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ABSTRACT *Participation in neighbourhoods is a highly valued phenomenon. Participation is the basis of a shared social life, but it also makes everyday life, and the lived experience of people participating in it, political. From a public administration perspective, governance and formal policy-making are increasingly reaching out to citizens, instead of drawing solely on representative mechanisms of local government. This paper investigates how practitioners working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Dutch cities enhance participation. Using empirical data from research in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in The Netherlands, the paper shows that these practitioners either start projects that connect people in their own life world or connect policy-makers and policy to initiatives on the ground. As a result, they create the opportunity for many to develop their citizenship and become a more active participant in their local communities.*

KEY WORDS: Participation, neighbourhood governance, citizenship, disadvantaged neighbourhoods, exemplary practitioners

1. Introduction

The participation of people in society is a highly valued phenomenon. Without such participation, there is no society. This participation and the way it supports society can be viewed from different angles. First, citizen-based participation occurs in a host of different ways at the level of the street, neighbourhood and city. Participating in the public domain is the basis of a shared social life. But it also makes everyday life, and the lived experience of people participating in it, 'political'. Second, local governments today seek to involve and engage with citizens in their decision-making processes. Formal policy-making increasingly involves reaching out to citizens, instead of drawing on representative mechanisms alone. The involvement of citizens in formal policy-making in neighbourhoods is now common policy in many cities in Western Europe. Governments seek to involve citizens to create support for policy decisions and to improve the quality of policy (Kooiman 1993, Cain *et al.* 2006). These two angles come

together in a third: discourse on citizenship. Citizenship is a requirement for participation but, when different modes of participation are optimised, it can also be the result of participation. Participation and citizenship are highly problematic in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. That is why these areas form a critical case (Flyybjerg 2006) for participation. From earlier research we know that various types of practitioners can be important in shaping policy and activating citizens in neighbourhoods (Bang and Sørensen 1999, Hendriks and Tops 2005, Tops and Hartman 2009, Van de Wijdeven and Hendriks 2009). Elsewhere we have written about these characters, calling them *exemplary practitioners* (van Hulst *et al.* 2011, 2012).

In this paper, we ask the following question: how do practitioners working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods enhance participation? The main contribution of this paper lies in its grounded observations of working methods and strategies in the enhancement of participation. Where others have focused on bigger groups of citizens (e.g. Denters and Klok 2010, Wallace 2010, Lombard 2013) and at the level of organisations or networks (e.g. Skelcher 2003, Ohmer 2008, Farrelly 2009, Lelieveldt *et al.* 2009, Blakely 2010), we have used an intensive field study to zoom in on what actually happens on the ground and who is making a difference. We start this paper with an overview of the literature on the role of participation. Three perspectives on participation will be discussed briefly: participation as an important aspect of people's everyday life, as an aspect of governance and more formal policy-making and as a contribution to citizenship and democracy. We then address the problem of enhancing citizen participation. After explaining the way we conducted our empirical research, we present findings from a project on practitioners in five cities in The Netherlands. These practitioners enhance participation by engaging with citizens in their direct environment and by bridging 'the gap' between citizens and their life world and formal policy-making efforts of formal organisations.

2. Modes of participation

In the literature, participation is widely regarded as vital to citizenship, policy and democracy. As mentioned above, three perspectives on the role of participation are relevant, which will be discussed below: participation as an important aspect of people's everyday life, as an aspect of governance and more formal policy-making and as contribution to citizenship and democracy.

Politics of lived experience

If we approach participation from a socio-political angle, we can start with how people participate in the environment that is close to them: their social life in the place they live. People participate in many areas in the public domain, and on different levels: the street, the neighbourhood and the city. This participation is part of everyday life and it is the basis of a shared social life (Berger and Luckmann 1967, pp. 33–48, Blokland 2003). The participation of people in

their own environment makes them experts on this environment. They have, what we could call, 'lived experience'. They have their personal experience of what it is to live in this environment and, through time, acquire an intimate understanding of local conditions (Yanow 2003). Lived experience and the knowledge that comes with it can remain hidden and private, but there is a political side to this, as well. In the literature about the politics of lived experience, people themselves define 'the political' in their concrete everyday practices. This, obviously, broadens the scope of what can be called political. Citizens themselves can become informal politicians and policy-makers, deciding on and taking control of their own lives and those of the people close to them. Marsh *et al.* (2007) show that this can be a critical position, and stress the emancipatory goal of freeing the people's voice from exclusion. According to Marsh *et al.* 'what is regarded as legitimately political is policed by the state', and individuals who do not participate in politics in conventional, orthodox ways are considered to be politically apathetic (Marsh *et al.* 2007, p. 23). Marsh *et al.* defend political activities not sanctioned by formal authorities, protests and informal activities as being normal aspects of participation and 'the politics of lived experience'.

Others stress that people who take part in protests and informal activities often have in common that they are not particularly interested in the political system as such; their main aim is to realise a concrete project. 'Everyday experts', who are often new professionals, particularly in voluntary organisations, and 'everyday makers', often young people who do not want to waste time on participation in formal political institutions, are particularly important in embodying the politics of lived experience (Bang and Sørensen 1999). In their empirical work in Danish neighbourhoods, Bang and Sørensen (1999) (for a similar approach in Dutch neighbourhoods, see Bang (2005)) found that participation is governed by a project identity. To everyday experts and everyday makers, participation and support are not for or against the system per se; they take up a supporting or oppositional role if that is functional to realising their plans or policies (Bang 2009, p. 131). Where everyday experts are more willing to play the official political game, everyday makers want to solve their immediate and concrete policy problems 'on the lowest possible level' (Bang and Sørensen 1999, p. 336). In Bang's words: 'do it yourself, do it where you are, do it for fun but also because you find it necessary, do it ad hoc and part-time, do it concretely, instead of ideologically, do it self-confidently and show trust in yourself, do it with the system, if need be' (Bang 2009, p. 132). The politics of lived experience finds its manifestation in 'everyday' participation.

Governance and policy-making

If we approach participation from the angle of public administration and formal politics, citizen participation may be conceptualised as a part of the policy-making process. Modern Western governments at every level often try to involve people in their steering efforts. Indeed, these efforts have tended to increase over

time (Torfing *et al.* 2012). Formal policy-making increasingly reaches out to its 'targets', instead of drawing solely on its representative mechanisms. Nowadays, collaborative modes of governance, in which people play a role, are considered to contribute to the quality of and support for policy. In the public administration literature, there is common ground for the idea that, due to increasingly complex policy challenges and the changing capacity of governments to pursue collective interests, government by the hierarchical state is slowly being replaced by what is called 'governance' in inter-organisational networks and communities (Kickert *et al.* 1997, Rhodes 1997, Pierre 2000, Pierre and Peters 2000, Kjaer 2004, Sørensen and Torfing 2005, Teisman *et al.* 2009). It is assumed that cooperation in networks and partnerships leads to better service provision, more efficiency and better opportunities for citizen groups to promote their wishes. The task of governing is believed to be too complex for governmental actors to manage on their own.

Citizens or their organisations are often part of networks and collaborative modes of governance, in small and larger projects (e.g. Denters and Klok 2010). Local governments in many countries have gained experience with collaborative governance, citizens' advisory committees, participatory budgeting and many other models in which citizens have a more direct say (Sintomer *et al.* 2008, Michels 2011). Through the implementation of these innovations, governments seek the input of and cooperation with those that are affected by their policy.

Local governments may have various motives for introducing participatory policy-making. The main argument is that involving stakeholders and (groups of) citizens at an early stage of the policy process, instead of waiting to consult with them immediately before the implementation phase, can create broader support for policy decisions and, in turn, strengthen the government's effectiveness and legitimacy (Edelenbos 2005). However, other arguments are also heard. Engaging citizens in policy-making allows governments to tap into wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions, and improves the quality of the decisions reached. Indeed, governments can make use of lived experience and the residents' local knowledge. Citizen engagement also contributes to building public trust in government, thereby raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity (OECD 2001). In short, participatory policy-making is expected to increase democratic legitimacy, narrow the gap between citizens and government, enlarge the problem-solving capacity, increase the support for policy and improve the quality of policy (Häikiö 2012).

Citizenship and democracy

Whether we look at participation from the perspective of the everyday life politics or formal policy-making, it finds a strong echo in normative political theories that emphasise that participation is important to democracy. These theories argue that participation contributes to the development of citizenship and that, in addition, it strengthens the sense of being part of a broader community (Wagenaar 2007).

Participatory democrats have argued that delegation of decision-making power to representatives leads to people becoming alienated from politics. Barber (1984) noted that an excess of liberalism has undermined our democratic institutions and fostered cynicism about voting and alienation among citizens. Large groups of citizens never vote, whereas those citizens who are politically active mainly participate by electing persons who then do the actual work. Participatory democrats regard the participation of people in politics as vital to democracy. They do not want to limit participation to political decision-making, but stress that participation should also encompass such areas as the workplace and local communities (Pateman 1970, Barber 1984).

Participatory democrats believe that participation gives citizens a say in decision-making, and thus enables them to exert influence on the decision-making process. A salient point is the emphasis placed by participatory democrats on the contribution of participation to democratic citizenship. By participating, citizens increase their civic skills and gain more competence in public decision-making. In addition, participation contributes to the development of civic virtues, citizens' feeling of being public citizens and part of their community. As a consequence, they may also feel more personally responsible for public decisions.

Citizenship is a precondition for and a result of both everyday participation in the direct environment (neighbourhood, community) and more formal, policy participation. That is to say, active citizenship goes hand in hand with citizen participation, and through the act of participation, civic skills are developed. Citizenship is also a phenomenon of both everyday and more formal participation. If both kinds of participation are optimised and speak to each other, lived experience might form the input for a person's participation in his or her own environment, besides becoming input for participation in formal policy-making and governance processes.

The different modes of participation are briefly clarified in Table 1.

Table 1. Different modes of participation

Modes of participation	Clarification
Aspect of everyday life	Participation is part of everyday life
	Concrete everyday practices define what is political
	Aim is to realise concrete projects
Aspect of governance and policy-making	Participation is part of policy-making
	Citizens and organisations participate in collaborative modes of governance
	Aim is to improve the quality of decisions, effectiveness and support for decisions
Contribution to citizenship and democracy	Participation is vital to democracy
	Citizens participate in politics, the workplace and local communities
	Participation increases democratic citizenship

3. Enhancing citizen participation

If we consider citizen participation as vital to everyday participation in the direct environment, and to formal policy-making, the question is how to encourage this and the role practitioners can play in enhancing participation. Stoker and his colleagues (Lowndes *et al.* 2006, Stoker 2006) have shown the conditions that must be met before people become active participants in politics. These are summarised in the acronym **CLEAR**:

> **C**an do – citizens have the resources and knowledge to participate.
> **L**ike to – citizens have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation.
> **E**nabled to – there is a set of supporting civic institutions and organisations that make participation possible.
> **A**sked to – citizens are mobilised through direct invitation or the efforts of a range of non-governmental, voluntary and community organisations.
> **R**esponded to – citizens see evidence that their views had been considered by public authorities and those engaged more regularly in the political process.

At first blush, this CLEAR model would seem solely to apply to formal political processes. In our view, however, it is also applicable to everyday participation. For, to become involved in participation, citizens must possess the skills that are needed to take part in an organisation, as well as resources, such as the time and energy to devote to a political purpose. It takes time for a group to form and develop an organised sense of purpose. Moreover, people must be asked to join in to develop an initiative and, over time, have the feeling that their contribution is appreciated.[1]

To be sure, in modern Western democracies not all the CLEAR conditions are met all of the time. Participation is especially problematic in those areas of our cities that are labelled disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In such neighbourhoods both the participation of citizens in their direct environment and the participation in formal policy-making are often limited (Fung 2004, pp. 99–131, Michels and de Graaf 2010, cf. Denters and Klok 2010). In particular, minority groups and young people are heavily under-represented in participation processes (Booher 2004, John 2009). Organisations at the neighbourhood level have weak structures because of difficulties in finding funding, especially in times of austerity. To put it bluntly, many people have a hard time making ends meet and lack the resources or interest needed to participate. Over the past 15 years, new government programmes for disadvantaged neighbourhoods have confirmed this (Smith *et al.* 2007). Part of what makes the participation problems worse in these areas is that natural participation of citizens in their own environment is often a precondition for participation on the higher 'rungs on the ladder' (Arnstein 1969).

However, participation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods requires more than the standard invitation to meet with civil servants, street-level bureaucrats or

politicians. Getting citizens in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to participate demands innovative, non-standard activities that have a positive influence on the conditions under which participation flourishes. Activities of this kind are often developed by individuals or small groups of practitioners.

In disadvantaged neighbourhoods, these individuals can have different roles. They may, for instance, be everyday makers, who mostly deal with immediate and concrete policy problems by themselves (Bang and Sørensen 1999). Then there are the frontline workers who work in small groups. As experts in pragmatic improvisation (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2012), they do not judge citizens according to formal, bureaucratic rules, but mostly on the basis of their own moral judgments (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003). Another role is that of the boundary spanner (Steadman 1992), who works between organisations and has knowledge and credibility on both sides of the boundary. Last are the social entrepreneurs, who are able to develop new initiatives that address social challenges of their communities (Leadbeater and Goss 1998, Korosec and Berman 2006).

Crucial questions surround the effectiveness of each type of practitioner in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. For instance, what is the relation between everyday makers and the other residents in the neighbourhood? How can frontline workers contribute to participation if their work is mostly aimed at dealing with 'cases'? What skills are required to be effective in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Goodchild *et al.* 2010)? How do boundary spanners function if the organisational structures on the side of the neighbourhood are poorly developed? And how can initiatives of social entrepreneurs link the everyday world with formal policies? Exploring these issues, Durose (2011) recently found three innovative strategies that were applied by frontline workers in Salford:

1. Reaching – identifying marginalised and excluded groups and signposting them to community recourses and service providers.
2. Enabling – engaging with groups excluded from the wider community or existing service provision.
3. Fixing – Relating government objectives and 'rules' with organisational opportunities and priorities within the community.

These strategies show how present-day frontline workers and other practitioners could develop their own strategies to be effective in enhancing participation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In our study, we explore the work and strategies that were used by different types of practitioners in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in five Dutch cities.

4. Empirical research: background, approach and methods

For a good understanding of the work of practitioners in Dutch neighbourhoods, we should first briefly sketch the context of the neighbourhood policy developed in The Netherlands. In the 1970s, city development was the core

value and the physical construction of the neighbourhood was one of its main objectives. But this slowly began to change in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, the policy focus has shifted to include social and welfare problems. This 'social renewal' at the neighbourhood level fostered a comprehensive policy that focused on the social, physical, economical and safety problems in the larger cities. It also advocated democratic innovations, such as citizens' advisory bodies, interactive policy-making and other forms of citizen participation. But it was only in 2007 that the Dutch national government developed a special programme for disadvantaged neighbourhoods. A special list of 40 so-called 'problem neighbourhoods' was compiled. The main goal was to improve the quality of life in these neighbourhoods, which were known for their unsafe areas, poverty and unemployment, turning these into 'power neighbourhoods' within a period of 10 years (Steyaert *et al.* 2009, Van Kempen and Bolt 2009).

We did fieldwork in the five Dutch cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Leeuwarden, Utrecht and Zwolle. We focused on the work of various types of practitioners in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Between February 2009 and December 2009, a member of the research team talked to 225 stakeholders (active citizens, government officials, professionals) about their work in the city. They were also asked whether they also knew about the work of other practitioners, whom they could tell our researcher about. This snowballing procedure yielded a list of active practitioners, according to a very sizable group of stakeholders.[2] In the preparation of the list, our colleague relied not only on the judgment of his many conversation partners, but also on his own judgment and on discussions within the research group. Some of these practitioners were working for formal bureaucratic organisations, such as large housing corporations, local government or the police. Others were working in more informal organisations, often ones they had founded themselves. The second part of the fieldwork involved 'shadowing' (McDonald 2005, Czarniawska 2007) a group of 43 practitioners, which consisted of observing them over the course of a working day in the environment in which they were active. In addition to the observations we made, we interviewed the practitioners about their work, zooming in on their project and the working methods they employed. The length of the interviews ranged between one hour and three-and-a-half hours. The interviews were transcribed and coded. On the basis of the observations and the interviews, we made short profiles of the practitioners. One of the elements that stood out in the analysis was the role of these practitioners in enhancing participation. In addition, this participation enhancement tended to be focused on either of two different environments: that of the life world of the neighbourhoods or of a boundary area between the world of bureaucratic organisations with their formal policy programmes and the life world. We therefore zoomed in on a selection of 22 practitioners, who were found to enhance participation in one of these, and sometimes even in both, environments.

5. Results: connecting worlds

This section addresses the question of how practitioners working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Dutch cities enhance participation. The focus is on the two forms of participation discussed in the first section. First, participation in the everyday life world. This relates to what we have called everyday participation. Second, participation in the boundary area between the world of organisations and the life world. This relates more to the formal policy-making that local government and other bureaucratic organisations engage in. We look in more detail at both these forms in the following paragraphs, first describing our findings and then providing examples to illustrate these.

5.1. Work in the life world: everyday participation

The neighbourhood in which people live is certainly not the only context that matters in their lives. It can, however, have a strong positive or negative impact on their well-being. When we look at the work of practitioners within disadvantaged neighbourhoods, there are three elements concerning participation that draw our attention: (1) these practitioners organise and initiate, (2) they strive for empowerment and (3) their working methods are mostly concrete, practical and focused.

- *The actors we studied were mostly active in the life world, by starting organisations or associations and initiating new projects in a neighbourhood.* Let us look at some examples from the fieldwork. S., for 9 years a councillor in the city of Leeuwarden, decided to become active in the small neighbourhood centre near her house. She joined the board of the neighbourhood association and initiated a project a couple of years ago that led to the building of a neighbourhood activity building. B., a student in applied economics in Amsterdam, founded an organisation together with a group of friends for young people run by young people. Among other things, they organise sports activities for a big group of young people. M1, a father himself, noticed that, aside from football and martial arts training, his neighbourhood in Amsterdam East offered few activities for young children. He therefore started a chess school for children, where many children from poor and migrant backgrounds are now learning to play the game. B., a youth worker in Zwolle, heard the young people he worked with complaining about the fact that there was nothing really interesting to do in their neighbourhood. He started a youth centre. Together with the groups of youngsters he involved in this initiative, he gathered 850 ideas from young people, submitted plans for the project and finally realised the centre.
- *The ultimate aim of the practitioners in the life world could best be called empowerment. The practitioners put in a lot of effort over the course of, often, years in order to improve people's situation and chances in life.* The organisations that were founded by the practitioners we followed and the projects

they initiated have in many cases become stable factors for people in the neighbourhood. Thanks to their persistence, some practitioners have even become 'institutions' themselves. F.'s organisation for women in Amsterdam West, for instance, has been in the neighbourhood for 10 years now. She started as a volunteer and many others joined her over the years. Nowadays, she is a paid employee of the organisation. She has become well known and respected by all the local stakeholders in neighbourhood governance. M2 in Utrecht launched an initiative to improve the image and the situation of Dutch-Moroccan youth in the deprived neighbourhood of Kanaleneiland. Many of these youngsters used to hang around in the neighbourhood, proving a nuisance to the other residents. M2 organised weekly sports events (mainly soccer and judo). The sports events prevented them from hanging around and loitering. Participating in sports allowed them to develop the skills needed to stimulate and coach others.

- *The work of most practitioners in the life world is focused, and aims for the concrete and practical.* Even if their ultimate aim might be an abstract one, the practitioners we interviewed are no daydreamers. Their short-term goals and the methods they use are concrete and practical. F.'s organisation, for instance, developed a language course called 'Empowering: this is the way to do it'. In other words, the first step in empowerment is to learn the language. Most projects and initiatives help a specific group – often young people or minority groups – in a particular disadvantaged neighbourhood or district, to develop skills and at the same time provide a moment and space for people to get together. D., for instance, started a graffiti platform in Leeuwarden that brought young people who like graffiti together, in this way stimulating interaction among them. And M3 works as a pastor for the local church in the city of Utrecht. She is active in a deprived neighbourhood of which 70% of the residents have a Moroccan background. She works at the street level and focuses on children. Via the children, she also connects with residents and organises all sorts of events, including a knitting club, whose members are women from various cultural backgrounds. They knit and – at the same time – are able to interact and discuss daily matters together. Another example from the same Utrecht neighbourhood is F., a young Dutch-Moroccan woman who started her own welfare associations in order to promote the social participation of Dutch-Moroccan women in the city of Utrecht. She organised childcare and day care, so that mothers were able to come out their houses and meet. Now, the events that she and her colleagues organise are regularly attended by upwards of 100 women.

5.2. Work between life world and system: policy participation with a twist

An important part of the difference that our practitioners make consists of their direct contribution to what is happening in the life world of the neighbourhoods. Most of the practitioners we encountered also displayed a keen understanding of the role of formal, bureaucratic organisations like local government, welfare organisations and housing corporations. Some of them actually work in those organisations,

contributing directly to the implementation of policies. When we look at the work of practitioners outside the neighbourhood, there are again three elements that draw our attention: (1) they connect within the life world, but also between the life world and the formal world of systems and bureaucracy, (2) they can upset those working in formal organisations, thereby making trouble when they find it is necessary and (3) when they work in government or other public organisations, they reach out to groups in the life world in a non-bureaucratic manner.

- *Various practitioners connect organisations and projects in the life world with each other and with the policies of formal organisations.* They are constantly crossing the boundaries between the life world of neighbourhoods and the system world of bureaucratic organisations. A good network throughout the neighbourhood and beyond is an important resource for this. S., for instance, not only knows many residents; after working as a municipal councillor for 9 years, she also knows many people in town hall and in Leeuwarden's civil society. O. has a Dutch-Moroccan background. In Utrecht, he organises projects and training courses in bridging cultural differences, and he works with minority groups; he was asked by the Utrecht municipal government for help in gaining better access to and connecting with the Dutch-Moroccan community, and did so by translating the ideas of the local government into the world of the Dutch-Moroccan community. Other practitioners demonstrated a similar approach, using different kinds of 'translation' from the world of policy to the world of the neighbourhood. B. from Zwolle, who, as we mentioned earlier, established a youth centre for the young people he worked with, translated the ideas of the youngsters into concepts that local government and the architect could work with. Support often comes from officials, who are higher up the hierarchy and who understand that these practitioners are valuable in neighbourhood governance. Local aldermen, for instance, might well know the practitioner as someone who has local knowledge, a good network and is trusted by certain groups in the neighbourhood. D. in Leeuwarden, for instance, was asked to mediate between angry residents and the local bureaucracy when relations grew tense. Some practitioners even become informal advisors to local administrators. Lobbying for support for their projects takes a lot of time. It cost D. in Leeuwarden many years before the graffiti project became accepted by local government. Practitioners with organisations in the neighbourhood are willing and eager to show the authorities what they are doing. But formal organisations like local government are not always aware of what is going on in the neighbourhoods. This is the main reason why, even if the relation with local government is predominantly cooperative, the practitioners also voice critique.
- *These practitioners are not afraid to make trouble in the system when they think this is necessary to achieve their mission.* These practitioners make 'trouble' because they want to get things done that otherwise cannot be achieved. They work directly with and for people in neighbourhoods. They feel strong compassion for the disadvantaged; they want to help even if it

means going against the local government. This strong compassion for disadvantaged groups is often related to their own social background; some had a working-class background, others came from poor families and were born in another country and one came from a vicar's family.

From a government's perspective, practitioners like those interviewed are sometimes seen as irritating and annoying. Some government officials tend to characterise them pejoratively, such as in the case of F. who works for an organisation that supports women from minority groups in Amsterdam, whom they referred to as '..that woman who is always causing trouble'. Or they call them 'cowboys', as in the case of D. and his partner in Leeuwarden. Indeed, these practitioners can be very assertive and display difficult behaviour towards policy-makers. Neighbourhood pastor M3, for instance, suddenly stopped talking to the local government and other partners participating in the platform 'Living Together', because she was convinced that the government had no vision and she did not want to be part of the consultation. Such behaviour can badly embarrass the government, as it fails to fit the bureaucratic system. F., as was mentioned above, worked for a local association in the city of Utrecht that aimed to strengthen the position of Moroccan women and children. After she became disappointed with the government's attitude towards establishing an Islamic childcare centre, she decided to publish the telephone number of the government official involved, stating that 'anyone who wants to know [more about the issue], can contact him'. The government official was furious, but the effect was that within two days, F. was once again on speaking terms with the deputy mayor.

The practitioners in our study usually do not want to fight local government, unless they feel that it is frustrating their mission. However, they are not afraid to shake things up a little if they consider this to be necessary. This attitude stands out in The Netherlands, where consensus is the dominant culture. Generally, under normal circumstances, 'troublemakers' seek cooperation and want to collaborate with others. D., for example, became the ambassador for the graffiti project, and F. works closely together with the housing corporation, the police and the local government of Utrecht to address social, education and language problems of Moroccan women and their children.

- *Some practitioners in local government and other formal organisations have started their own projects aimed at reaching disadvantaged and threatened groups in local society in non-bureaucratic ways.* Let us look at some examples. R., a 'participation broker' in Amsterdam East, spends most of his time in the neighbourhood he serves. He talks to residents and civil society organisations about their plans and initiatives, supporting them and connecting them to each other. He also promotes initiatives in his local bureaucracy. He regularly faces bureaucrats, who seem to see only problems and risks instead of opportunities. He keeps going anyhow. Thanks to R.'s efforts, M.'s chess school project received financial support from Amsterdam's district government. R. displays an alternative view of civil service, and one that

we also encountered elsewhere. A1, for instance, who works for the local government of Zwolle, emphasised that in his view, his main job is to bring people together in order to identify problems and opportunities.

There are also initiatives created by local bureaucracies themselves, like the frontline team in Leeuwarden that visits every resident in a disadvantaged neighbourhood to find out how they can help. In various neighbourhoods in Amsterdam, the local university of applied sciences offers legal counselling and homework tutoring for youngsters. Even if these initiatives are developed by formal organisations, individual practitioners often play an important role in these innovative efforts to initiate change. E., working for a housing corporation, for example, ignored the municipality when he wanted to renovate an apartment building in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Amsterdam East. He started a participative process without the local government and succeeded. Like those who are mostly active in the neighbourhood, practitioners working for formal organisations are (or become) realistic enough to focus on practical goals. As A2, working for the local government of Utrecht: 'over the years I've become more modest. You have to work very hard to reach small changes, but it is fun to do'. The practitioners we followed who are working from 'within the system' have learned that reality often does not fit policy plans. They experience how difficult it is to realise policy, especially with regard to the complex problems a disadvantaged neighbourhood is facing, every day.

After discussing the enhancement of everyday participation and policy participation, it is important to understand that, although these two have different starting points, they are not totally unrelated. It is often a practitioner who is central in both: as the initiator of a project in the life world and as the person who maintains the relation between bottom-up initiative and formal organisations. To be sure, these practitioners hardly ever work alone. Moreover, there are also initiatives that fail, fights that are not resolved and practitioners who suffer burnouts due to the fact that they work too hard, with too little support. Crucial is this respect is apparently the support experienced by individual actors in their own environment and that received from people 'higher up', for example, an alderman. In Table 2 we present a summary of the findings. In the next section, we will discuss our findings in the light of the literature and draw some conclusions.

Table 2. Enhancing participation

Work in the life world	Work between life world and system
− Starting organisations or associations	− Connecting organisations/projects in life world with each other
– Initiating new projects in a neighbourhood	− Connecting organisations/projects in life world with formal policies
− Ultimate aim is empowerment	− Starting formal projects to engage local society in non-bureaucratic ways
− Focused on the concrete and practical	− Mission that might involve trouble-making

6. Discussion and conclusions

The main question of our paper was: how do practitioners working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods enhance participation? The practitioners we observed work in various contexts and play different roles in participation processes. Some are entrepreneurial, and run a voluntary or more professional social organisation, while others have jobs as civil servants or professionals in another bureaucratic organisation. Some develop initiatives individually and carry out projects in the neighbourhoods, while others encourage and support citizens' initiatives and projects. Civil servants and professionals identify, encourage and promote local initiatives, making them part of formal policy-making, although this is done in a pragmatic manner. The practitioners we encountered are people with a large network, who often have strong feelings of empathy with the people in the neighbourhoods they serve. At the same time, despite or perhaps because of their social nature, they can be troublemakers who give a voice to those they care for. They are highly committed to their work, are energetic, show persistence and are 'go-getters'. They could also be called 'exemplary practitioners' (van Hulst *et al.* 2011, 2012).

In theoretical terms, we zoomed in on two types of practitioners in participation processes in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. First, there are those who worked mostly in the life world. These actors resembled social entrepreneurs and everyday makers or fixers. They initiated projects in a neighbourhood or set up organisations or associations. The work of most practitioners in the life world tended to be focused, and aimed at achieving concrete and practical goals. But the ultimate aim of the practitioners in the life world could best be called empowerment. Through the work of these practitioners, people in the neighbourhoods developed civic skills, improved their chances in life and engaged in everyday participation themselves. The second type moved between system and life world. These resembled Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2003) frontline workers, although they did not always have a formal position in a street-level bureaucracy. They connected organisations and projects in the life world with each other and with the policies of formal organisations. To get things moving for the neighbourhood, they set up their own projects aimed at reaching disadvantaged and threatened groups in local society in non-bureaucratic ways. They wanted to improve the life world in local society and were often able to bridge the life world(s) and system world(s). Moreover, they embodied the relation between local society and government, and they proved to be the linking pin between the two in participation processes – at least in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

We know from other studies on citizen participation that it is difficult to reach certain groups in neighbourhoods (Fung 2009). Minority groups and young people particularly are often under-represented in participation processes (Booher 2004, John 2009). Also, citizen involvement in regeneration can be a difficult and demanding process due to divisions amongst residents driven by geographical or ethnic tensions (Communities and Local Government 2010,

p. 8). In addition to this, citizen participation should not be seen as a panacea for every problem with which neighbourhoods are wrestling. Nevertheless, our study shows how practitioners in disadvantaged neighbourhoods can contribute to more inclusive forms of participation and community development. Those working in the life world enhance participation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods by – and here we follow the CLEAR model – providing knowledge to people, encouraging a sense of attachment and supporting civic institutions. Next to these empirical findings, our study also shows that the CLEAR model not only is applicable to administrative and social organisations, but also is a relevant framework to understand participation processes initiated by or connected through individuals in (civil) society. In terms of Durose's (2011) strategies, they identify marginalised and excluded groups and signpost them to community recourses and service providers (*reaching*), and engage with groups excluded from the wider community (*enabling*).

The frontline workers we encountered enhance participation, because they want to develop and establish a relationship with citizens and others in neighbourhoods. They reach out to citizens and focus on mobilising them by inviting them to participate, and responding to their views and wishes (e.g. aspects Enabling, Asking and Responding (EAR) of the CLEAR model). This also relates to Durose's (2011) strategies. The frontline workers' focus is on *enabling*. They especially engage with groups that (often) are excluded from the wider community or are distant from the existing service provision. They are also in the business of *fixing*. They relate government objectives and 'rules' with organisational opportunities and priorities within the community. And finally, for two more reasons they are relevant for participation processes. They are able to link with groups in society that are often excluded or at least under-represented in these processes. Second, they know the formal rules, but they also know how to bend them, so that they fit the situation and yield results for government and social organisations.

Although their work often remains invisible, practitioners working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods appear to be important actors in enhancing participation. In this paper, we have tried to make their work more visible. A core element is that they either start projects that connect people in their own life world or connect policy-makers and policy to initiatives on the ground. As such, they relate to and form a bridge between the life world and the world of formal policy-making. And, as a result, they produce the opportunity for many to develop their citizenship and become a more active participant in their (local) community.

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Notes

1. What the model does not seem to encompass is a certain amount of initiative on the part of the citizens themselves.
2. For reason of paper length we do not go into the details of our procedure for finding practitioners who stand out. A more elaborate description can be found elsewhere (van den Brink *et al*. 2012).

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