

Appendix C: Reflection

In this attachment, a reflection on the research process and the preliminary results is included. This has been done according to the format provided by TU Delft, which outlines the aspects it should cover. This includes a section on the research process, the results of the research, and some other prescribed components.

Research process

Research design

A research design was chosen that includes a combination of document and literature study in the areas of policy context, municipal social housing policy, and a comparison of the performance agreement documents. This is then supplemented with an analysis based on empirical results from interviews with relevant and involved stakeholders. The aim of this research is whether there is a relationship, based on the interview results, between the differences in municipal policy context and the differences in municipal social housing policy on the one hand, and the differences found in the performance agreements on the other. Also, due to the exploratory and explanatory nature of the research question, which resulted from the problem statement, the most appropriate type of research for this case was thought to be qualitative.

The extensive comparative research on three aspects (municipal policy context, municipal social housing policy, and performance agreements) provides the opportunity to clearly outline these variables regarding the chosen topic and to search for connections in a holistic manner. This broad-oriented design of the research is therefore considered as a strength of the study. However, on the other hand, this broad approach also presents difficulties with demarcation. Especially in the area of policy context and the comparison of the performance agreements, this was challenging. For this reason, I adhered quite strictly to the methodology for each chapter.

In addition, the specific details of the design in relation to answering the sub-questions also had to take shape during the execution of the research, as it oftentimes turned out aspects needed to be investigated in a different manner during the research process. This is an iterative process and has ultimately formed the current research design and framework.

Planning

Proper scheduling of the research process has consistently been a challenging theme throughout this process. On a personal level, I don't look back on my easiest year, and this has also manifested in my research process. I struggled to specify the scope and deliver the associated products. Especially towards this summer, things went awry, and I chose to postpone the submission by one semester. I might have been able to avoid this with a less extensive research design and better planning of the desired progress. During the start of the research semester a detailed plan was in place, but in the end, almost all components of the thesis (*read: sub-questions*) turned out to be more work than anticipated, making the plan essentially unfeasible for the progress I managed to make. On the other hand, taking more time and maintaining the research design led to an overall result that I can ultimately be proud of. If I had chosen to constrain in an earlier stage and made it more achievable for two semesters, this might not have been the case and the quality of the thesis might have been compromised.

Research results

Results of the different analyses

Overall, the preliminary results of the study show helpful results in gaining insights in the main research question, by means of establishing connections between the comparatively assessed documents through the supplementation of the interviews. These results can further be reassessed (reflect on the preliminary analysis after P4) to see if more relationships between the municipal context (SQ1) + the municipal social housing policy (SQ2) and the differences in performance agreements (SQ3) can be learned from the interviews (SQ4), in order to finalize the report towards the P5. The in-depth interviews and my own document analysis worked well together to provide (at least partial) answers to the main research question.

Regarding the outcomes of the performance agreement chapter, it was challenging to compare them side by side because the performance agreements had different procedures and slightly different setups. The chosen framework was carefully adhered to in order to counteract this, and the limitations of this comparison were acknowledged.

Difficulties with data-collection

When considering context, it was challenging to define what to include and what not to. I tried my best to follow the chapter's structure from the methodology and carefully weigh what belongs in it and what doesn't. Ultimately, you see that the national and regional parts don't appear very frequently in the final analysis. On the other hand, it was deemed essential to follow the multi-level governance framework, and it is impossible to predict how relevant those results will be in advance.

In the policy chapter, there were few difficulties with data collection.

To compare the performance agreements, a document from each city has been searched for where the entirety of the performance agreements was incorporated. In Amsterdam, due to the collective nature of the agreement set, there were no difficulties with this. In Rotterdam, it was different because the agreements there were made with individual housing associations. This initially posed a problem for the data collection of this chapter, as manually compiling all individual agreements into an overview is an impossible task within the scope and timeframe of this thesis. Eventually, after several attempts at different departments within the Rotterdam municipality, I received a council letter in which the agreements with all individual housing associations are bundled into an overview.

Finding interviewees wasn't always straightforward. I had set up a framework of eight desired respondent types, with four from each city. Each of these respondents had a different role within the process of the performance agreements. Filling these interview 'categories' sometimes proved challenging. Especially on the side of the municipality in Amsterdam, both in the case of a councilor and the policy officer regarding performance agreements, it was hard to even get in touch with them. Once the interviews were ultimately set, they proceeded as planned.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this research is due to the qualitative nature of the analysis and the results. The results provide a broad overview of the policy making process regarding performance agreements, but based on the document and policy analysis, it cannot necessarily be assessed which city performs better. This is also not in line with the objective of exploratively outlining the differences

without setting standards. As a result, the findings are subject to personal interpretation, although the approach has been described as accurately as possible.

Another limitation of this study is the sample size. eight interviewees provide a snapshot of the situation and highlight objective aspects, but they might still be biased in some way. The only way to prevent this would be to expand the research group, which is not feasible in this thesis. In the end, the respondents were carefully selected, and the problem statement was thus viewed from multiple stakeholders' perspectives.

Lastly, another limitation of this comparative study is the difference of used definitions. Both cities might use different terminology for certain aspects, which can complicate the comparison. An example of this is how a municipality defines its social stock.

Other components

Relation between topic, track and master programme

The master's track in Management in the Built Environment (MBE), which aims to give students the knowledge and abilities to successfully analyze and manage complex projects within the built environment, has core objectives and competencies that are closely aligned with the chosen research topic. Housing governance is an interdisciplinary field that draws on expertise from many disciplines, including that of MSc AUBS. The topic, which centers on housing-related municipal policy, is appropriate for the Chair of Housing and Governance. In turn, this chair plays an important role within the MBE track.

Social and scientific relevance

The development process and formulation of performance agreements have only been anchored in this manner within the institutional system (local triangle) since 2015. For this reason, it can be argued that broadly researching its implementation and evaluating it in this way is scientifically relevant. This is especially true when considering the societal importance of the social housing sector. There is still relatively little research on the policy implementation of this system and its connection to municipal policy and its policy context.

Ethical considerations

The use of data (interview results) that, when traceable to a specific individual, could be considered sensitive, especially since some of the respondents were critical of their own organization. For this reason, full anonymization of the interviewees' input for the results was promised up front, for them to be able to speak without restraint. Additionally, in accordance with the guidelines of TU Delft, a Data Management Plan was established to ensure this.

Transferability

The transferability of the research results centers on their exploratory nature when it comes to housing governance, particularly within the framework of performance agreements. The findings could be considered by other municipal governments, or parties involved in the performance agreements. The inclusion of diverse stakeholders, as reflected in the interview data, and the depth of their insights, especially those critical of their own organizations, contribute to the research's comprehensiveness.

Utilization potential

The results not only provide an intriguing insight into the differences between the two cities, but the identified relationships also offer a more general perspective on how a certain type of policy and context influences the performance agreements. This, along with the associated methodology, could potentially be used and replicated in other Dutch municipalities. Additionally, the research might be useful for professionals involved in performance agreements, municipal housing policy, and social housing policy in a broader sense.