servants lack cultural literacy. Though they have a general and basic awareness of cultural diversity present in the neighbourhood, there is a lack of expertise in how to deal with this in policies and practices.

There is indeed a mismatch between the world of residents and how civil servants perceive this. Even though the municipality claims to be open to all cultures, this is not experienced by the interviewed residents of G-buurt Noord. In order to include all residents in planning processes, there should be more and better attempts to get to know the opinions of people living there – especially the ones who are labelled as 'unreachable' now. This is inherently linked to a shift to intercultural planning where civil servants are more aware and understanding of the diversity and cultures that are present in a particular area. A condition to accomplish this is better communication between residents and municipality and more involvement of civil servants, being physically present in the neighbourhood, but also mentally – connecting with the reality of local residents.

The challenge here especially lies in reaching out to the seemingly 'unreachable' – people with whom the civil servants have no contact and whose wishes and needs are unknown to the municipality. One way to reach out to them is through so-called neighbourhood ambassadors, who are other residents of the same neighbourhood that represent the majority of people. Since these ambassadors are less formally linked to the unreachable residents, this might remove the obstacle for the latter to participate or share their ideas – for example when the ambassadors have different cultural backgrounds, similar to those who are currently unreachable. Another possible solution for civil servants to connect with the 'unreachable' is through visiting organised events in the neighbourhood. Examples can be found in low-threshold activities, such as a bingo game for the neighbourhood, or activities at a church or mosque. Such examples can strengthen the connection between civil servants and residents, and eventually lead to a more sustainable bond in which both parties are more willing to cooperate and support each other.

Relating this to the claim of Duxbury, Hosagrahar and Pascual (2016) that culturally informed urban development is able to inspire more participatory processes, more effort should be put in acknowledging cultural diversity in G-buurt Noord since it can benefit the utilization of assets of the neighbourhood's residents. Such an approach can empower marginalized individuals and communities to participate in cultural and political life, which should be the aim of asset-based community development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Through increased self-sufficiency and a more sustainable bond between residents and civil servants, residents become less dependent on the municipality and are more likely to participate. The capacities and willingness to contribute to change are mostly there, but according to both residents and civil servants, the municipality can facilitate the use of their skills and assets more and better supporting the practical implementation of plans. Only then, people are more willing to participate. Seeing actual change is important in this process, as well as getting involved, two things that Muljono (2011) also

described as powerful indicators for achieving community empowerment. Following Sandercock's line of thinking (2010), this collective form of empowerment can be seen and used as a foundation for conversation and cooperation, which will benefit the greater goal of establishing a multicultural vision for the city, representing the wishes, ideas and plans of a culturally diverse population.

5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

>> This research was conducted to provide an answer on how intercultural planning can contribute to equity-based, participatory urban planning that enables community building and empowerment in the Bijlmer neighbourhood of Amsterdam. Through analysing to what extent local residents with a multicultural background are participating in planning processes related to urban regeneration of Bijlmer-Oost, specifically G-buurt Noord, different perceptions were found which have to be taken into account in order to improve the current status quo.

This section reflects on the central research findings in light of the aforementioned research question, and furthermore formulates recommendations for practitioners and follow-up research on this theme.

5.1 Discussion

Urban regeneration and resident participation
As was described in the previous section, civil servants of the municipality of Amsterdam are in touch with local residents in G-buurt Noord, the Bijlmer, as part of the ongoing neighbourhood regeneration process. Despite this, the municipality is currently failing to fulfil its basic role of serving its residents in this context. When it comes to the involvement of residents in local decision-making processes, or more concretely their participation in neighbourhood developments, we learned that most of the time, pre-made plans were presented to them. This indicates that participative power of residents is still limited to consultation instead of being able to articulate their preferences in an earlier planning phase. This is also in line with the claim made by Hall and Hickman (2011) that local governments often disguise consultation as participation.

Community building
Following the approach of asset-based community development (ABCD), it became clear that perceptions on (the outcomes of) this approach differed strongly among the stakeholders interviewed. The previously mentioned mismatch regarding the difference between the actual lives of residents and the perceptions of civil servants is therefore also relevant here. While the intentions of the municipality to focus on participatory democracy might look good on

paper, the practice is far behind. Overall, on the side of the municipality, cultural literacy is lacking in terms of communication and information provision to residents, which in turn also effects how participation happens in practice. On the other hand, high levels of collective efficacy are noted in the neighbourhood as well, for instance through a resident platform. The self-efficacy of residents in G-buurt Noord may not be that high, but they are actually contributing to change in the neighbourhood as a collective – as much as possible. Because of the complexity of regulations and procedures within Dutch planning, there also is a relatively large dependency on institutions amongst migrant residents.

Intercultural planning
It was noticed that cultural diversity among residents is indeed acknowledged among civil servants, however, they often still think in target groups, thereby generalizing residents. In order to actually accomplish resident participation in processes of urban regeneration, it is necessary that (1) residents are more involved in earlier stages of planning processes, and that (2) the quality of the relationship between residents and civil servants improves. The latter was a specific point stressed in the interviews with residents; especially the distance (both physical and mental) between residents and the municipality makes them feel unheard.
An increased cultural literacy or sensitivity can support better relations between residents and municipality. Mutual understanding is a key condition here, when involving residents into decision-making processes, in order to reach more people than before. As Duxbury et al. (2016) wrote, training in cultural sensitivity can make planners more culturally competent and planning more culturally effective. When planners become culturally competent, they learn the principles that help them understand the beliefs and customs of cultural groups. This understanding in turn capacitates planners to provide plans that reflect these beliefs and customs in practice.

In order to include all residents in planning processes, there should be more and better attempts to get to know the (opinions of) people living there – especially those who are 'unreachable' at the moment, such as through neighbourhood ambassadors. This is inherently linked to a shift to intercultural planning where civil servants are more aware and understanding of the diversity and cultures that are present in a particular place, and act accordingly. Key conditions here are a better communication between residents and municipality, and more involvement and presence of civil servants in the neighbourhood. This entails not just physical presence, but also empathy towards the reality of local residents, and an ability to imagine themselves in the position of the residents. As a first step, it is very important for civil servants to become aware of their own cultural biases, though these might be unconscious.

Furthermore, the space which local residents have to manoeuvre, should be enlarged, probably consolidating a foundation on which the community can build as a whole. In this sense, it can be argued that the ABCD approach seems a (more) successful way to support residents, and brings about more positive effects than a needs-based approach which is more commonly used so far. Especially multicultural neighbourhoods call for this approach. This echoes Hall and Hickman's (2011) critique that multiculturalist, targeted policies have been replaced by universalist, mainstreaming policies that disregard intergroup differences, apparently negatively influencing the participation of local residents.

This more general critique is relevant for other neighbourhoods as well as for the case in Amsterdam, it is also relevant for the wider international debate of participation, multiculturalism, community building and intercultural planning. Through connecting residents with policy-makers, mutual understanding and respect are more easily established, since people learn more about each other's perspectives and backgrounds. This includes cultural differences, which can be bridged between different individuals and groups and that can contribute to decrease in formal as well as informal power disparities within urban settings.

5.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

In this essay, we have argued that an asset-based approach towards community development can foster the empowerment of local residents on the individual as well as the collective level, conditioned by the level of residents' dependence on institutions, the level of residents' individual self-efficacy and collective efficacy. This research furthermore shows that the municipality of Amsterdam applies a needs-based approach to community building, in which residents are mostly dependent on the municipality when it comes to participation.
The empowerment and confidence often needed for strong leadership roles – ascribed to self-efficacy – were lacking for the majority of residents in G-buurt Noord, whilst this is an important prerequisite for effectuating change. A suggestion for future research would be to see how increasing levels of self-efficacy influence collective efficacy, and also participation. Another suggestion would be to compare different case studies in this field, so that differences between municipalities or countries can become visible, related to their approach.

It would furthermore be interesting for the municipality of Amsterdam to set up trajectories for residents to boost their self-efficacy. One step has already been taken by making a neighbourhood budget available to fund small-scale projects, such as the cook-out and the open-air cinema. This of course can be extended to other ideas as well, for instance a football tournament for the entire community or an urban farming initiative, where people can learn from each other while growing their own food.

In the case of Amsterdam the distance between civil servants and residents turned out to be the most important obstacle in the participation process in G-buurt Noord. Most residents want to be involved in the planning processes affecting their living environment; they wish to have their say in smaller projects such as gardens between flats, but also in larger developments that are taking place – since these changes have a strong impact on their lives. Expertise on urban planning may be present at the municipality, but the entire process and trajectory of planning should not be established as pre-packed plans; all voices of stakeholders should be included, especially those whose lives are most affected by change.

As the nature of this study is rather exploratory, introducing the intercultural approach to participation in planning processes of urban regeneration, it would be valuable to initiate a more encompassing, in-depth research agenda to further explore this theme more thoroughly in the context of spatial planning research. This would also yield more fine-tuned solutions for municipal planners as to how to manage this multicultural planning challenge. One of the possible research directions could be a more quantitative research set-up to enable the study of causalities between variables such as degree of residents' self-efficacy, collective efficacy and resident participation. Learning about what people value and their sense of place could be interesting and relevant variables, providing information on their place attachments and willingness to contribute to local developments. Through collecting large scale data on resident participation in multicultural neighbourhoods, this would provide more generalizable findings that could inform policy decisions in other parts of the Netherlands and beyond.

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