

Summary

Residents' participation is high on the political agenda. In combination with urban development, it is an issue that is attracting growing interest. The role and position of residents in the process of developing city districts and neighbourhoods is becoming an increasingly prominent theme (Van Marissing, 2008; Tonkens, 2008; Tonkens, 2009; Van Hulst et al., 2009; Van Ankeren et al., 2010; Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2011). In this process, in which there seems to be an increasing focus on residents' participation, the Dutch government's introduction of the district approach as the spearhead of urban renewal appears to be one of the most important moments of the last ten years. Lying at the heart of this approach are the residents of fragile districts. In the policy jargon, these are also known as 'priority' or 'power' districts.

The reason for this research was the supposed contrast in attention paid to residents in urban renewal and the district approach, two policy fields that overlap significantly with one other. The issue of participation in urban renewal, and urban renewal in Amsterdam's Bijlmermeer in particular, is the subject of this study. In the period studied (1992-2008), residents are often mentioned in policy documents, but their role and opportunities for policy influence in urban renewal appear to be marginal (see, among others, Uitermark, 2007; Mepschen, in: Tonkens & De Wilde, 2013). The central research question was formulated to establish whether this has been the case in practice:

To what extent and in what way have residents had influence on the (final) outcome of the long-term, large-scale and complex process of urban renewal in the Bijlmermeer?

In order to reach a well-founded answer, for this research a distinction was made between the input, influence and major influence of residents and stakeholders. These concepts are described as follows:

- All documented suggestions from residents and stakeholders as part of the decision-making process of the renewal of the Bijlmermeer are described as *input*.
- All documented and honoured input of residents and stakeholders as part of the decision-making process of the renewal of the Bijlmermeer that leads to changes being made to plans, is defined in this research as *influence*.
- The documented and honoured input of residents and stakeholders as part of the decision-making process of the renewal of the Bijlmermeer that leads to changes being made to plans, which has a significant effect on the liveability and/or the quality of life, and which also often entails high costs for the parties to the development, is described as *major influence*.

Six sub-questions were formulated to provide a basis for the answer to the central research question. When answering the sub-questions, a picture emerges of several phases of urban development and restructuring over time at the level of policy development, and residents' involvement in this. Insight is also gained into what, precisely, residents' participation is, and how this relates to a large-scale and complex process of renewal such as that which has occurred in the Bijlmermeer. Finally, we can answer the question of whether residents' participation has resulted in actual influence on the process of (planning) urban renewal in the Bijlmermeer.

This research can be classified as a single, descriptive case study, in which the initial development, the 'deterioration' and the renewal of the Bijlmermeer are reconstructed. We look at residents' input and influence in the section on renewal, in particular, but this is also done in relation to the policy-related and historical framework of urban development and restructuring in general. The conceptual model that is used for this research is that of John May's (2006) 'star of participation' and 'triangle of involvement'.

No involvement of residents in policy development

Over the centuries, there has been no involvement of residents in urban development and restructuring at the level of formal policy development, either at the national or city level. This research shows that this has also been true for the most recent policy.

Analysis shows that after World War II, the frameworks for urban development policy and restructuring policy in the Netherlands were initially established by central government. After this, more or less space was left for city councils to elaborate this framework. At both of these levels (national and city-level),

there was no policy participation on the part of residents. This was also the case for policy that was heavily focused on residents (for example, the '56 districts approach' or the district approach). Between the 1970s and the beginning of the 1990s, districts played a central role in metropolitan policy development. With the *Grotestedenbeleid* (urban policy), this central role took a new form. Parallel to this policy and at a later time, with the introduction of the 56 districts approach and, above all, the district approach, districts again assumed a key role, and residents were also increasingly on the political agenda.

Viewing urban policy in historical perspective shows that the focus on the city and the districts overlapped in time, but at no point in history were residents involved at the level of policy development. The developments in the Bijlmermeer need to be seen against this background.

A very limited theoretical conceptualisation of participation

This research shows that there is a wealth of definitions, descriptions and forms of participation. Depending on the context, variables can be identified that affect the meaning, interpretation and form. At the same time, it can be concluded that in recent decades, very few theoretical concepts of participation have been developed. At the end of the 1960s, Arnstein (1969) introduced the 'ladder of participation', and various scientists developed variations on this (including Wiedemann & Femers, 1993; Bishop & Davis, 2002; Wilcox, 2004; Tritter & McCallum, 2006).

Only May (2006) has presented a different concept. He sees Arnstein's ladder as a classical approach to power (2006:307). According to May, '[...] one of the most powerful and useful features of the original Ladder of Participation is that it makes this power dimension explicit' (2006:307), and '[...] it helps to explain the disillusionment and cynicism that arise all too frequently in the wake of public participation exercises' (2006:309). In May's view, however, the theory must be disconnected from ideology, and it needs to address the discontinuous character of the interaction between citizens and government. This is taken into account in May's star of participation.

The star is a conceptual model that, together with the triangle of involvement, has been used for this research. The triangle of involvement shows, by means of a graphic, that the number of participants falls as the intensity of involvement increases. This causal relationship is not new, but according to May, it is necessary to look differently, on the basis of this, at the small group of residents or citizens who are highly committed and show involvement. In May's view, more governmental appreciation and support (for example, the development of social capital, if necessary) lead to more effective decision-making.

May's conceptual model has one great advantage compared to Arnstein's concept: it is applicable in situations where the government is in position of power, but also in those cases in which this is not the case, or to a much lesser extent. With this, the limitation of Arnstein's ladder, which had previously drawn criticism (among others, Burton (2004) and Tritter & McCallum (2006)), is removed. The presentation in the form of a star is also more neutral. The suggestion that a 'higher' level of participation (with a ladder or continuum) is better, or more worth striving for, is no longer at issue when a star is used. This is also true for the triangle in comparison with the much-used pyramid.

In the context of urban renewal, many variables have an influence on the meaning, interpretation and form of participation. Uitermark (2007) and Mepschen (2013) have highlighted the political character of this policy field. Power and influence play a major role in urban renewal. Lelieveldt (1999) has established that research into participation should be combined with research into power, in order to gain insight into both attempts to exercise influence and actual influence. In Lelieveldt's view, however, this is impossible. Influence can only be ascertained in formal decision-making, a limitation that was also identified by other researchers in the past (including Bachrach & Baratz (1964) and Lukes (1974)). As it is not easy to find a solution (and, in Lelieveldt's words, even impossible), in this research, demonstrable influence in formal decision-making is seen as a 'lower limit'. This means that more influence will have been exercised in practice than can be ascertained on the basis of the research.

The population of the Bijlmermeer: unique in Amsterdam and the Netherlands

The Bijlmermeer is by no means an 'average' district. Wassenberg (2013) has even characterised the Bijlmermeer as the area that once had the worst reputation in the Netherlands. Since then, things have improved on various fronts, but certain aspects remain fragile. The district is ethnically extremely diverse, and many households have a weak social-economic position. This research finds seven aspects to be characteristic of the Bijlmermeer:

- More than half of the adult population of the Bijlmermeer looks after one or more children (54%), and a quarter of these adults are single.
- In terms of size, the Surinamese population is the largest group in the Bijlmermeer (36%), non-Western immigrants (*niet-westerse allochtonen*) form the second-largest group (27%), while the number of native Dutch has fallen to under 20%.
- The group of residents who have lived in the Bijlmermeer for longer than 10 years is increasing in size (in 2010 25%), but the rate at which people move in the Bijlmermeer remains high. This is partly explicable as a result of the urban renewal process.
- In the period between 1995 and 2005, the Bijlmermeer was one of the areas with the highest levels of unemployment in the city.

- The relative number of people eligible for welfare assistance in the Bijlmermeer also scored very highly in the period between 2000 and 2010.
- The D,F,H-neighbourhood combination is one of the poorest in Amsterdam. The E,G,K-neighbourhood combination scores slightly better in terms of average disposable income.
- Almost half of the population of the Bijlmermeer had a low level of education in 2010.

In their own way, all of these aspects influence residents' willingness to participate. For a major part of the population, this willingness will not initially be very great. This requires focused action on the part of the government, so as to be able to enter into a meaningful dialogue with residents. The urban district has managed to get better at this over time, especially in the period between 1995 and 2001.

No role for residents in the initial development of the Bijlmermeer

Analysis shows that residents did not play a role in the initial development of the Bijlmermeer, and that in the subsequent phase their main contribution was to research. Mentzel (1989) has shown that the discussion about the construction of the Bijlmermeer was a discussion between professionals. No research was undertaken into the housing desires and needs of residents, nor was the architectural and urban development philosophy tested beforehand. Even the city council only approved the Bijlmermeer zoning plan after the last home had been completed. No vote by call was held in the council prior to construction (1989:177).

There were already problems in the initial phase, following the completion of the first homes. The rate of moving was high and facilities were not completed, or were completed later or otherwise than agreed. Global developments, such as the oil crisis and independence in Surinam, also had a major influence on life in the Bijlmermeer. The picture that emerges is that the Bijlmermeer had an 'unfortunate' start and was subsequently drawn into a downward spiral, caused by a combination of faulty human estimations and national and global developments. The attempts to limit the damage and stem the tide lasted between 15 and 20 years. This period, too, was mainly a matter for professionals. In no phase were residents or residents' organisations engaged as permanent discussion partners to assist with finding solutions to existing problems. By means of (residents') research, however, surveys were undertaken by the authorities (government and housing corporations) into what it was like to live in the Bijlmermeer (including: 'Bijlmermeer van binnen. Een grootschalige hoogbouwwijk beoordeeld door bewoners' (1975); 'Bewonersonderzoek Glijphoeve I' (1976); 'Bewonersonderzoek Groot-Fleerde. Een experiment met huurverlaging' (1986); 'Die Bijlmer, wat heb je daar nou te zoeken? Een onderzoek naar bewoners die langer dan 4 jaar in de Bijlmer wonen' (1989)).

In 1980, 50 residents' organisations and institutions had a study conducted on the Bijlmermeer's problems and potential solutions. This study, entitled 'Van de Bijlmer meer maken. Een deltaplan voor de Bijlmermeer', showed in very concrete fashion which problems were being experienced by the residents, and what in their opinion might serve as solutions. This study had been prompted by the residents' lack of confidence in a research study that had been announced by the city council. Parallel tracks thus developed: one research study carried out by the city council, and one carried out by residents' organisations. The municipal executive made fl 250,000 available for this, of which fl 50,000 was for the residents' study. Later (much later) in time, a number of the solutions that had been presented by residents would form part of the improvement and renewal of the Bijlmermeer. Archival research did not reveal a direct relationship with the study that was initiated by the residents.

No role for residents in policy development relating to renewal of the Bijlmermeer

Just as with the initial development of the district, the development of a vision on the renewal of the Bijlmermeer appears to have been a matter for professionals. Although there was a study by the Wijkopbouworgaan Bijlmermeer foundation in 1980, broadly supported by residents' organisations, which sketched out the Bijlmermeer's problems and the potential solutions to these, the discussion was still mainly held between administrators, officials and the staff of housing corporations.

The 1980s were dominated by the establishment, implementation and evaluation of the so-called rehabilitation programme. This programme ran from 1983 to 1988, with the aim of reversing the negative spiral on various fronts in the Bijlmermeer. During the programme, in the framework of scenario discussions, the Nieuw Amsterdam housing corporation (founded in 1984) raised the idea of the partial demolition of existing flats. This was not an option for any of the other parties during this phase.

The rehabilitation programme nevertheless proved to be inadequate. It was established that there was no direct relationship between letting (the vacancy rate had risen to almost 25% in 1985) and the programme of improvements. To be sure, there was a boost to the quality of the buildings, and the vacancy rate did actually fall after some time, but the shortcomings of the Nieuw Amsterdam housing corporation continued to mount. To put it differently, the rehabilitation programme had failed in its aim and follow-up initiatives were needed.

The Toekomst Bijlmermeer working group was created in 1988. Central government refused to provide yet more financial support, and structural solutions to the Bijlmermeer's problems thus had to be sought by other means. Various experts sat on the working group, but residents and/or residents' organisations did not participate in it. Eighteen months later, in a report entitled 'De Bijlmer blijft, veranderen', the working group formulated a set of eleven recommendations that would form the basis for the renewal of the Bijlmermeer. It also referred to the demolition of homes, and the taboo on this appeared to be disappearing slowly. This was also shown by research by Wassenberg, entitled 'De bewoners over de toekomst van de Bijlmermeer'. This describes how '[...] radical urban development measures are not (or no longer) rejected beforehand, but the precise implications for each neighbourhood have to be determined' (1990:8). Wassenberg's research, though, was only carried out after the working group's proposals had been made known. With this, use was made of the opportunity to combine research into the functioning of caretakers, which had been planned earlier, with research into opinions on the outcomes of the work of the working group. In other words, this study came about by chance and was not commissioned.

Despite the limited involvement of residents until that time, residents were discussed prominently in successive reports: 'Over de toekomst van de Bijlmer' (by the Zuidoost urban district) and 'Kiezen en Beginnen' (by the steering group on the Renewal of the Bijlmermeer, which was set up only for a limited time). A central element was that renewal without residents' involvement would not work, and that sufficient account should therefore be taken of this in the process. There was extensive discussion on how this could be achieved. In a policy-related sense, the involvement of residents in the elaboration of the renewal process appeared to be guaranteed at that moment. The residents' role in the vision process remained limited to participating in research. The final report, 'Werk met werk maken', by the steering group on the Renewal of the Bijlmermeer, was the first detailed programme of activities to follow from the 'Kiezen en Beginnen' report. In fact, this programme of activities for the period 1992-1993 can be seen as the start of the current renewal process.

Residents have input into and influence on realisation of policy in the renewal of the Bijlmermeer

The residents of the Bijlmermeer have had input into and influence on the process of urban renewal in their district. In the period between 1992 and 2008, residents and stakeholders submitted 325 suggestions during public consultations. More than a third of these – 114 suggestions (35.1%) – were honoured. A slightly higher number (131 suggestions: 40.1%) were not honoured, and a quarter (80 suggestions: 24.6%) were postponed.

In addition to these absolute numbers relating to public consultations, participation plans were drafted and implemented for the Action plans for the F-neighbourhood, the K-neighbourhood and part of the G-neighbourhood. In the preparation of the Final Action Plan, much time and effort was also put into gathering residents' preferences and opinions by means of house-to-house surveys, among other things. This approach had an influence on the final result, without our being able to show this in a precise way. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that we can see the residents' input and influence that can be identified as a 'lower limit'. In the process of renewal, residents have thus had more input and influence than this research study shows (or rather: can show).

The 325 suggestions that were submitted can be classified into phases 2, 3, and 4 of the planning development process. Phase 2 concerns the Action plan for an area. Much is still undecided; agreements are made on the key issues. Phase 3 concerns a decision on a more detailed plan, whereby financial cover is also arranged. Phase 4 is the definitive, detailed elaboration. In addition to the various phases, for this research, a sub-division was made into categories. We looked at whether residents' input concerns: (a) the housing stock/property, (b) public space, (c) infrastructure or (d) the process.

This study shows that the chance of honoured input by residents and stakeholders increases as the phase of planning development becomes more concrete. Suggestions that relate to the housing stock/property are submitted, in particular, in phases 2 and 3. For public space, this is the case for phase 3 and, in particular, for phase 4. In the Bijlmermeer, infrastructure is a theme that gets significant attention from residents and stakeholders in all phases. Process-related suggestions increase in number as the phases become more concrete.

Honoured input can also be described as the influence of residents and stakeholders. For this research, a distinction was made between major influence and non-major influence. The definition of major influence is influence for which it is extremely likely that this will have significant consequences for the liveability and quality of life in this area. Substantial financial implications can play a role in this.

For each honoured suggestion, we looked at whether or not the input was major. From this analysis, a picture of 18 major suggestions emerged from a total of 114. In addition, for six suggestions there was some uncertainty as to whether there had been major influence, because it could not be established for sure whether there had been a significant effect on liveability or the quality of life. This results in a bandwidth of 15.8% and 21.0%. Without exception, the 18 major suggestions concern the housing stock/property. With the exception of one suggestion, they concern input in phases 2 and 3. The six suggestions for which there is some doubt concern infrastructure (with one exception), and then mainly parking issues.

The conclusion for input was that the chance of honoured input by residents and stakeholders increases as the phase of planning development becomes more concrete. With influence, the opposite can be concluded. The chance of major influence on the part of residents and stakeholders falls as the phase of planning development becomes more concrete. To put this differently: the greater the chance of honoured input, the smaller the chance that this will lead to major influence.

This research shows that there is space for residents' input in every phase, and that residents can also contribute something in practice. Set against the total honoured input, the honoured residents' input per phase in the renewal process of the Bijlmermeer is a fifth for phase 2, more than a third for phase 3 and almost half for phase 4. Around a sixth of all residents' input had a major impact.

Residents less convinced than professionals and administrators

For this research, a questionnaire was sent to 4,287 residents and ex-residents of the Bijlmer, and discussions were held with 46 professionals and four administrators. The outcome of this data collection also points to the conclusion that there was demonstrable input and influence, although a substantial proportion of the residents were not convinced.

The residents were divided into active residents (non-representative random sample) and general residents (representative random sample). The first group are residents who have attended an information or consultation meeting at least once, or have informed themselves or become informed in some other way about urban renewal plans in their neighbourhood. For the group of general residents, this was not known beforehand. Both groups of residents are positive about the fact that the Bijlmermeer has been renewed (88% and 98%, respectively) and a significant share of both groups thinks that residents' input at information and consultation meetings led to changes to plans (53% and 58%, respectively).

Professionals and administrators are moderately positive in their evaluation of residents' influence. Half (50%) state explicitly that residents have had an influence on the (final) outcome of urban renewal, 22% estimate that this influence has been small, and 28% think that there has been significant influence. The view of the total group of respondents is, in general (both residents and professionals/administrators), that residents have exercised influence. This is in agreement with the outcomes of the archival and literature research. Nevertheless, at least 40% of the residents (all residents together) do not believe that they have had any influence on the planning and decision-making process. Only 6% of the professionals and administrators believe that residents have not exercised any influence. The professionals and administrators were also asked whether the

Bijlmermeer would have looked different had the residents not provided input. Of this group, 84% responded to this in the affirmative. This adds a little more colour to the previously mentioned figure of 50%.

The Bijlmermeer as a 'critical case'

Following Flyvbjerg's (2006) approach, residents' participation in the renewal of the Bijlmermeer is a 'critical case'. According to Flyvbjerg, the aim with critical cases is 'to achieve information that permits logical deductions of the type: "If this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases"' (2006:230). In the case of this research, the implicit assumption beforehand was that the residents do not (or did not) contribute input to, or have influence on, the (final) outcome of the urban renewal process in the Bijlmermeer. This assumption stems from the large-scale nature of the renewal approach, in combination with the large proportion of social-economically fragile households in the area.

This research has shown that residents of the Bijlmermeer did, in fact, provide such input into, and have such an influence on, urban renewal. This is the case for both strong and weak social-economic groups. It is likely, in view of Flyvbjerg's argument, that if this is the case for the Bijlmermeer, then it is also highly likely to come up in other areas of renewal in Amsterdam and the Netherlands. An important precondition for this, though, is that the government plays an active role.

For the period between 1995 and 2001 in particular, the urban district took a great deal of initiative to initiate discussions, often at an individual level, with all layers of the population of the Bijlmermeer. This approach, in this phase, could be described as the so-called 'Bijlmer methodology'. A wide range of forms of participation was used, in which the specific situation of the population, the project phase and the task in hand played leading roles; precisely the core of May's conceptual model. This has led, among other things, to Bijlmer-specific forms of participation, such as information tents with a festive feel and occasional payments to residents and key figures. The discussion about this last form of participation reached the highest political levels.