

SUMMARY

As a result of the tendency to (re)develop inner-city locations, a tension between living and working, on account of a lack of space, is currently identifiable in industrial urban waterfront regenerations in the Netherlands. The redevelopment of such areas directly affects the interests of the existing entrepreneurs. In order to create support for redevelopment plans, these stakeholders have to be involved in the planning process by municipalities. The involvement of stakeholders in planning processes is referred to as participation.

Problem statement

With the approaching of the new Environment and Planning Act (Omgevingswet) in 2021, participation is becoming an inevitable part of planning processes. However, both in theory and practice, it remains unclear how participation is carefully and effectively shaped. There are instruments for participation, but there is no fixed procedure to shape the process because the interests of stakeholders are diverse and the context in which urban area (re)development takes place is constantly changing. Moreover, most participation processes are particularly focused on future residents and future users of to be (re)developed areas. This is a different type of participation process than with existing companies who, at first sight, do not directly benefit from the redevelopment plans. Therefore, participation of existing companies is by definition more complex to achieve.

Research goal and question

The following goal is formulated for this research: to define possible improvements in the involvement of existing businesses in regeneration processes of urban industrial waterfronts. The research goal consists of three parts: (1) to understand how participation can be achieved in urban regeneration projects, (2) to investigate how participation of existing businesses currently occurs and (3) to identify possible improvements in the participation process with existing businesses.

From the research goal, the main question is drafted: **How can participation of existing businesses be achieved in the regeneration of industrial urban waterfronts in the Netherlands?**

To provide an answer on the main question, three sub-questions are formulated:

- (1) How is participation achieved in planning processes?
- (2) How are the existing businesses involved in the planning process?
- (3) How can existing businesses be (better) involved in the planning process?

Methodology and approach

The focus of the research is on the people, their interests and mutual relationships, involved in urban development processes. Due to the social nature, a qualitative research method is chosen. The techniques used in this research are a literature review, a document study and semi-structured interviews. A theoretical framework is established, based on the studied literature on public participation. The theoretical framework comprises the ladder of participation, which consists of five instruments (informing, consulting, advising, co-creating and co-decision-making) with corresponding roles, tools and outcomes.

The empirical part of the research is designed as a comparative case study. Based on various criteria, four cases are selected for the analysis of participation in practice: the Binckhorst in Den Haag, Rijnhaven in Alphen aan den Rijn, the Schieoevers in Delft and the Plaspoelpolder in Rijswijk.

To obtain data semi-structured interviews are conducted with different stakeholders of the four cases on the involvement of existing businesses in the planning process. The key elements of the interviews are the use of participation instruments and the role of the municipality and the role of existing businesses in the planning process. Also, interviewees are asked to evaluate the participation process. The retrieved data is analysed with the theoretical framework to compare the findings from practice with theory.

Results and conclusions

The results of the research will be summarized through answering the sub-questions. Subsequently, an answer to the main question will be provided.

(1) How is participation achieved in planning processes?

In practice, instruments of the participation ladder are used to involve stakeholders and thereby they contribute to achieving participation. However, from the case study other factors derived that are crucial to take into account in the setting up of participation processes. These factors are the context of the project, the type of development strategy and the interests and requirements of the existing businesses. In order to achieve participation these factors have to be taken into account as well when setting up participation processes with existing businesses. These are factors that influence the process of participation, while the ladder of participation influences the content of the participation process.

(2) How are the existing businesses involved in the planning process?

Existing businesses are predominantly involved in the planning process with the instruments informing, consulting and advising, which are applied in every case. The tools that have been applied the most by municipalities to involve existing businesses are information meetings, surveys, working groups and expert sessions. But, although the instruments of the participation ladder are applied in practice, the results of participation processes are not always satisfying. From the case study it is discovered that for existing businesses there are some factors that can lead to dissatisfaction with the process. The dissatisfaction with the process of participation occurs through a number of causes:

- A lack of information and knowledge, and subsequently, the absence of a common language between the municipality and existing businesses;
- A lack of trust that arises if expectations are not fulfilled or agreements are broken;
- Uncertainty about the future;
- A lack of benefits for existing entrepreneurs;
- Unclear about the process of participation.

(3) How can existing businesses be (better) involved in the planning process?

Therefore, some factors of improvement are determined. The first aspect which can lead to an improvement in the involvement of existing business in the planning process is the *preventing asymmetry of information and knowledge, distrust and uncertainty*. If both parties are well-informed and there is an equal basis of information and knowledge, mutual trust can arise which is needed to start a substantive conversation about plans. Equally important in this is the removal of uncertainties, which is considered the biggest threat for entrepreneurs.

The second aspect consists of *identifying the benefits for the existing entrepreneurs* by answering the question "What's in it for me" from the entrepreneurs' point of view. If benefits can be achieved for companies, they are more likely to participate.

The third aspect is *providing clarity on the course of the participation process*. Before starting the participation process it should be clear for municipalities what they want to achieve with participation.. In advance, agreements should be made between municipalities and existing companies about how feedback is given and when the participation process is successful for both parties.

During the participation process clarity is enhanced by providing continuous insight into the progress of the participation process.

The fourth and last aspect is *making a deliberate and bespoke choice about participation instruments and tools*. The first step for municipalities is to make an inventory of what existing businesses want and need. Based on the differing (economic) situation and wishes of existing companies, a subdivision within this group could also be useful. Participation must always be low threshold for entrepreneurs and it is very important to keep people actively involved. This involves creative working methods during meetings and visually attractive and understandable ways of reporting and communication.

These four aspects of improvement lead to the answer to the main question: **How can participation of existing businesses be achieved in the regeneration of industrial urban waterfronts in the Netherlands?**

By preventing of asymmetry of information and knowledge, distrust and uncertainty can be realized by making the participation process more *accessible*. This means all information and communication is transparent, understandable for entrepreneurs and that clear agreements are made in advance. Accessible also implies physically accessible, in determining the location, time and the number of meetings.

Through identifying the benefits for the existing entrepreneurs, the participation process becomes more *beneficial*, and therefore more attractive for entrepreneurs. Special attention in this should be paid to the individual approach of companies, because amongst existing businesses there are many different interests.

By providing clarity on the course of the participation process, the participation process becomes more explicit, and subsequently more *concrete*. This entails being clear on the bandwidth of participation. Also, it includes setting a goal in terms of a product (plan), drawing up agreements on what the input is used for, and making results tangible.

By making a deliberate and bespoke choice about participation instruments and tools, the participation process becomes more *personal*. This starts with knowing the context of the project: “Who are the existing businesses?”, “What do they want?” and “On what scale level (area, municipal, regional)?”. Furthermore, this entails staying in close contact with entrepreneurs, approaching them personally for meetings and developing personal solutions.

Recommendations

As a recommendation, a process approach was created which can be used as a guideline to set up and carry out participation processes with existing companies in the regeneration of industrial urban waterfronts. The process approach embraces the use of the participation instruments for the execution of the participation process, but the emphasis is on the four pillars that guide the process. The process approach consists of four steps, namely preparation, execution, processing and evaluation (*see figure 1*).

Discussion

Although the cases illustrate that to a certain extent participation instruments are used effectively, a clear structure in the design of the participation process and application of instruments could not be identified in practice. Therefore, some limitations to the theory are observed. The limitations are related to the fact that the participation ladder places too much emphasis on the role of the municipality, that it suggests that only one instrument can be applied throughout the process and that the theoretical framework does not address external factors influencing the participation process.

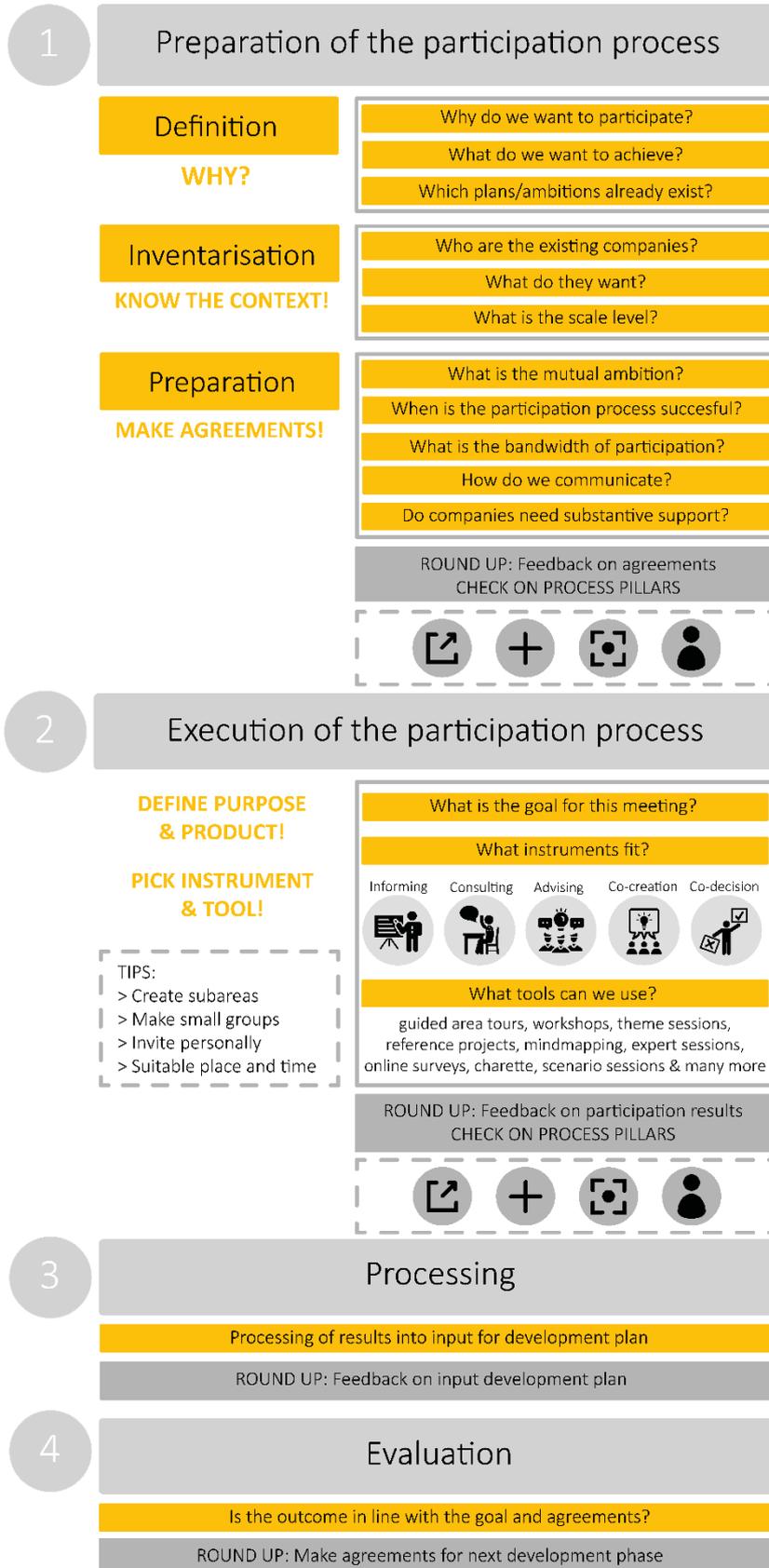


Figure 1: Recommendations: plan of approach