8 Will the Participation Society succeed? Lessons from neighbourhood regeneration programmes in England and the Netherlands

Abstract

Inspired by the Big Society agenda in the UK, the Dutch government has introduced an ambitious programme to devolve responsibility for welfare services to local authorities. This devolution is accompanied by substantial budget reductions, based on the assumption that local actors are able to deliver more efficient, tailor-made and effective services. Central to this new policy paradigm is the more active involvement of citizens in the co-production of solutions to complex societal problems through the development and sustaining of intermediary arrangements between individuals and public sector agencies such as housing associations.

This chapter aims to increase our current limited understanding of the conditions under which connections between public sector professionals and citizens are able to solve place-related and people-related problems. This chapter is based on Dutch and English neighbourhood regeneration case studies. A theoretical framework connecting governance network theory with Habermas's concepts of 'system' and 'lifeworld' guides this exploration.

Keywords

Big Society, Governance Networks, Lifeworld and System, Housing Associations

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It is undeniable that people in our current network and information society are more empowered and independent than before. Combined with the need to reduce the government's deficit, the classic Welfare State is slowly transforming into a Participation Society. Anyone who can, should take responsibility for his or her own life and neighbourhood. (Dutch Government, King's Speech 2013)

In 2013, the notion of a 'Participation Society' ('Participatiesamenleving'), a new term in the Dutch vocabulary, was instantly elected as *the* word of the year (Onze Taal, 2013). Remarkably, it was also nominated as the most disagreeable term in 2013 *and* 2014 (Dutch Institute of Lexicology, 2014). It was not only a new term but also a key element of the government's welfare-state reform policy. Notwithstanding the ambivalence surrounding the Participation Society agenda, the national government expeditiously began implementing important elements of it, such as the 'three welfare decentralisations', in January 2015. This entailed the devolution of social care, youth and work-related support services to local authorities, and included a considerable reduction of available budgets (Association of Dutch Municipalities, 2013). In addition, support services to address unemployment were elaborated in the *Participation Act* (Law Gazette, 2014).

Local authorities are now developing new institutional arrangements to accommodate their new responsibilities and cope with reduced budgets. One of the frequently used solutions is the creation of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency 'Social Neighbourhood Teams' ('Sociale Wijkteams') to improve coordination between professionals in order to deliver integrated and tailor-made services that make better use of the strengths and capabilities of citizens (Hilhorst & Van der Lans, 2015; Movisie, 2013). In 2015, it was expected that 89% of all Dutch local authorities would have one or more Social Neighbourhood Teams. In 2014, this number was 69% (Van Arum & Schoorl, 2015).

The expectations surrounding such a Participation Society are high. Will it succeed or will it turn out to be a 'fig leaf' for government cutbacks and austerity? Without adequate support, vulnerable people and places may fall into the abyss created by government cutbacks. Institutions and programmes that can deliver this support are being affected by the austerity measures that are part of the current Participation Society agenda (Hilhorst and Van der Lans, 2015; Tonkens, 2014a).

The Dutch Participation Society agenda is strongly inspired by the English Big Society agenda that was presented by David Cameron in the run up to the 2010 election (Cameron, 2009; Van der Horst, 2013; Rutte, 2013). The welfare state reforms driven by the Big Society and Participation Society agendas both aim at more active citizenship by devolving responsibilities to the local level (e.g. individuals, local authorities and civil society). There are, however, considerable differences in the way the Dutch and English governments have framed and implemented their reforms. Based on an analysis of policy documents and political speeches, Verhoeven and Tonkens (2014) found that English politicians use 'empowerment talk', calculated to trigger positive feelings about being active citizens, while Dutch politicians employ 'responsibility talk', conveying negative feelings about the failure to participate more actively in society. Based on the policy discourse used in England, the government is to blame because it became too big – participation is conceived of as a civic 'right'. In the Netherlands, the citizens are the culprits because they have become too complacent and too dependent on the government – participation is thus understood as a civic 'duty'.

§ 8.1.2 Learning from co-production in neighbourhood regeneration

Government cutbacks to services supporting vulnerable places and people are not new. In 2011, the Dutch national government terminated its involvement in the Empowered Neighbourhoods Programme, which was introduced in 2007 to support 40 vulnerable neighbourhoods across the country (WWI, 2007). This was one of the first domains in which the Participation Society – avant la lettre – came to the fore. The government announced the premature termination of the programme in a letter to Parliament, in which the arguments used to justify the termination were remarkably similar to the text of the 2013 King's Speech:

The Empowered Neighbourhoods Programme demonstrates that many residents are highly capable of independently achieving improvement in their local community. That is what they prefer. Therefore, residents have a key role. (Donner, 2011)

As part of the 2007 Empowered Neighbourhoods Programme, several Dutch cities created Neighbourhood Teams. While these teams had a stronger focus on place-related and collective problems (e.g. safety, social cohesion and quality of life), the more recently established Social Neighbourhood Teams have a stronger focus on people-related issues (e.g. social inclusion, health, social care, work and parenting). The focus may differ, but the challenges facing these new Neighbourhood Teams remain largely the same: strengthening multi-disciplinary work and creating stronger connections between the activities of professionals and people and communities based

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on the latter's needs and capabilities. The experiences of actors directly involved in these teams could support the implementation of the Participation Society agenda.

In England, while Big Society supporters might claim to be focused on empowering residents, the programme is mainly known for being accompanied by severe austerity measures, government reductions in welfare provisions and the termination of government programmes. The concept is strongly criticised for exactly this reason. Philip Blond, one of the co-creators of the concept, has since argued that 'Austerity strangled Big Society at birth'[20] (also see Blond, 2010). Many see the notion of Big Society as entailing a philosophy of self-help, with few, if any, additional resources (Bailey and Phil, 2011). Jacobs and Manzi (2014, p. 40) have suggested that the 'localism' framework of community planning that emerged from the Big Society paradigm is very likely to disempower local communities and will lead to decision-making being controlled and managed by small numbers of unrepresentative elites masquerading as local and community-focused groups. As we will discuss later in this chapter, the austerity measures introduced in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review terminated funding for many initiatives that supported forms of co-production in neighbourhood regeneration. There was also a scaling back of funding for infrastructure bodies that are vital in supporting the development of skills and capacity among community-led bodies (Caron and MacMillan, 2014).

§ 8.1.3   Goal, scope and structure

We still have a limited understanding of the differences between the world of professionals and the world of citizens and local communities (Van den Brink, Van Hulst, De Graaf, & Van der Pennen, 2012; Van Hulst, De Graaf, & Van den Brink, 2011, 2012; Van der Pennen & Van Bortel, 2015). Moreover, limited use has been made of the experiences of neighbourhood teams and the lessons learned that might promote the successful implementation of Participation Society policies.

This chapter aims to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning the factors influencing collaborative connections between public sector agencies and citizens that aim to resolve place-related and people-related problems. This chapter will pay special attention to the role of third sector housing associations and the perceptions of the actors directly involved. Many of the people who should benefit from the Participation Society agenda come from low-income households, live in deprived neighbourhoods and are tenants of housing associations. Social housing landlords have played a

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20   Interview with Philip Blond on Altijd Wat on 24 November 2014.

prominent role in neighbourhood regeneration in both the Netherlands and England (Mullins & Murie, 2006; Mullins, 2010; Van Gent, 2009; Van Gent, Musterd, & Ostendorf, 2009). Therefore, case study data from neighbourhood regeneration programmes from both countries will be used.

The theoretical and methodological framework of this chapter will be briefly introduced in § 8.2 below. This framework is then applied in § 8.3 and § 8.4 to case study data from two neighbourhood regeneration programmes, one in the Netherlands and the other in England. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some of the key factors influencing the success or failure of collaborative connections between agencies and citizens.

§ 8.2 Theoretical perspective and methodology

§ 8.2.1 Participation Society and the international debate on co-production

Welfare reform and the Big Society and Participation Society agendas are related to the debate on the role of citizens in the provision of public services and the development of joint solutions to social problems: also referred to as 'co-production' or 'co-creation' (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2014; Boyle & Harris, 2009; NEF, 2007). International research on co-production processes and outcomes is still limited and inconclusive. Some research results suggest that the involvement of citizens can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery and also increase the affective connection between citizens and government (Clark, Brudney, & Jang 2013; Dunston et al., 2009; Osborne, 2010a, 2010b; Thomas, 2012). Some findings suggest that third sector organisations are better able to develop higher and more sustainable levels of citizen participation in the provision of public services compared to public and for-profit providers, insofar as they have a strong focus on local communities (Pestoff, 2006, 2008, 2009). In contrast, based on an extensive literature review, Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2014) concluded that little is known about the benefits and the effects of co-production with citizens. Not only is little known about the outcomes, in addition, most of the research undertaken has been focused on the role of government and organisations in co-production processes and has barely looked at the role of citizens.

Participation Society and the limitations of the governance network perspective

The Participation Society[21] paradigm and the concept of co-production imply more intensive collaboration between professionals and citizens. These different groups of actors bring diverse and sometimes conflicting sets of values and rules into decision-making arenas. This requires a theoretical framework that helps us understand interactions between very diverse actors. Governance network theory is a promising approach to explore, explain and support these complex multi-actor decision-making processes (Kickert et al., 1997; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Rhodes, 1997).

An important element of governance network theory concerns the notion that in the context of uncertainty interdependent actors solve problems by participating in decision-making 'games'. The often compounded and interrelated nature of problems in deprived neighbourhoods compels actors to combine their resources with the capabilities of local communities (Hilhorst & Van der Lans, 2015). In order to solve problems, actors need to be brought together. In governance network theory this is often referred to as establishing 'couplings' between actors (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Weick 1969, 1979; Crozier & Friedberg, 1980). These couplings can be arranged in various ways: ranging from light and informal arrangements to settings that are more formal and anchored in written agreements and contracts. Insofar as interactions are guided by the 'rules of the game', if decision-making games are to be successful, actors need to agree on these rules (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004, p. 193).

Governance network approaches are mainly focused on inter-organisational interactions. Perspectives concerned with understanding interactions between professionals and citizens are less developed within this academic domain. Koppenjan and Klijn (2004, p. 198) state that as an element of sound network management, actors should be 'matched' according to hierarchical level, skills, competences and professional language. In governance network theory, citizens are often regarded as 'outsiders' to the problem-solving and decision-making arenas. Their involvement is seen as an aspect of the democratic anchorage and legitimacy of the governance network itself (Bogason & Zølner, 2011). The Participation Society paradigm sees citizens as co-producers of solutions. Consequently, they can neither be regarded as outsiders nor as just 'regular' institutional actors. The coupling of professionals and residents in decision-making arenas is therefore difficult to reconcile with the network management requirements of matching languages, values, hierarchies and skills.

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21   For the remainder of this chapter we will use 'Participation Society' when referring to the policy agendas of both the Dutch and English governments. We acknowledge that the concepts are closely related but not identical.

§ 8.2.3 Connecting governance network theory with Habermas's theory of communicative action

Several scholars, commentators and others have pointed to the differences and interrelationships between the world of organisations and the world of residents with respect to neighbourhood regeneration (Van der Lans, 2012; Van den Brink et al., 2012; VROM-Raad, 2007; Van der Pennen & Van Bortel, 2015; Tonkens 2014a; Tonkens & De Wilde, 2014; Stienen, 2015). In developing his theory of 'communicative action' (1987), Habermas theorises about the differences between 'system' and 'lifeworld', distinguishing two forms of rationality at work in modern society: first, an 'end-means rationality' dominant in what Habermas calls the 'system', and second, 'communicative rationality', which is the cohesive mechanism in the 'lifeworld'. The system includes all that people have developed in the form of organisations, rules, laws, procedures and hierarchies in societal domains such as economics, politics, education, housing, science, government, healthcare, welfare and justice. In contrast, the lifeworld is the domain of personal relationships between family members, friends, neighbours and members of local, faith or other groups. It is a world of informal communication, storytelling, personal values, experiences and emotions, but also a domain of social inequality and conflict (Van den Brink et al., 2012, p. 56).

Bureaucracies are the most undiluted form of the 'system' (Weber, 1922/1992, quoted by Van den Brink et al., 2012, p. 55). Bureaucracies have largely contributed to the growth of productivity and the creation of our modern welfare state. Due to their success and efficiency they have spread to many government institutions, and also to large profit and non-profit companies. However, that success has come at a price: bureaucracies function best when the human element is eliminated and decisions are based on strictly formal, rational and hierarchical rules. Such system agencies are increasingly met with scepticism and distrust (Kunneman, 1998; Sieckelinck et al., 2013; WRR, 2005). Habermas contends that system agencies have become estranged from their roots and have begun to 'colonise' the lifeworld. According to Habermas, the untapped potential of the lifeworld should be mobilised to reverse this development (also see WRR 2012; Van der Lans, 2012). This invites the question of whether the Participation Society agenda is part of a 'decolonisation' or a 'colonisation' process.

The reservations surrounding the ability of system agencies to develop and sustain connections with people and communities are not new. In 1992, the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (Dutch acronym: WRR) questioned the ability of public sector organisations to develop 'civic' values and behave like good fellow citizens (WRR, 1992, p. 89). A more recent report by the same council concluded that only enlightened, talented and independently minded frontline workers (professionals) are able to make and sustain connections between the system and the lifeworld (WRR, 2012, p. 14).

Van den Brink et al. (2012, p. 59), using Habermas and Weber, summarised the incongruities between the logic of the system and that of the lifeworld [see Table 8.1 below]. These incongruities are primarily ideal types in the Weberian sense, and will rarely be seen in undiluted form in empirical reality. Both worlds have their own logic and rules, but do not exclude each other completely. Most citizens are well versed in navigating both the system and the lifeworld. They switch back and forth almost daily and are perfectly capable of distinguishing the rules that apply in work and in private. In vulnerable neighbourhoods, however, the tension between both worlds can take extreme forms (Van den Brink et al., 2012). Residents in these areas often have very intense contact with system agencies. This may be because they are on a waiting list for social housing, receive unemployment benefits, have chronic health issues, have children that have dropped out of school, broken the law or are victims of those that have. Many withdraw behind their front door, in order to have as little as possible to do with system agencies (social care avoiders), others are overwhelmed by professionals from various system agencies that deliver social support to one family or individual but insufficiently coordinate their activities. In both instances, problems often remain unresolved.

	SYSTEM (WEBER'S BUREAUCRACIES)	LIFEWORLD (HABERMAS)
1.	Salaried staff	Voluntary service
2.	Division of labour and specialisation	Communicative action
3.	Formal rules and procedures	Informal rules and personal outcomes
4.	Functional hierarchies	Social inequalities
5.	Functional relations	Personal relations
6.	Rational power resources	Values and emotions

TABLE 8.1 Theoretical incongruities between the logic of the system and the lifeworld
Source: Van den Brink et al. (2012, p. 58), translation by authors

There are different views about the relationship between the system and the lifeworld: is the system separated from the lifeworld or is it not so much detached from the lifeworld but 'colonising' that lifeworld's logic and values? While the first premise suggests that professionals are no longer able to communicate with vulnerable people because they come from different 'worlds', the second premise assumes that residents are able to talk and think like professionals. Both are unsatisfactory, and they require different solutions (Mensink, 2015). The conclusions of Van der Pennen and Van Bortel (2015) support this, suggesting that in order to overcome these incongruities a careful match should be made between professionals and the environment in which they work. Some exemplary urban practitioners are successful in their work in the rough-and-tumble of the world outside bureaucratic institutions. Others are more successful working inside these institutions (Van der Pennen & Van Bortel, 2015, p. 19).

Research methodology

This chapter is one of the outputs of a qualitative cross-national longitudinal exploration of the role played by housing associations in neighbourhood regeneration governance in the Netherlands and England (Van Bortel, 2015). The fieldwork for this study was conducted between 2007 and 2014. The important components of this research project are two longitudinal case studies on the role played by housing associations in two deprived neighbourhoods. In total, the study included around 70 in-depth interviews with actors involved in the local neighbourhood regeneration networks in Groningen and Birmingham, such as officers from the housing association and local authority and community representatives. This chapter is informed by approximately 20 of these interviews. Many actors were interviewed multiple times over the years to capture contextual changes and developments. For the purpose of this chapter, the empirical data from this study (interview transcripts and policy documents) was analysed in the light of incongruities between system and lifeworld as discussed by Van den Brink et al. (2012).

§ 8.3 The case studies: agencies, areas and arenas

This section introduces the system agencies, the case study areas and the decision-making arenas that played an important role in the analysis.

§ 8.3.1 Agencies

In recent decades, non-profit housing organisations in the Netherlands and the UK have taken a prominent role in neighbourhood regeneration initiatives (Mullins & Van Bortel, 2010; Van Bortel & Elsinga, 2007; Van Bortel et al., 2009; Van Bortel & Mullins, 2009; Van Bortel, 2009). The focal actors in the current case studies are two such housing associations: the Groningen-based housing association *De Huismeesters* (6,500 properties) and housing association *Midland Heart*, which owns and manages 32,000 properties across the West Midlands. These organisations were selected because they have both expressed the ambition to give residents an important role in the regeneration of their neighbourhoods. They are not necessarily representative for the entire social housing sector in their respective countries. The Groningen and Birmingham local authorities also played a prominent role in the decision-making arenas.

§ 8.3.2   Areas

This chapter focuses on regeneration activities in two neighbourhoods: Lozells in Birmingham (England) and De Hoogte in Groningen (the Netherlands). Both areas face compounded issues concerning social, economic and physical deprivation, with the housing associations playing an important role in initiatives to improve the quality of life in these areas, and both areas were also part of nationwide neighbourhood regeneration programmes. Lozells was part of the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) programme and was included in 'Urban Living', the HMR Pathfinder for Birmingham and nearby Sandwell (Audit Commission, 2011; Webb, 2010; Wilson, 2013; Leather et al., 2012) that started in 2003 and was prematurely terminated in 2011. De Hoogte was selected as one of the 40 priority areas in the Netherlands that were part of the Empowered Neighbourhoods Programme initiated in 2007 and prematurely terminated in 2011 (WWI, 2007). Both areas have a long history of regeneration initiatives going back to the 1970s, combining social and economic initiatives to increase community cohesion and support vulnerable individuals. Investments have been made to improve the quality of the public space, neighbourhood facilities and the quality and variety of the housing stock.

§ 8.3.3   Arenas

In partnership with the Birmingham City Council and the Urban Living HMR Pathfinder, housing association Midland Heart developed a master plan in 2009. The plan stated that the agencies 'wanted to harness the talent of the area's community to create mixed and well-functioning neighbourhoods' (Birmingham City Council, Midland Heart and Urban Living Partnership, 2009, p. 25). In a similar vein, the 2007 Neighbourhood Action Plan for De Hoogte, developed by local housing associations and the Groningen local authority, stated that 'We want to transfer the control over the future of the area to residents and neighbourhood professionals' (Groningen Local Authority and Housing Associations, 2007, pp. 3-4). There were clear parallels between the ways the agencies in both countries wanted to involve local communities in neighbourhood regeneration. As part of these regeneration programmes, decision-making arenas were created to couple system agencies (e.g. professionals working for housing associations and local authorities) and local communities (e.g. residents and community volunteers). These arenas are visualised in Figure 8.1. Table 8.2 contains examples of the various types of arenas. This chapter focuses on 'Type 3' arenas, which are briefly introduced in Table 8.3.
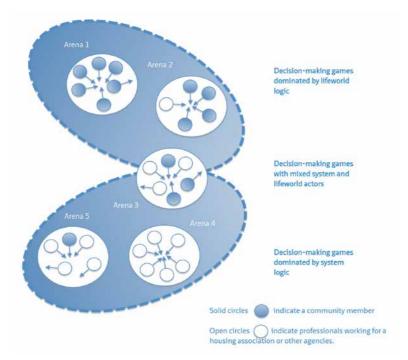
FIGURE 8.1 Arenas in informal (lifeworld) and formal (system) networks
Note: Each circle in the figure above represents an actor. The direction of arrows indicates the level of shared understanding and mutual goals between the actors involved. The figure presents generic examples of arenas which are not directly connected to the case studies.

ARENAS	PREDOMINANT LOGIC	EXAMPLES
1.	Lifeworld	Informal resident meeting
2.	Lifeworld	Informal meeting of residents with a community support officer from a housing association
3.	Mixed system and lifeworld logics (co-production arena)	Neighbourhood team with community members and neighbourhood professionals
4.	System	Neighbourhood Regeneration Steering group with representatives from housing associations and local authority
5.	System	Board of housing association or neighbourhood regeneration agency (e.g. Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder) with members from local communities

TABLE 8.2 Examples of lifeworld, co-production and system arenas

ARENAS	AREA	AGENCIES
1. Neighbourhood Team and Neighbourhood Voting Days	De Hoogte, Groningen	HA De Huismeesters Groningen City Council Third sector social care providers
2. Neighbourhood Management Board and Neighbourhood Manager	Lozells, Birmingham	Birmingham City Council Local ward councillors
3. Resident Involvement Platforms Housing Associations	De Hoogte, Groningen Lozells, Birmingham	HA De Huismeesters HA Midland Heart

TABLE 8.3 Co-production arenas in De Hoogte and Lozells explored in this study

1   Neighbourhood Team and Neighbourhood Voting Days (De Hoogte Groningen)

Neighbourhood Teams were introduced in Groningen in 2007. The creation of these teams was part of a concerted programme run by the Groningen local authority and housing associations to improve the quality of life in deprived neighbourhoods (Groningen Local Authority & Housing Associations, 2007).

The Neighbourhood Team for De Hoogte consisted of professionals from the Groningen local authority, housing associations, third sector social care providers, and several residents. Each neighbourhood received a budget pooled from resources provided by the Groningen City Council and housing associations. The Neighbourhood Team for De Hoogte received special status and additional national government resources after the area was selected as one of the 40 priority areas in the National Empowered Neighbourhoods Programme later in 2007 (Ministry of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration, 2007).

Residents could decide on the allocation of the neighbourhood budget to specific project proposals during 'Neighbourhood Voting Days' ('Wijkstemdagen'). These events were organised in De Hoogte once or twice a year in the period 2008–2010. Project proposals were to be resident-led. Up to €500,000 in funding was available for each voting day (Groningen Local Authority and Housing Associations, 2008). Projects receiving the largest number of votes from residents were allocated the requested funding until the budget was depleted: a 'Value Sieve' methodology was used to assess proposals based on their perceived added value to the neighbourhood (Corbett, 2000; Deuten & De Kam, 2006). Some examples of the proposals selected included the 'Colourful Dinner', aimed at bringing members of different community groups together to enjoy a multicultural meal, and the placement in the area of a mobile container with playground equipment.

2   **Lozells Neighbourhood Management Board and Neighbourhood Manager (Lozells, Birmingham)**

In early 2007, the Birmingham City Council started a neighbourhood management pilot in five areas, including Lozells. A Neighbourhood Manager was appointed and a Neighbourhood Management Board established. This board was chaired by a local councillor and was a platform to discuss and align the activities of public sector agencies with the needs of the local community. The role of the Neighbourhood Manager was to act as a bridge between agencies and to work closely with residents. The programme was funded through 'Working Neighbourhoods Fund' grants, which ended in March 2011 as a result of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (Birmingham City Council, 2011).

3   **Resident involvement by housing associations**

The resident participation structure of the housing association De Huismeesters included a central Tenant Board ('Huurdersraad De Huismeesters') that served as a platform to discuss issues that affected all residents, for example, the annual rent increase. The Tenant Board was the umbrella body for resident committees that operated on a neighbourhood or estate level. The Residents' Interests Association for De Hoogte ('Bewoners Belangen Vereniging De Hoogte/Selwerderwijken') was the formally accredited resident platform in De Hoogte. In addition to this more general participation structure, De Huismeesters also created a temporary 'Residents Planning Group' as an advisory body for the refurbishment of approximately 400 properties in the period 2008–2011, and organised several public consultation meetings to discuss regeneration plans with residents (De Huismeesters, 2008–2013).

The participation structure of housing association Midland Heart consists of five geographically organised 'Customer Panels', including a panel for Birmingham. The panels provide feedback to an umbrella 'Customer and Communities Committee'. Residents can also participate in 'Customer Groups' for a specific neighbourhood, street or estate.
During the fieldwork period, Midland Heart did not have an active Customer Group in Lozells, but did organise street-level meetings around specific issues such as litter and safety. Midland Heart also organised consultation events to discuss regeneration plans for the area.

Actor perspectives on system/lifeworld incongruities

This section connects neighbourhood regeneration case study data from Birmingham and Groningen to the six system/lifeworld incongruities as formulated by Van den Brink et al. (2012) in Table 8.1. Each incongruity in this section starts with a brief introduction (in italics) and continues by deductively applying examples from the case studies.

§ 8.4.1 **Incongruity 1: Salaried staff *versus* voluntary service**

System agencies work with salaried and qualified staff members. Residents are most frequently found in the lifeworld. Most of the time, no money is involved, and there are no hierarchical relationships between active residents and the local community (Van den Brink et al., 2012, p. 57).

The research found indications that professional behaviour is increasingly expected from community volunteers. Not long after the start of the Neighbourhood Teams in 2007, issues arose around the participation of residents in these teams. In a letter to the Groningen City Council (Gemeenteraad), the Groningen Cabinet consisting of the Mayor and aldermen (B&W) stated:

Residents must be able to adequately represent their neighbourhood as well as be able to make trade-offs for the entire neighbourhood on the allocation of resources. Residents need to work within a group of professionals who work on the basis of their own background and knowledge. This actually requires 'professional' community representatives. (Groningen Local Authority, 2008)

This letter gives the impression that professionals are permitted to work on the basis of their own 'background and knowledge', with no adaptation in their routine apparently required. In contrast, residents are expected to 'work in a group of professionals', 'represent their neighbourhood' and 'make trade-offs for the entire neighbourhood on the allocation of resources'. Moreover, a hierarchical relationship is assumed between residents in the Neighbourhood Team and the rest of the community.

A second observation concerns the dominant role of professionals in community initiatives that were intended to encourage the active participation of residents. The Neighbourhood Voting Days, introduced above, were regarded by many as a successful instrument in stimulating community involvement (Groningen Audit Commission, 2011). The Voting Days were indeed successful in Korrewegwijk, a neighbourhood

adjacent to De Hoogte. However, in De Hoogte there was meagre participation from residents. A community worker commented: 'Residents submitted very few proposals. Almost of the all ideas were conceived by professionals. I don't mind this, as long as residents are involved in some way or form, but that was not the case'. Several professionals interviewed indicated that they had attempted to mobilise residents to develop proposals, but the results were disappointing. A housing association officer remarked in 2010 that residents used the Neighbourhood Voting Days as an opportunity to submit ideas that would then be implemented by agencies: 'Residents need to think about the implementation of their plans. We are happy to provide support, but it is not a "you ask and we run" exercise. We do expect some level of reciprocity, but many residents quit when we asked for something in return'.

The positive evaluation of the Neighbourhood Voting Days also overlooked the considerable resources invested in this instrument. A community worker stated that a considerable share of the funding allocated was not used to pay for the direct costs of regeneration activities, but to pay the professionals who were involved in the projects. In Lozells, a considerable share of the funding was also used to pay the professionals. As a ward councillor stated in 2011: 'the [Birmingham] city council have taken a large proportion of regeneration money for their officers. Those officers do things *to* the community rather than *with* the community'.

§ 8.4.2 **Incongruity 2: Division of labour and specialisation
versus communicative action**

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Residents experience the lifeworld as an organic whole in which various associated activities come together. The lifeworld does not have a division of labour. In the lifeworld it is important that actors develop a common story (Van den Brink et al., 2012, p. 57).

This research found two patterns that can be linked to the specialisation versus communicative action incongruity. The first pattern involved the limited participation of residents in large capital investment decisions, such as demolition, refurbishment and new housing construction. Large capital investment decisions were usually made in arenas that were not open to residents. Resident participation was far more developed in projects that required limited resources; for example, activities to improve the public realm, street layout, playground facilities and dealing with environmental issues such as littering [Low investments in Figure 8.2].

Large investment plans were first developed, and agreed on, by system agencies. While residents were consulted on draft plans, very few were involved in their inception [High investments in Figure 8.2]. In an interview in 2008, a manager working for De

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Huismeesters commented on this agency-led approach: 'It's important that we involve residents, but we have an investment horizon of 30, 40 or even 50 years. Therefore, it is crucial that a lot of our ideas are included in plans to regenerate the neighbourhood'. That large regeneration investments are mainly institution-led is not necessarily bad. The Lozells Neighbourhood Manager stated in 2009 that 'the options in the master plan were received very positively by the residents consulted. Residents in Lozells will support every investment in the neighbourhood'.
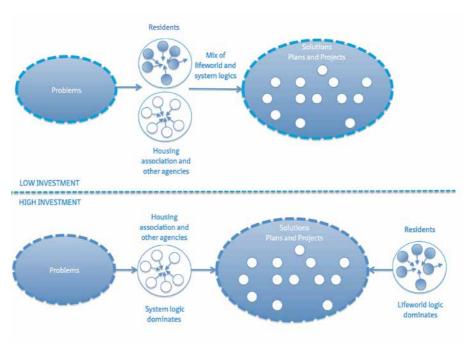

FIGURE 8.2 Dominant consultation approach concerning low versus high capital investment projects

The second pattern entails the creation of many disconnected, specialised agency-led projects because of abundant regeneration funding. A community support officer taking up a position at De Hoogte in 2010 was 'flabbergasted' by the number of projects going on in the area and the number of professionals involved. Two years after the start of the Empowered Neighbourhoods Programme, many professionals involved in these projects still did not know each other: 'I was shocked, we had all kinds of professionals engaged in resident activation programmes, all of which were aimed at similar target groups. There was no coordination and a shocking lack of resident involvement'. These professionals were often new to the area and its residents. This led to a growing resentment among residents and incumbent professionals who preferred a limited number of actors that were 'familiar faces' to the local community (also see Incongruity 6).

Both patterns reinforced the specialised and fragmented nature of neighbourhood regeneration activities and did not support the creation of a 'common story' that was shared by professionals and local communities.

Incongruity 3: Formal rules and procedures *versus* informal rules and personal outcomes

In the lifeworld, fixed rules and procedures play a marginal role. It is not the correct application of rules when undertaking an initiative which is the most important thing but whether that initiative produces outcomes relevant to those directly involved. In the lifeworld of residents, rules are implicit and unwritten, such as rituals, cultural norms and social codes (Van den Brink et al., 2012, p. 57).

Delivering outcomes that are relevant to local communities sometimes requires liaison in order to mediate between and translate the rules and policies of agencies and rules and needs of local communities. In this regard, the Neighbourhood Team in De Hoogte was given a brief to act as an intermediary institution to prioritise neighbourhood needs above city-level policies. In practice, this task proved more complicated than anticipated. A Groningen local authority officer closely involved in the activities of the Neighbourhood Team made a distinction between two kinds of rules. First, there were rules that related to political decisions on the allocation of scarce resources. Second, there were rules that related to public safety principles or the proven effectiveness and efficiency of policy interventions. While it is possible to deviate from the first when wanting to invest additional resources in deprived areas, it is easy to diverge from the latter when interventions are evidently not safe or not effective. A community involvement officer working for De Huismeesters voiced his exasperation in several interviews with respect to the 'lack of courage and decisiveness' of the Neighbourhood Team in taking firm action to champion neighbourhood needs.

Residents in De Hoogte tended to offload the work involved in implementing proposals to the professionals (also see Incongruity 1). This is illustrated by a telling example involving a proposal to place a work of art on a roundabout in the area. Residents supported this proposal during one of the Neighbourhood Voting Days. It was clear from the start that the plan needed city-level traffic and spatial planning approval. Some local authority officers who were part of the Neighbourhood Team took over the residents' responsibility to obtain the necessary permits. An officer working for De Huismeesters regarded this as an example of pampering residents. In his view, professionals should deliver support but not take over the responsibilities of residents.

In comparison to statements about the Neighbourhood Team in De Hoogte, the Lozells actors interviewed report more positive experiences with the Neighbourhood Manager. In Lozells, the neighbourhood manager was applauded for her intermediary role. A ward councillor stated in 2011: 'Neighbourhood management was probably one of the best things that has happened to this area for a long time. Neighbourhood management did simple things: bringing people together, stopping duplication of work and enhancing partnership working'. Referring to the neighbourhood manager, a community volunteer commented in 2011: 'she saw the need to build bridges between organisations and resident groups … In terms of having an influence, it was the best structure, but now they've abandoned that'.

§ 8.4.4   Incongruity 4: Functional hierarchies *versus* social inequalities

The lifeworld of residents has no formal hierarchical relationships, but it is certainly not an egalitarian community. There are social inequalities and the influence of some is greater than others (Van den Brink et al., 2012, p. 57).

Residents in the Neighbourhood Team in De Hoogte were expected to 'represent their neighbourhood' and 'to make trade-offs for the entire neighbourhood'. From a lifeworld perspective, this is a rather awkward position. The residents were self-nominated: there was no formal or informal mandate from the local community underlying their position in the Neighbourhood Team. Unlike the Netherlands, England has a form of neighbourhood-level representative democracy: councillors are elected for small areas called 'wards'. Local ward councillors were part of the Lozells Neighbourhood Management Board and were actively engaged in matters that affected their constituency.

Compared to community volunteers in the Netherlands, the councillors in Lozells had a much stronger mandate to speak on behalf of the local community. This mandate sometimes conflicted with participative forms of democracy [also see Chapter 3]. A community involvement officer working for Midland Heart expressed his reluctance to work with permanent resident groups in the area. He feared 'political tilt' by local politicians and referred to several events where local politicians 'highjacked' community group meetings for their own political purposes. Consequently, Midland Heart preferred to involve residents in informal and temporary settings. In De Hoogte, the opposite occurred. Residents participating in the Refurbishment Planning Group were asked by the housing association to represent the views of the wider community and to be accountable to that community. However, these residents wanted to participate on a strictly personal basis and remain anonymous, in fear of possible negative responses from other community members. This apprehensiveness of

community volunteers is not without reason. In 2011 a community volunteer noted that voicing your opinion or presenting ideas in De Hoogte is not without risk: 'The moment you do that, you stick out and you will be criticised by other residents. I have received loads of critique, but I can handle it. Two days later, I will be drinking a beer with that same person. That's also typical for De Hoogte'.

Social inequalities in De Hoogte could explain the reluctance of its residents – in comparison to Korrewegwijk – to develop project proposals for the Neighbourhood Voting Days. Actors mentioned the more open social structure and the larger number of owner-occupiers in Korrewegwijk as important factors leading to the more active participation of residents. A community support worker commented on how the rather closed social networks in De Hoogte influenced the outcomes of the voting process: 'Good proposals will not be accepted if you do not have good connections in the neighbourhood'. This was echoed in a statement by a community volunteer: 'De Hoogte is a close-knit community. People have to get to know you, otherwise you will not be accepted in the community'.

§ 8.4.5   **Incongruity 5: Functional relations *versus* personal relations**

In the lifeworld, human qualities take central stage. Factors such as social background, age, gender and religious beliefs are all relevant in the lifeworld. The impersonal formal system-world responsibilities of salaried staff members are of secondary importance (Van den Brink et al., 2012, p. 58).

Agencies such as housing associations tend to underestimate the importance of personal relationships between practitioners and the local community. Small acts can have huge impacts. A Lozells community activist described an incident in 2009, when a Midland Heart officer apologised at the last minute for not attending a community meeting and sent a trainee as a replacement. This felt like 'a kick in the teeth' and led the activist to conclude that 'they don't have regard for us, they think we're stupid'. In a similar vein, several residents in De Hoogte terminated their participation in the Refurbishment Planning Group after De Huismeesters failed to inform them about a change in the venue of the meeting. This incident was the 'straw that broke the camel's back', after previous incidents gave community volunteers the impression that their views were not taken seriously.

On a more positive note, other developments indicate the evolution of stronger personal relationships between practitioners and community members around 2010. In interviews, actors in both case study areas started referring to new neighbourhood professionals taking up posts. More specifically, they spoke of a community

involvement officer working for Midland Heart and a community support officer working for a third sector organisation in De Hoogte. Interviewees reported a new dynamic generated by these new professionals. Previously, the actors had usually referred to projects, not to the personal commitment of professionals. The difference was that these new practitioners were no longer focused on delivering specific agency-led projects but on giving support to community-led activities. A community involvement officer working in Lozells stated: 'This new way of working generates a lot of energy. Now real relationships are built with residents'.

Gender, age and religion played a prominent role in the design of resident participation in Lozells. It is very likely that this approach was influenced by the high proportion of ethnic minority residents (around 90%) in the area. As part of the public consultation on the Lozells Masterplan in 2008/2009, Midland Heart and the Birmingham City Council organised various meetings aimed at specific groups. For example, they had a women's-only breakfast meeting for mothers with a Bangladeshi background at their children's school, a meeting for local shopkeepers, events for young people and for older residents. There were also meetings in a Catholic church, a Methodist church, a Somali community centre and events after prayers in two different mosques, one Pakistani-led the other Bangladeshi.

In contrast, this research did not find meetings in De Hoogte that were designed to address specific cultural needs. When presented with examples from Lozells, several Dutch interviewees did not regard them as feasible in the Dutch context. Compared to Lozells, the proportion of residents with an ethnic minority background in De Hoogte remains relatively low (20% in 2011), and the need to include cultural and religious concerns in designing resident participation may not be that urgent.

§ 8.4.6   **Incongruity 6: Rational power resources *versus* values and emotions**

The lifeworld is less focused on rational business considerations. More important are personal ambitions and values. In addition, rational arguments, stories, feelings, ideals, experiences and passions are also relevant (Van den Brink et al., 2012, p. 58).

The termination of national regeneration programmes [see § 8.3.2] appears to have caused a paradigm shift among community volunteers and neighbourhood practitioners. Although one would expect local actors to lament the loss of resources, this was hardly the case. A former Lozells neighbourhood manager stated: 'It is really, really so interesting how quickly things have changed after the money disappeared and how that dramatically alters your perspective'. A Lozells community activist found the disappearance of funding 'liberating'. It forced people to become creative

with resources. It forced agencies to set priorities and increase their focus on what communities wanted. A Midland Heart community officer described the post-austerity era in 2011 as a 'new dawn', 'staff was no longer given a project, but briefed to see what was happening on the ground and find the places to plug in and give support'.

This response to the funding cuts must be interpreted in the context of scepticism among residents and practitioners about the capacity of agency-led initiatives to transform resources into results relevant to local communities. A Midland Heart community involvement officer commented in 2011: 'There has been lots of regeneration money, but none of it has been grass roots. These organisations had money swilling … but unfortunately the capacity of the people involved didn't tally with the amount of money that ran through their accounts'. In a similar vein, a ward councillor stated that same year: 'Urban Living and all the other regeneration agencies have invested millions into this area. Where's all that money gone, what legacy has it left behind?' A community activist did see a legacy of the regeneration investments: 'A lot of that actually did help to build a sense of identity'. This is also reflected in a comment made by another community volunteer in 2011: 'One of the biggest legacies is "friendships". I know it sounds very woolly, it's relationships, it's the connections, it's the network … now we sort of know how to get problems sorted'.

A community officer described how Midland Heart had to find a new ground of legitimacy for their involvement in neighbourhood activities: 'In a way we had to prove our worth from scratch, but implementing ideas that benefit the neighbourhood does not necessarily involve large amounts of money. Projects are not driven by money … they are powered by passion'.

Between 2007 and 2011, in both case study areas, housing associations and local authority professionals were largely preoccupied with the allocation of funding, the coordination of regeneration projects and attempts (especially in Lozells) to acquire additional regeneration resources. Rational arguments and the need to coordinate and manage activities prevailed during that period. The focus of the professionals was not particularly on the needs of the local people, but on projects, procedures and collaboration with other professionals. The reduction in resources resulted in fewer actors and projects, and simplified structures.

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§ 8.5 **Conclusion**

What is required for the Participation Society to succeed? This chapter contributed
to answering that question by exploring co-production arenas that include agencies
and residents who aim to solve neighbourhood problems. This research included a
secondary analysis of qualitative case study data on decision-making interactions
in two vulnerable neighbourhoods: De Hoogte in Groningen (the Netherlands) and
Lozells in Birmingham (the UK). This data was analysed using a governance network
framework (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004), supplemented by elements of Habermas's
theory of communicative action, notably his system and lifeworld concepts (Habermas,
1987; Van den Brink et al., 2012). This exploration was experimental in nature, and
the findings lend themselves to tentative and cautious conclusions. These conclusions
are divided along two lines. The first concerns the theoretical and methodological
implications of this research, the second focuses on practical implications.

Theoretical and methodological implications

By connecting governance network concepts with Habermas's theory of communicative
action we wanted to construct a framework that increased the explanatory power of
co-production interactions between professionals and citizens and to understand
interactions not only from the perspective of organisations but also from the viewpoint
of residents.

The research confirmed the incongruities between system and lifeworld, as formulated
by Van den Brink et al. (2012). The application of the network governance concept
highlighted that the logics of system and lifeworld are found in very different decision-
making arenas (such as neighbourhood teams, public consultation events and board
meetings), which possibly require different solutions to reconcile the divergent logics.

The connections between the 'incongruities' defined by Van den Brink et al. (2012) and
the case study data are not seamless. There are some overlaps, and sometimes the case
study examples did not fully match the incongruity labels. Further development and
study of these incongruities is required to give them more depth and make them less
ambiguous.

The notion of co-production between citizens and professionals amplifies the need for
the further theoretical and methodological development of research frameworks that
combine network governance concepts with the communicative action perspective.
This research deductively applied key statements on incongruities by Van den Brink et
al. (2012), looking for supporting evidence from interview transcripts. An alternative
approach would be to inductively develop a framework and investigate co-production

interactions to explore the rules and logics used by professionals and residents. This could result in conclusions that are different to or do not confirm the findings in this chapter. This would require research methodologies that empirically examine interactions 'up close and personal' from the perspectives of the actors involved, such as anthropological approaches.

Practical implications

This research found strong indications to support the premise that a system logic 'colonises' the lifeworld (see Mensink, 2015). While the term 'colonises' has a malicious connotation, this research found that even with the best intentions neighbourhood professionals tended to apply system logic in their attempt to support residents in taking a stronger role in neighbourhood regeneration. Often with the best intentions, professionals took over the responsibilities of residents. This research was not designed to explain why neighbourhood professionals did this, but the results do allow for the formulation of some tentative hypotheses. First, professionals are trained and disciplined to work according to system logic. Therefore, it may not be part of their mind-set to use any other logic. Second, practitioners often work with tight time frames and professional standards, set by themselves or other system agencies. Professionals may take the initiative in the assumption that they can produce results faster and in compliance with their professional standards. Third, professionals want to protect residents from bureaucratic complexity and the red tape that is involved in neighbourhood regeneration initiatives.

Tonkens (2014b) highlighted several misconceptions about the Participation Society agenda, notably that it adequately replaces the welfare state and that it is easy for professionals and residents to adapt to their new roles. This chapter supports Tonkens's contention that this is not the case. The success of the Participation Society to a large extent depends on the ability of organisations, professionals and residents to communicate and collaborate. Developing these capabilities can be regarded as a form of 'craftsmanship', as described by Richard Sennett (2009). Citizenship is a craft, and reliable and responsive institutions and professionals are needed to support and nurture its development with patience and persistence, while accepting the unruly nature of the subject.

Given the results presented in this chapter, the optimism surrounding the implementation of the Participation Society agenda is rather unsettling. The examination of the case study data highlighted the widespread lack of knowledge about the divergent logics at play and, consequently, the lack of awareness of the craftsmanship needed to overcome the incongruities between system and lifeworld.

There is an urgent need to start developing this craftsmanship in order to resolve these incongruities and prevent the Participation Society from failing, and to prevent vulnerable people and neighbourhoods from falling into the abyss created by government cutbacks and austerity. In relation to co-production in neighbourhood regeneration in particular, this requires a form of 'place leadership' by residents and professionals which can build networks that champion vulnerable places [see Chapter 7].

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