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Publication date
2016

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Published in
Jane Jacobs 100: Her legacy and relevance in the 21st Century, TU Delft, 24-25 May 2016

Citation (APA)

Sanders, F. (2016). Exploring resident-empowered meetingplaces in Dutch neighbourhoods: by Jane Jacobs Walking Action-research methodology. In *Jane Jacobs 100: Her legacy and relevance in the 21st Century, TU Delft, 24-25 May 2016* (pp. 1-14)

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Exploring resident-empowered meeting-places in Dutch neighbourhoods

by Jane Jacobs Walking Action-research methodology

Jane Jacobs 100: Her legacy and relevance in the 21st Century

TU Delft, 24-25 May 2016

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Abstract – The 'Jane Jacobs Walk' organization as one of the Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) heritage initiative supported three Jane Jacobs Walks of certified Fred Sanders in the period 2011 - 2014 in Amsterdam neighbourhoods. These walks helped residents to explore resident-empowered meeting-places and activities in their own housing environment for the benefit of community living-quality for themselves and others all spirited by Jane Jacobs her thoughts. These walks can methodological be seen as a form action-research by which the participating residents analyze their own data of experiences and insights. From the three Jane Jacob Walks organized (added to the results of my dissertation as the 'body of knowledge') (Sanders, 2014) the conclusions are: 1. Residents favor nearby and lifestyle coupled meeting-places, 2. Beside the by the municipality organized meeting-places there are many so called 'free' meeting-places available, 3. Less of all these meeting-places suite youngsters, foreign people and unemployed people, and 4. Residents are willing to organize meeting-place even to manage subsidizing still a financial support from the municipality is essential. The effect of the 'talking by walking' could be optimized by involving more youngsters. 'Jane Jacobs Walks' as example of action-research could methodological be optimized by testing the results in a pilot-neighbourhood.

Keywords – Jane Jacobs Walk, neighbourhoods, meeting-places, empowerment, action-research

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1. Introduction

During the period of years 2011-2014 three Jane Jacob Walks in Amsterdam and Amstelveen municipality neighbourhoods have been organized to explore community meeting-places that form foundations for-organized activities in neighbourhood areas. The immediate cause was the nation-wide budget-reduction of welfare-activities as effect of the 2008-2014 economic crises, due to which welfare-organizations start exploring resident-initiative as the base for alternative welfare business-cases. The underlying hypotheses was that resident-

empowered meeting-places could be more effective to the neighbourhood-residents and cheaper in its operations. Being a certified Jane Jacob Walker it gave me the opportunity to organize these three walks. Secondly it gave me the opportunity to add new research to the knowledge gained with my dissertation called 'Sustainable Development through Resident's Collective Initiatives'. Logically Its an honour to present the research results of these walks at the TU Delft Urbanism Spatial Planning 'Jane Jacob 100' conference.



Picture 1. Impressions from Jane Jacobs Walks website (www.janejacobswalk.org).

2. Dutch call for resident participation in neighbourhoods

In the period during and after the Dutch recession 2008-2014, the Dutch national government called-up for resident initiative: residents initiative that should flourish on the scale of neighbourhoods (Ministerie-BiZa, 2009) (Sanders, 2010). This primarily to enforce a smaller government and achieve goals with lower governmental budgets (Ministerie-BiZa and VNG, 2011). In a way, the Dutch government therewith seems to follow the strategic route pointed out by the UK MP Tony Blair in 1998 called 'The third way' (Giddens, 2000). In this strategy the 'Civil society' makes room for initiatives of resident groups to rule their personal hemisphere to develop entrepreneurial, government-loose initiatives with a

minimum of professional assistance (Kuiper et al., 2012).

This development started in and around 1997 concerning programs of neighbourhood renewal started-up by Dutch national government to better the living conditions of deprived neighbourhoods (Ministerie-VROM, 1997). The first program (IPSV) (Ministerie-VROM, 2001) lead to 150 initiatives (Ecorys, 2006) mostly investments in real estate, changing blocks of social housing in postwar neighbourhoods into mixed housing with resale housing included within. By mixing classes of residents, middle-class standards and values were supposed to become the standard for all residents. To facilitate processes of working and learning together by bridging classes, for elevation of deprived people on the long run (VROM-Raad, 2006) (Ministerie-VROM, 2007).

A development followed-up by countrywide municipality budget cut-down on welfare in neighbourhoods to stimulate resident-responsibility and resident-initiative on the scale of neighbourhoods. The governmental assumption under this policy is that residents could help en stimulate each other to the best and secondly that neighbourhood community-centers could be managed by residents too to reduce welfare-costs further (De Boer and van der Lans, 2011) (De Haas, 2014).

Recently from 2015 on Dutch National government by 3D-Transition handed-over the responsibility of home-living elderly-care, youth-care and unemployment to the municipalities, with lesser money because resident-participation managed on the scale of the municipality would reduce costs (BZK, 2014).

The result of these consecutive developments is that resident-participation for municipalities became a 'must' to be managed instead a 'chance' for residents to take initiative over the last two decades of time (www.gemeentevandetoekomst.nl) (SCP, 2016). A process in Dutch referred to as 'responsabilisation' (Garland, 2001) in a so mentioned a 'participation society' in the Netherlands. Residents are persuaded to take initiative in the so called 'action society', in Dutch: 'doe maatschappij' (Hendriks, 2006) (Sanders, 2009). The foundation of this development is supposed to be the social interaction of residents connected to action, concerning goals of the people's interest (Tonkens, 2006) and this trend that citizen-initiative is mobilized for making local solutions for national responsibilities with lesser money seems to intensify.

As a consequence of these policy developments the Dutch government is rapidly changing their aims from a 'welfare state towards a welfare society' (Kuiper and

Bremmer, 1983), bringing a smaller government and more resident responsibility together (Giddens, 2000). A development towards residents taking-up 'roles' depending on the circumstances in a 'deliberative democracy' (Elster, 1998) in the so called 'doe-democratie': a society in which taking responsibility and active participation are important (Tonkens, 2009). A development embraced by government because of budget on care and welfare cuts to re-promote neighbourhood care-giving in between residents (Carley et al., 2013).

3. Meeting-places function by resident mobilization

Meeting-places show to be important places where socializing in neighbourhood networks starts (Blokland, 2008) (Sanders and Dautzenberg, 2010). The Nestor of social-psychology Paul-Michel Foucault too proved that Physical places are the important factor for people in networks meeting each other, or places where people meet networks to start joining these (Foucault, 1975)

People do live in social networks (Weick, 1979) because people prefer 'loose-coupled' networks (Putnam, 1995) within socializing opportunities (Riesman et al., 1950) because 'bridging' (mutual socializing of people from different social networks) has a blockade among most of the people because they avoid 'social cohesion' (Sanders, 2014). Such networks are often lifestyle- or age-coupled (Blokland-Potters, 2005) (Dekker and Bolt, 2005) although people are active in more than one social network mostly (Ouweland, 2002) not only in their own neighbourhood also in and outside their city depending on their mobility (Dijst, 2008).

People like to meet in public space areas (Kearns and Forrest, 2001) (Van Kempen and Bolt, 2003), on green neighbourhood locations like parks (Berg et al., 2001) and

in community centers (Oosterling, 2009) within safety conditions (Puddifoot, 2002). Also Jane Jacobs proved that locations being green-zones, parks, well-furnished public-space and welcome community-centers are important for people to feel good and lower barriers for meeting and socialize with each other (Jacobs, 1961). Exceptional well rated meeting-places create place-attachment (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001) that make people to come back to visit the place and the people more often. Such places give emotion (Foucault and Kremer-Marietti, 1969) and identity to people (Van der Land, 2004). A characteristic of these places are that they are situated in between 'anonymity and intimacy' and 'public and private' (Van Dorst, 2005) (Blokland, 2008).

Research in the Netherlands as a follow-up to all these insights showed that such meeting-places are important for neighbourhood-residents to meet, to socialize, to start or join networks with others (Dautzenberg, 2009) (Sanders and Dautzenberg, 2010, Dautzenberg, 2009) (SEV, 2011). Therewith meeting-places seem to be an important starting-point for taking initiative (Sanders, 2014).

Most meeting-places though in the Netherlands are created by municipalities and related welfare-organizations for which budgeting has been cut-down. In more and more cities nowadays in 2016 the movement started to turn-over these meeting-places into the responsibility of local residents, with variable success. Therewith the interesting basic question for responsabilising development for further research is:

'What are good meeting-places to the opinion of neighbourhood residents, and how do these places to their opinion have or should have a function in their residents life and taking responsibility.'

4. Jane Jacobs Walking as research methodology

Action-research as research methodology is gaining interest over recent years because of the advantages of future-oriented research (researching 'what could be' instead of 'what has been') and quality research (research by focus groups mainly instead of questionnaire analysis) with the two advantages: research on the three levels of 'the opinion', 'argumentation' and 'motivation' and the methodological benefit that such groups 'clean-up' results, criticize abnormal contributions and support recognizable contributions. In special when conditions have changed substantially and new developments are the subject of study such action-research is favorable (McKernan, 2013). Therewith action-research distinguishes from the more general used ex-post quantity research methodologies as shown in picture 2. Examples of action-research are focus group research, Delphi group sessions and the not often mentioned 'Jane Jacob Walks'. When 'Jane Jacob Walks' are used for 'talking by walking' such a walking session can be seen as a focus-group session by which the area of research, for instance an neighbourhood, is visited actually

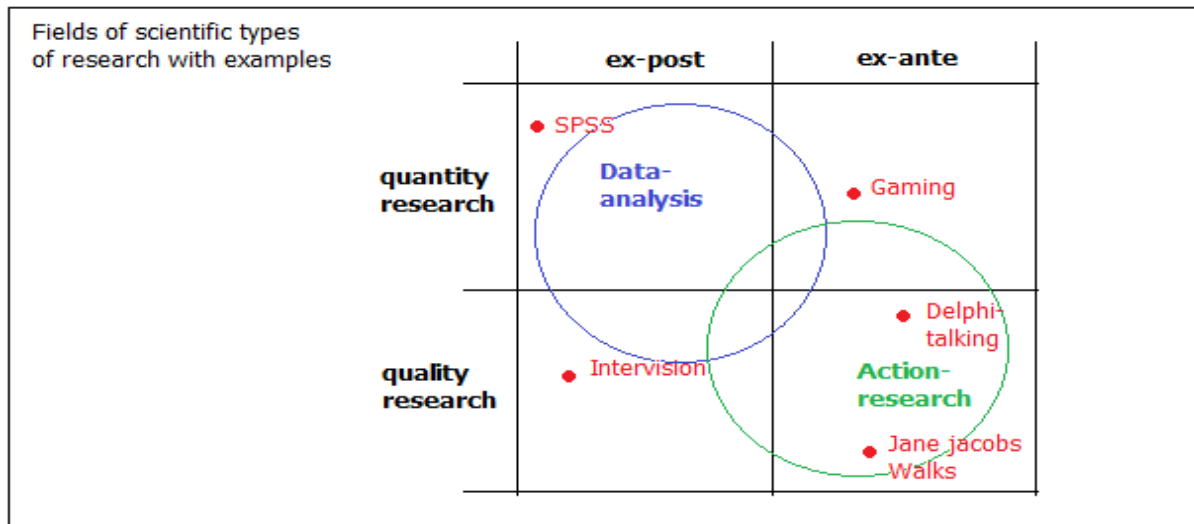


Figure 2. Positioning action-research in the field of research methodologies.

It was Jane Jacobs herself that used her walks to talk with city or neighbourhood residents to make clear their worries, talk over their thought of solutions and which of these have their preference. She also 'walked' with mixed groups of residents and professionals, civil servants and urbanism specialists, to energize the 'talk during the walks' (Jacobs, 1961). Therewith 'Jane Jacob Walks' is chosen as research methodology for researching the research question given above in chapter 2. This because the research question concerns residents area coupled, on the scale of city neighbourhoods and villages, the research question is related to the actual period of time after the recent recession of 2008-2012.

Using the advantages of 'Jane Jacobs Walks' the research question can be split-up in the following three underlying sub-questions:

1. *The opinion: 'What are good meeting-places to the opinion of neighbourhood residents.'*
2. *The argumentation: 'How do meeting-places have or should have a function in residents lives.'*
3. *The motivation: 'For which of these meeting-places will residents take responsibility.'*

Actually the three Jane Jacobs Walks in Amsterdam and Amstelveen neighbourhoods (two in Amsterdam en one in Amstelveen) were organized with mix groups of residents and professionals: municipality civil-servants and professionals from municipality related welfare-organization. These walks took place in the neighbourhoods 'De Pijp' Amsterdam, Amsterdam-North and 'Elsrijk' Amstelveen in the period 2011-2014. For each of these walks the walking track was made known two to three weeks before, residents and professionals were given the opportunity to sign-in in advance and they were given stopping-point during the walk to step-in or drop-out the walk, to facilitate maximal possibilities for interested parties to join these walks. At the end of each walk during a coffee-break the results of all the talking were rehearsed, and the report was send to all that walked for comment and agreement. Herewith the research became controllable not repeatable as common for action-research.

An average of 20 people gave notice to join each of these walks, some joined the whole day of walking and others periods varying from 2 to 5 hours. During the walking not only existing by the municipality arranged meeting-places were visited also private meeting-places being cafés, libraries and

elderly-housing community-rooms and not commonly known meeting-places brought-up by the participants were visited. On the place of this meeting-places discussion among the walking-participants was given time like there was talking during the walks.

5. The results of the three Jane Jacobs Walks

The 'Jane Jacobs Walks' organized in 'De Pijp' Amsterdam (March 2011), Amsterdam-North (November 2011) and 'Elsrijk' Amstelveen (May 2014) were basically organized out of interest for the function of meeting-places for residents and related resident-initiative as a side-kick of a dissemination trajectory (Sanders, 2014), thought these walks were respectively sponsored by Combiwel welfare-organization, the Am-

sterdam-North area-municipality and Participe welfare-organization.

'De Pijp' Amsterdam (September 2011)

In 'De Pijp' neighbourhood the walk started in the morning with two professionals from the local Combiwel welfare-organization starting at the 'De Pijp' community-center walking to other smaller community-centers in the neighbourhood, talking with people that they knew passing-by and with people at these community-centers, resident and professionals as well. So this 'Jane Jacobs Walk' did not start with a group but grew and shrank depending on the complicity of people. Walking along the talking concerning meeting-places in this neighbourhood moved from the available community-centers to the many empty locations that could be used too, school-buildings and shops mostly, see figure 3.



Figure 3. Pictures of the community-center and available empty places in 'De Pijp' Amsterdam.

Amsterdam has the tradition in the way the housing is built that the ground floor offers space for shops and other kind of public functions as is needed for dentists, family doctors and small offices. It became clear that most shops had moved to more traffic intensive areas by which many of the space offered show empty, ugly to see and also attractive for bad behaviour of youngsters. It would be wise was said, to use more of these (temporarily) empty places as meeting-places instead of the huge expensive community-centers. Secondly there came

clear that residents of different age and lifestyle do search other places and other densities of such meeting-places, because of their different action-radius of mobility, as shown in figure 4. Elderly as became clear do need a more density grit with meeting-place near shopping areas where they live mainly. Youngsters have great mobility the best thought is to offer meeting-places where they like to go. Laying these grits above each other makes clear that less of the available community-centers lay on the right spots. Most community-centers as told

were situated where municipality buildings had come free instead of following the need-

iness of residents.



Figure 4. The lifestyles-coupled meeting-places grits on the map of 'de Pijp' Amsterdam.

Talking over the results of the walk at the end of the day at the coffee-table It became clear that residents are less to none motivated to take responsibility for one or more meeting-places. The entrepreneurs spoken on the way signed more enthusiasm and motivation for such. The manager of on the most central situated supermarket saw possibilities to make the coffee-spot in the shop bigger to become a meeting-point for lonely people. Some restaurants told that the café-table could be used for such during silent morning hours. Some Real Estate brokers saw possibilities to bring-in small empty shops to start meeting-point for young people. There were enough empty shops available to offer another one when the one given was taking for rent again. Hellas all asked serious sums of monthly revenues for these spatial propositions. Only the supermarket manager asked no fee and could offer facility during whole the day seven days a week. He and the other entrepreneurs were positive motivated to participate in such a new meeting-place program

Amsterdam-North (October 2012)

In Amsterdam-North the walking was carefully prepared: the walking track was given notice to the people of existing community-centers and to the team of civil-servants from the municipality, the track was given resting-spots with times for people to join in later and appointments were made with the managers of community-centers for a talk with their regular resident visitors, see figure 5.

The positive effect was that residents and professionals really got with each other in conversation, asking each other: what they brought into this walking experience, if they liked the community center and they talked over yearly planning of activities and what kind of people visited the center.

'Elsrijk' Amstelveen (April 2014)

At 'Elsrijk' neighbourhood there were two developments in 2014 that led to action from the local Participe welfare-organization to ask for a 'Jane Jacobs Walk' as a try to make the situation in communication with residents clear to find solutions. The first development was the municipality budget-cut on community-centers with the possible effect that 't Open Hof' center would be closed-down if residents would not take-over its management. The other development was the initiative of two local resident organizations (Wijkplatform Elsrijk and NGO 'Stadsdorp Elsrijk') to rebuilt the old open-air amphitheater situated in the park of 'Elswijk' not only for performances also for creating a meeting-center for residents and a starting-point for resident-initiatives. Some initiatives had already started: reading books in groups of elderly,

an inventory of empty shops and other building to reduce vacancy and organizing activities for youngsters for the hours after school-time.

Together with these two organizations and the welfare-organization the walking-track was prepared, to be sure that all the existing and possible meeting-places should be visited. The group of walking-participants was really mixed from-out these organization and also spontaneous participating residents joined the group. Even two residents with disability hooked-up the group with their electric wheel chairs, because they wanted to show that some meeting-places are not accessible for disabled people. The walking event was officially accepted by the 'Jane Jacobs Walk Foundation' by which the participants could download this from the official site, see picture 7.

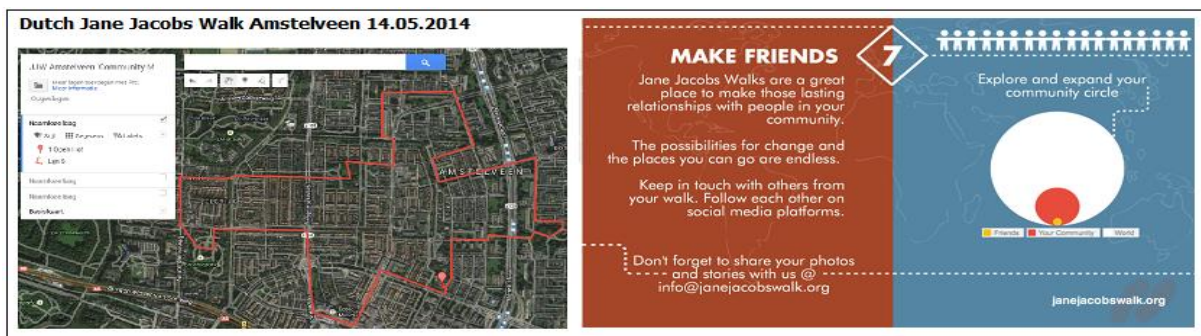


Figure 7. The walking track with information on www.janejacobswalk.org.

The result of the walk was that the professionals from the municipality and the welfare organization learned about for them unknown meeting-places, much more places than as they said they could imagine. There were meeting-places in churches, in a danc-

ing school, in schools, in shops and all of these were visited, talked-over and imaginary placed in a network of meeting-places. For an impression of the walking and talking, see picture 8.



Picture8. Impressions of the walking group at 'Elsrijk' Amstelveen.

Interesting was how both development were talked over in mutual importance. The residents understood that new meeting-places could not be started as long as the existing meeting-place was sinking-away. And the professionals understood that the meeting-places embraced by residents could be more effective and personal for residents as the older places would be abandoned on a period of time. The people from the municipality took notice of all these during the walk and promised to work all out in the next yearly planning, because funding was part of the local democratic decision-making. At the coffee-table evaluation of the walking and talking all participants showed satisfied. There had been made a start for solving the two developments and there were found unknown opportunities for new meeting-places. Most of these places were already resident managed and that gave the participants good feeling and feelings of trust for the future of living with quality in 'Elswijk' neighbourhood.

6. Resident-empowered meeting-places in neighbourhoods

The results of these three 'Jane Jacobs Walks' are be coupled to each of the sub-questions. The 'talking by walking' delivered mutual confirmation of results and isolated results. These all helped to sketch how meeting-places in Dutch neighbourhoods

can become resident-empowered, see below:

1. *The opinion: 'What are good meeting-places to the opinion of neighbourhood residents'*

The most remarkable result from the 'talking by walking' showed to be, that neighbourhoods already do contain 'free' meeting-places created by residents, organizations and local entrepreneurs out of side of the municipality and related welfare organizations. These places are created in housing-communities of elderly, in schools and public centers like libraries, at sport facilities and at people's homes normally at the dining-table. Local entrepreneurs offer meeting-places to residents too, like coffee-corners in the supermarkets and reading-tables at a coffee-bars. Most places have evolved to be more for one lifestyle than others. These 'free' meeting-places do evolve, new ones start and older stop. Therewith such meeting-places process manually always fit to the residents that seek these according to the quality offered and location. Advantage of these 'free' places is that they exceed the meeting-placed organized by the municipality in number and spread over neighbourhoods and they offer for many lifestyles places of choice. The contra-side is that less of these meeting-places do suite youngsters, people with low income and foreign people, the ones that are born in the Nether-

lands too. Barriers seem to be the dominant 'white' visitors of these locations and the costs to be made to be permitted, for joining a sporting-club or buying coffee as examples. Still there seem to be enough meeting-places as in a libraries and in supermarkets free of entrée where people can walk-in easily. Most of these 'free' places though show not to be convenient for youngsters and foreign people and the by municipality created meeting-places aren't better. Meeting-places seem to be 'good to residents' when they fit their needs, when they meet their lifestyle folk, when the distance fit in their action-radius and when using these meeting-places match their room for expenditures. Meeting-places for youngsters and foreign people are less available these could get more attention to be developed and offered. The 'talking by walking' did not made clear if the use of empty shops or other buildings could offer possibilities to create meeting-places to solve this lack. At the other hand such an approach could be very flexible in making meeting-places on the right spot suiting the lifestyle of these specific neighbourhood residents. The 'Jane Jacobs Walks' delivered that insights too.

2. *The argumentation: 'How do meeting-places have or should have a function in residents lives.*

Meeting-places do have that basic function to offer people opportunities to meet others. Residents though search for meeting places and activities, not only to compensate feelings of loneliness also because they like to meet others. Like Watzlawick said: 'people cannot without communication' (Watzlawick et al., 1967). From the 'talking by walking' it became clear too that an important advantage of meeting-places for residents is that these need organizing, the facilities have to be maintain, activities have to be

organized and residents have to be informed. The organizing in togetherness does give people much joy and fulfillment. Youngsters, foreign and unemployed people are unfortunately to them not often involved in these activities and organizing. For those is left meeting each other on the street on 'open' places. Such places do not have to be of second quality, such so called 'porous' places can be of very personal quality having the function of fulfilling the needs of the people that seek these (Schram, 2006).

3. *The motivation: 'For which of these meeting-places will residents take responsibility.*

The thee 'Jane Jacobs Walks' made clear that many residents are willing to take responsibility for meeting-places for the benefit of themselves and others. Most of these volunteers seem to be 'white' elderly people. Talking with these the most of them showed to be very open to all kind of people, their passion was grounded in the organizing part of being a volunteer not to a kind of people to meet. These volunteers were very willing to invest many hours and enthusiasm in meeting-places and they were arranging subsidizing too. Unless these efforts there showed to be a continue shortage of money. As the volunteers told, there is less difference in between by the municipality created meeting-places and such 'free' meeting places, they need a basic amount of money contribution from government. The motivation of the people involved, volunteers en professionals, showed also to be coupled to this availability of governmental money contribution. They understood the shrinkage trend concerning the governmental money-contribution to neighbourhood meeting-places and they told to be willing to take responsibility over as residents. Still the fear that the lesser money availability would end-u in no money

availability reduces much of their motivation, as they told.

7. Remarks to the 'Jane Jacobs Walk' Action-research methodology

The research methodology of 'Jane Jacobs Walking' was positively embraced by the participants. The 'talking by walking' delivered results and new insights as predicted on the three levels of opinion, argumentation and motivation. The instrument of walking events could be improved by stimulating youngsters to join these. The talking over meeting-places would also be more effective when the municipality budgets would be more clear in advance. Finally it was the advice of the walking-participants to test the sense of reality of the conclusions in a pilot neighbourhood to professionalize 'Jane Jacobs Walks' as an example of action-research methodologically

8. The author

Dr. Fred C. Sanders Msc MBA SFBR (1956) did his dissertation at Urbanism department of Delft University of Technology recently in 2014. His main topic is 'resident initiative' for which he started a 'knowledge reporting-point' at the Urbanism department recently. Before he gave his time to scientific research he was managing-director in real-estate covering the construction of offices, housing and industrial areas employed with government, a social-housing company and an commercial RE-developer. Besides being a Jane Jacobs Walker he is a researching-consultant on personal name and starting-up a knowledge-point for 'resident-initiative' at Urbanism TU Delft.

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