P5 Reflection Zuba Adham

Reflection

In this chapter I have reflected upon the theory, the case study methodology and case studies. Besides a reflection on the content of the research, I have also reflected upon the relation of this research with the graduation lab and my own process.

Theory

Several theoretical concepts have been reviewed in this research, which can be found in the sections 2.1 – 2.4. With literature review the first four sub-questions have been answered in chapter 2. This theoretical framework has formed the basis for the conceptual model and then the analytical case study model.

In section 2.1 I have looked at the sustainable urban development characteristics. This has helped me to better understand what a sustainable urban development is and also to frame the research. I have used a list of objectives, made by Buskens (2015), to operationalise the definition of a sustainable urban development in this research. And this list is later on also used in the analytical case study model to identify the gap by comparing pre-formulated objectives – according to the list – with the realised objectives. However, this list is not some sort of checklist for SUDPs in practice, but rather an operationalisation of several definitions of sustainable urban development.

Section 2.2 about the obstacles for market actors is also partly based on the thesis of Buskens (2015). This is not very odd since his thesis was basically about the formation of an implementation gap from the private sector's side. He has researched commitment of Dutch developers to SUDPs and found several obstacles that developers encounter. This research looks at why implementation gaps between SUPs and SUDPs form and these obstacles for market actors are a reason from the private sector's side. The planning tools of Adams can be used by public planners to influence market decision-making and possibly the mentioned obstacles. It would have been nice to also identify possible market actor's obstacle in the case studies, but that would have made the scope of the research too wide and would also take a lot more time.

The third section, about the gap between decision and implementation in SUPs forms a very important part of this research as it explains why implementation gaps are formed and links this specifically to SUPs. It explains several features of implementation gaps, which is used in the conclusion to answer how the planning tools can help to bridge these gaps. It would have been an addition to the research to have identified the features in the case studies to have been able to better substantiate the link between the planning tools and the features in the conclusion. Both the features as well as the use of the planning tools would have had empirical findings to substantiate the table in the conclusion (table 13).

In section 2.4 the planning tools of Adams have been explained. Since the research is about the use of these planning tools by public planners, it is a very important part of the theoretical framework. It has been very important to understand the planning tools, because in the case studies the actions have been categorised according to the planning tools. However, the choice for these specific tools of Adams could have been explained more clearly.

The conceptual model might seem very simple, but in my opinion grasps the essence of the research. Implementation gaps between SUPs and SUDPs can be formed from both the private sector as well as the public sector's side. Public planners can use planning tools to bridge this gap which is shown in the blue box. The conceptual model shows my idea as researcher on how the research problem will be explored, namely by looking at how planning tools can be used by public planners to bridge the gap between SUPs and SUDPs.

Case study methodology

In this research two in-depth case studies have been conducted which have been compared to each other. One case (RijswijkBuiten) was selected because it seemed to have reached (most of) its pre-formulated sustainability objectives, while in the second case (Bruisend Dorpshart Kaatsheuvel) it has looked like (most of) the pre-formulated sustainability objectives have not been reached. I would like to

emphasize that the Bruisend Dorpshart Kaatsheuvel case should not be seen as a failed project. Both case studies are conducted to be able to draw lessons from them.

One of the mentors gave me the tip to look at RijswijkBuiten to use as successful case. After some orientation I found that RijswijkBuiten has often been used as an example of a successful sustainable urban development, so it seemed suitable for me to choose this project as one of my case studies.

It was a lot harder to select the second case, the one with the 'large' implementation gap. I have not found many sustainable urban development projects in the Netherlands, which is in accordance with what Heurkens (2016) has stated: Sustainable (private sector-led) urban development projects seem to rarely materialize.

After my supervisor at Brink M/A named some suggestions of projects where the company has worked on, I looked the suggestions up. In one of these projects, Bruisend Dorpshart Kaatsheuvel, I found that apparently an ambition document about sustainability was part of the project. However when I read the website of the project and some news articles, sustainability was never mentioned. This was an indication for me to select this project. This has caused me some time and a slight delay. Without this delay the case study analyses could have been finished earlier, leaving more time for the cross case analysis, conclusion and recommendations.

Because we compare a 'successful' project with a 'less successful' project this might lead to confirmation bias. This means that a researcher has formed a hypothesis or belief and uses respondents' information to confirm that belief (Norris, 1997). This can extend into the case study analysis where the researcher tends to remember the points that supports their hypothesis and points that disprove other hypotheses. I have tried to be as objective as possible in the case studies and re-evaluated the documents and interviews many times.

In the case of RijswijkBuiten a small online survey was conducted to get an indication if some of the pre-formulated objectives have been realised. These were People objectives which could mainly be experienced by the residents of RijswijkBuiten and therefore I set up a survey. The People objectives in Bruisend Dorpshart were aimed at social interaction of events on the square and activities and restaurants around the square. Information about this can be gathered via news articles and interviews, which made it unnecessary to conduct a similar survey for Bruisend Dorpshart.

Validation

During the interviews there were sometimes different answers, I saw this happen more clearly in the Bruisend Dorpshart case. I noticed that one of the interviewees sometimes gave (politically correct) answers that would promote the case, rather than being critical of it. Luckily two other interviews were critical enough, so I was still able to receive information I could process in the research.

In RijswijkBuiten this was seen in a lesser extent. Although two interviewees both said they devised the plan to ask for a low as possible EPC score in the tender. This had no further influence on the analysis of the used planning tools, because anyway it could be categorised in the planning tools.

By interviewing persons with different roles I have tried to triangulate the answer, which made it possible to deduce the most plausible answer from the other interviews.

In this research I have looked at how planning tools are used in practice by conducting two in-depth case studies. Then I have tried to relate the use of planning tools to the size of implementation gap between sustainable urban policies and sustainable urban development projects. However, it is understandable that based on the two case studies I have conducted, I can only make an assumption in the conclusion rather than show a causal connection. Testing the table in the conclusion with more cases can increase the validity of it.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the use of planning tools is not the only influence on implementation gaps in sustainable urban development projects. This is why the context of both projects have also been explained.

Case study analysis

While doing the case study analysis of Bruisend Dorpshart Kaatsheuvel I started to have doubts about the size of the implementation gap: it was approximately the same size of RijswijkBuiten. However, there is a difference between the level of ambition of both cases. Many objectives of Bruisend Dorpshart Kaatsheuvel are not that ambitious, which makes them easier to implement. Besides this, their largest objective (a WKO for the whole development) has not been implemented. So, it appears that in evaluation research about this subject the ambition level of the objectives should be kept in mind and might be a more suitable indication than only comparing pre-formulated and realised objectives.

It should be noted that the cases differ much in their cooperation model. RijswijkBuiten cooperates with a development partner and has very active public planners. In Bruisend Dorpshart the project was tendered and then a Design & Build contract was drawn. The public planners were not in charge of the whole development, they were only involved with the multifunctional accommodation. Some sustainability objectives have been implemented in the multifunctional accommodation.

What has not been pointed out very specific is that if the potential for revenue in a development is high, there is less need to make cuts in spending. Budget cuts often mean that ambitions have to be lowered, so sustainability ambitions are more likely to be implemented when there is enough budget. Although both case studies have started around the same time and thus both have been through the financial crisis, this has had more effect on Bruisend Dorpshart Kaatsheuvel than RijswijkBuiten. RijswijkBuiten has had a potential for revenue despite the financial crisis and since the development is still ongoing it will experience more positive effects because of the improvement of the market. In Kaatsheuvel the financial crisis has had a stronger effect on the development as well as the municipal finances, resulting in lower and less ambitions.

Relation with graduation lab

This research is conducted within the Management in the Built Environment graduation lab of Sustainable Private Sector-led Urban Development. Often in this graduation lab the private sector is researched, but there are challenges for the public sector as well. With a shift towards private sector-led urban development, the public planner should reposition itself to influence the decision environment of market actor. The planning tools of Adams have been touched upon in this graduation lab, but not as extensively as in this master thesis. The empirical findings of this research contribute to the knowledge about the planning tools and can serve as an aid for further research on this subject.

Process

The graduation process has been a long but educational year, where I have learned much about the subject of my research and doing research as well as about myself as a person.

This research process has helped me further develop my analytical and professional skills. I have experienced that I like to make connections between several viewpoints from academic literature and write this down. I had experienced this in previous academic writing assignments during my studies as well.

Working on an academic research while being surrounded with people from practice during my graduation internship has been enriching. In practice I have seen how abstract academic concepts really work. Sometimes I had to be careful to not lose my academic attitude, but feedback from my mentors has helped me very much.

Especially during the last quarters I have learned more about myself as a person. The focus have been so much on this individual research and writing a lot, which made me realise that I miss doing teamwork. Also I knew that I like to organise things and make decisions, but now I know I really like to *do* things and make things happen, rather than only writing.