A tale of two neighbourhoods
The changing role of social housing organisations in neighbourhood regeneration governance
in England and The Netherlands

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Abstract

What is the role of non-profit housing organisations in neighbourhood regeneration governance? This is the leading research question explored in this paper. Using a network governance perspective, this international comparative case study explores the role played by social housing organisations in the regeneration of two deprived neighbourhoods: Lozells in Birmingham (UK) and De Hoogte in Groningen (NL). The study examines interactions between social landlords, local authorities, residents and other stakeholders over a more than five-year period (2007-2013).

Research findings highlight a remarkable change in the nature of neighbourhood regeneration and its governance, change not only caused by the interactions between the actors involved in area-based approaches, but also influenced by changing welfare-regimes and housing system characteristics. Regeneration has shifted from a ‘bricks-and-mortar’ to an integral approach combining social and physical interventions. The global financial crisis, the housing market downturn and the austerity measures have substantially reduced the ability of governments and housing associations to contribute to neighbourhood regeneration.

These contextual developments, combined with changes in the local neighbourhood regeneration networks, altered the role played by social landlords. From a leading role in large-scale and often top-down neighbourhood interventions, the housing associations in our case study areas have transformed their strategy into a more facilitating role supporting resident-led initiatives.

Using Habermas’ concept of system and life-world, we conclude that the system-world of national and local governments and housing associations was dominant in the top-down regeneration approach. Lack of money, changing ideas about regeneration and shifting opinions on the welfare state and the role of the system makes the life-world more important. Both worlds can be regarded as separate networks driven by different logics, perspectives and values. Coupling activities that connect both networks are crucial for neighbourhood regeneration to succeed and for system-world actors to legitimize their actions. This poses new challenges to develop robust and sustainable relations between the life-world of residents and communities and the system-world of agencies such as housing associations and governments. Because of the place-based nature of their business, housing associations are the most natural actor to take on that role in neighbourhood regeneration.

Keywords: Network governance, Neighbourhood regeneration, Housing associations
The Netherlands, England
1. Introduction

Non-profit housing organisations in the Netherlands and the UK have been increasingly involved in neighbourhood regeneration (Mullins and Van Bortel, 2010; Van Bortel and Elsinga, 2007; Van Bortel et al., 2009; Van Bortel and Mullins, 2009; Van Bortel, 2009). This paper focuses on the regeneration of two specific neighbourhoods: Lozells in Birmingham (England) and De Hoogte in Groningen (The Netherlands). Both areas face compounded issues of social, economic and physical deprivation. This research applies a longitudinal network governance approach to investigate neighbourhood regeneration initiatives spanning a more than five-year period (2007-2013). During this period a remarkable transformation took place in the neighbourhood regeneration approach and the role of housing associations and governments. At the start of our study period, 2007, top-down, large-scale, neighbourhood regeneration initiatives led by national and local governments and housing associations were quite common. By the end of our study period (2012/2013) this approach is almost inconceivable. This shift is not only the result of the economic crisis, austerity measures or the housing marked downturn, but the outcome of a more far-reaching change in the welfare system and the role of the state. This change has implications for neighbourhood regeneration governance and has an impact on the role of housing association and other actors. In this paper we will explore how these developments affected neighbourhood regeneration governance in Groningen and Birmingham.

This paper starts by briefly introducing in section 2 the theoretical framework and methodology used in this research. Network Governance (De Bruijn and Ten Heuvelhof, 1991; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007; Kickert et al., 1997; Rhodes, 1997; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004) and Habermas’ System / Life-world concept (Habermas, 1981; Kunneman, 1998) are key elements of this framework. Research results are presented in section 3. We focused on the activities aimed to connect system and life-world actors in neighbourhood regeneration decision-making, which involved housing associations. We assess the effectiveness of these coupling activities in section 4 and conclude the paper with a general discussion on the shifting roles of state and citizens, and the implication for housing associations.

2. Theoretical framework and methodology

Network governance

The network governance perspective applied in this study\(^1\) analyses the interactions between actors taking into account the pluriformity, interdependencies, closedness and dynamics of relations between actors in governance networks (De Bruijn and Ten Heuvelhof, 2010). Using Koppenjan and Klijn’s (2004) concepts of learning and uncertainties in networks we explored how actors were able to entwine their goals and develop mutually shared perspectives on the neighbour problems that needed to be addressed and most viable solutions to do achieve the desired outcomes (cognitive learning). We explored how different actors were able collaborate and overcome (or not) deadlocks in decision-making (process learning) and how actors have organized and managed their interactions (institutional learning and network management). Finally, we looked at the influence of contextual factors (e.g. housing policy, housing market and welfare system characteristics) on the decision-making processes. In this paper we will focus on the interactions between professional agencies (housing associations and local authority) and community (residents and residents organisations). Housing associations will be our focal actor throughout this paper.

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\(^1\) Research results are part of an on-going doctoral research project on shifts in governance and the changing roles of HAs in complex urban regeneration decision-making processes.
The role of Non-institutional actors in neighbourhood regeneration decision-making

Network governance theories provide an excellent lens to study the interactions between international actors. However, the specific role of non-institutional actors, such as citizens, is rather under-developed. They are often seen as outsiders to the network and their role is as studied as an element of the democratic anchorage and legitimacy of the governance networks (Bogason and Zelner, 2011).

Evidence from our research, presented later in this paper, illustrates that citizens in neighbourhood regeneration networks can neither be regarded as outsiders nor as just regular institutional actors. They should be considered full-fledged, albeit non-institutional, actors in the network. Neighbourhood regeneration is, by definition, area-based. It affects residents in that area even if they choose not to actively participate in decision-making. Consequently, these networks are more then networks in other domains connected to the life-world.

Habermas’ system and life-world concept

Jürgen Habermas' concept of system and life-world and system-world, presented in his magnum opus Theory of kommunikativen Handelns (Theory of Communicative Action) (Habermas, 1981), helps to increase our understanding of the role of residents as active participants in neighbourhood regeneration networks. Habermas distinguished two forms of rationality at work in modern society. Firstly, the end-mean rationality dominant in what Habermas calls the ‘system’, and secondly, the communicative rationality that is the cohesive mechanism in the life-world ('Lebenswelt').

The system (also referred to as system-world) entails all that people have developed in the form of organizations, rules and laws in societal domains such as economics, politics, education, housing, science, government, healthcare, welfare, justice, economic and political systems. This forms an extraordinary collection of disparate systems and subsystems. The life-world is the private domain of individuals and includes the nuclear and extended family, friends and the local community. Distinctive for life-world interactions is the importance of communication through story telling about the experiences of groups and individuals (Van den Brink, p 56).

It is Habermas' thesis that the life-world is the most essential and has made possible the breakthrough of the system-world but that we have reached a critical tipping point where the system breaks away from its roots in the life-world and even begins, to dominate the life-world. Habermas talks of the "colonization of the life-world" by the systems. In the past, society consisted almost entirely of life world, but over time, Systems have dramatically increased in number and size and have taken over much of what was previously life-world.

Bureaucracy as typical example of system-world behaviour

The system-world is strikingly characterized by Weber’s description at the beginning of the twentieth century of what he called the "bureaucracy" (1922, quoted by Van den Brink et al., 2012, pp.: 53-57). According to Weber bureaucracies are technologically and administratively superior to all previous forms of organisations. Due do their success and efficiency bureaucracies have spread throughout all state and local government institutions, but also to large private companies. Bureaucracies have contributed largely to growth of productivity and to the creation of our modern welfare state. But that came at a price. Bureaucracies function best when the human element is eliminated and decisions are based on strict formal, rational and hierarchical rules (table 1). Human emotions such as love, hate, virtue and personal relations are like sand in a well-oiled machine. Bureaucracies work according to a clear horizontal and vertical division of labour: everyone has a specific task and there is a clear distinction between bosses and subordinates. The rules, the processes and the expected results
are documented. Work and private life are strictly separated. Relations between colleagues and clients or customers should be business-like and functional.

The table below described the different logics driving the system and life-world, these logics influence the interactions within, and between, both worlds.

Table 1 Theoretical incongruity between system-world (according to Weber) and life-world (according to Habermas)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System-world (Weber’s Bureaucracies)</th>
<th>Life-world (Habermas)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Salaried staff</td>
<td>Voluntary service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Division of labour and specialisation</td>
<td>Communicative action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Formal rules and procedures</td>
<td>Informal / story telling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Functional Hierarchies</td>
<td>Social inequalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Formal / Functional relations</td>
<td>Personal relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rational power resources</td>
<td>Values and emotions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Van den Brink et al. (2012, p: 58)

Although they are not pure bureaucracies, Housing associations clearly belong to the system-world (Van den Brink et al., 2012, p: 53). Many housing associations have their roots in the life-world, but these connections have been weakened or have disappeared by secularization, professionalization and mergers (Beekers, 2012).

The revival of the life-world

The impersonality and cold rationality of the institutions of the system is increasingly met with scepticism and distrust. However, we can hardly live without it, and usually we do not want to (Kunneman, 1998). People want to be treated as an individual and are not inclined to take the judgement of experts (medical or otherwise) or statutory agencies at face value (Sieckelinck et al., 2013; WRR, 2005).

According to Habermas, the solution lies in mobilising the untapped potential within the life-world. Several publications explore the potential of better connections between the system- and life-world in neighbourhood regeneration (Van den Brink et al., 2012; WRR, 2012; Van der Lans, 2012).

Neighbourhood regeneration and the connection between the system and life-world

Neighbourhood regeneration has moved away from an exclusive ‘bricks and mortar’ approach. Present-day regeneration is not only aimed at improving the built environment, the quality and variety of the housing stock, neighbourhood facilities and amenities, but also at improving people’s lives (health, work, education and social inclusion) and creating sustainable communities by tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and improving social cohesion (Mullins and Murie, 2006, pp:253-269; Van Gent, 2009). Where previously buildings, parks and roads were the object of interventions, now also people and communities are part of the approach. The life-world therefor has become integral part of neighbourhood regeneration.

Connections between actors take place in arenas. ‘It is the place where a specific group of actors make choices on the basis of their perceptions and problems’ (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004, p: 58). Seen from a network governance perspective, the life-world and system-world can be seen as separated networks: domains that encompass many arenas and were decision-making follows the rules that are part of that specific network. Network theorists describe the institutional fragmentation of networks and arenas as a cause for conflicts in decision-making (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004, p:68; Weick, 1969/1979). Because of the interconnection of life-world and system-world in neighbourhood regeneration is paramount that these networks are coupled in order to solve area-based problems. A coupling brings parties together with
different perceptions, different resources and solution preferences (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004, p:188). In our research we have found evidence of coupling-activities undertaken or involving housing associations. We will discuss these in the next section of this paper.

Research methodology and focus

This research is based on 70 in-depth interviews, undertaken between 2007 and 2012, with actors involved in the local neighbourhood regeneration networks in Groningen and Birmingham. Often actors were interviewed multiple times over the years to capture changes in perceptions and actions of network actors. Fieldwork data was also gathered through participative observations of public consultations and other events related to neighbourhood regeneration in the case study areas and supplemented with desk research, including reports, newspaper articles and social media. In this paper we will refer to interviews with residents and officers from the local authority, housing associations and community. In this paper we will refer to these officers as ‘neighbourhood professionals’.

3. Research results

Regeneration in Birmingham and Groningen

Our case study areas, Lozells in Birmingham and De Hoogte in Groningen have seen a long history of regeneration activities, but this story starts in 2007. Focal actors are Groningen-based housing association De Huismeesters2 (6,500 properties), and Midland Heart3, owning and managing 32,000 properties across the West-Midlands. In 2007 both housing associations were closely involved in the development of area-based initiatives to improve the social/economic position of residents and strengthen the local housing market in the case-study area.

Both areas were part of nationwide neighbourhood regeneration programs. Lozells, in North West Birmingham, was part of Urban Living the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder (HMR) for Birmingham and nearby Sandwell (Webb, 2010; Wilson, 2011; Leather et al., 2012), De Hoogte was selected as one of the 40 priority areas in the Netherlands that were part of the ‘Krachtwijken’ (‘Power Neighbourhoods’) Action Plan (WWI, 2007).

In 2007 housing association Midland Heart led, in partnership with the Birmingham City Council and Urban Living, the development of the Lozells Master Plan (Lozells Masterplan, 2009). The plan focused on physical measures such as the development of ‘gateways’ with facilities for commercial and community use on strategic locations in the neighbourhood. The plan also referred to the already on-going deconversion program to merge studios and flats in Victorian terraced, detached or semi-detached properties into large family housing. This program aimed to reverse the conversions in the 1970s of these Victorian properties into small rental units. Social initiatives were referred to in the plan, but were not part of the masterplan, but coordinated through the Lozells Neighbourhood Management initiative that also started in 2007.

That same year, De Huismeesters was involved in de development of a Neighbourhood Action Plan for De Hoogte. The content of the plan was very different from the Lozells Master Plan. The Neighbourhood Action Plan contained mostly social initiatives to tackle worklessness, low educational attainment, but also the creation of a neighbourhood centre that should provide accommodation for a school and a Family Support Centre. As in the Lozells Masterplan the Neighbourhood Action plan for de Hoogte referred to other area-based interventions such as the refurbishment of the pre-WWII housing stock and the construction

2 www.dehuismeesters.nl
3 www.midlandheart.org.uk
of new affordable family housing. The masterplan in Lozells focussed on the physical interventions, the Action plan in De Hoogte was aimed at social measures (also see table 2).

**Table 2, Overview of the two key neighbourhood regeneration documents in the case-study areas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of policy document</th>
<th>De Hoogte, Groningen</th>
<th>Lozells, Birmingham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Main actors | • Housing Association De Huismeesters  
• Groningen Local Authority  
• Department of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration | • Housing Association Midland Heart  
• Birmingham Local Authority  
• Urban Living, Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder  
• Housing Corporation (later Homes and Community Agency) |
| Topics included in policy document | Family Care Centre, Multi-problem families, parenting, health, employment | Gateways, development sites and public realm (streets, green) |
| Topics referred to in policy document | Developments by De Huismeesters (Housing Refurbishment and construction) | Housing Deconversion program Midland Heart  
Lozells Neighbourhood Management (Themes: Environment, Community Safety, Youth Provision, Housing, Cohesive Communities and Communication, Health, Enterprise and Employment) |

* In 2008 a Masterplan for North Lozells was delivered, this was later extend to include plans for South Lozells. The final North and South Lozells Masterplan was delivered in 2009

**Contextual developments: shrinking welfare states and public service withdraw**

The coming to power of more conservative political parties in both countries in 2010 created a movement that changed the perspectives on how neighbourhood regeneration should be delivered. The top-down approach taken in De Hoogte and Lozells (and many other priority neighbourhoods) were increasingly seen as phenomena of the central state that disempowered residents, deprived them of the possibility to take the initiative and made dependant recipients of public services. This development is part of a far wider realignment of the welfare state, the roles and responsibilities of the government, citizens and third sector organisations such as housing associations.

The government expects more active engagement from citizens in the provision of services previously delivered by the public sector. The respective governments present these changes not only as modest in size and impact, but also as something desirable and commendable. Citizens should indeed feel obligated to do more for their neighbourhood and neighbours. Volunteers and carers are the new heroes⁴ (Tonkens and De Wilde, 2013).

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In his 2010 speech in Liverpool introducing his Big Society initiative David Cameron did briefly mention the necessity to ‘cut the budget’ but spent more time in his speech criticized the “way government has worked – top-down, top-heavy, controlling” and “the effect of sapping responsibility, local innovation and civic action” he emphasised the need “to create communities with oomph – neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them”

Similarly, in his 2011 letter to Parliament announcing the termination of the 40 Priority Neighbourhoods programme the former Dutch Minister responsible for Housing, Piet Hein Donner, hardly talked about money, but emphasized that the program had created a divide between citizens and government and that the government “should stop taking over responsibilities that belonged to residents and local communities”. Minister Donner continued by stating that “we seem caught between the development of ever larger and impersonal systems in our society and the and feeling and perception of citizens that is seeking institutions that are accountable with which they can identify. According to the minister “Area-based working and giving the residents a central position can close that gap” (BZK, 2011).

The tendency to put residents in the driving seat is also reflected in the statement form the Chief executive of housing association De Huismeesters in 2011 that “Housing associations ... are able to support the community but we call upon residents to take their own responsibility for the quality of living in their neighbourhood. Out the end of the day it’s their responsibility”.

Government make a stronger appeal to residents to take more responsibility and neighbourhood regeneration funding was reduced considerably. The UK Housing Market Renewal Program’ and the 40 Priority Neighbours programs in the Netherland (BZK, 2011) were both terminated prematurely in 2011. In the UK the Localism Act (DCLG, 2011; Maclennan, and O'Sullivan, 2013) was developed to give residents a stronger say about their neighbourhoods. In the Netherlands no such legislation has been developed, however, a new Housing Act will include provisions that will give local authorities more power over the activities of housing associations. It is, however, uncertain when this piece of legislation will be enacted.

**Coupling system-world and life-world neighbourhood regeneration networks**

This paper is part of a broader study into the role of housing associations in neighbourhood generation governance. In this paper we focus on one, albeit crucial, aspect of area based-governance: the interactions between life-world residents and communities and system-world agencies in the local neighbourhood regeneration network in De Hoogte and Lozells.

In our research we found evidence of coupling-activities undertaken or involving housing associations. We found two types of coupling activities. Firstly, housing associations’ frontline workers developing robust connections with residents and resident’s organisations. Residents can also develop these connections, however this falls outside the scope of this paper (but see Van der Pennen and Van Bortel, 2013). The second type involves the creation of boundary-spanning arenas that involves residents, housing association, local authorities and other agencies (see figure 1).

**Figure 1. Connecting System-World and Life-world in neighbourhood generation**

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In the table below we will present the ‘coupling activities’ we have found in our case study areas. This is not an exhaustive list and only includes activities that directly or indirectly involved housing associations.

Table 1 Coupling initiatives in the neighbourhood regeneration networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coupling Arenas</th>
<th>De Hoogte, Groningen</th>
<th>Lozells, Birmingham</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Teams</td>
<td>Neighbourhood Management Board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Voting Days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refurbishment Planning Group</td>
<td>Public consultation on Neighbourhood Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident groups</td>
<td>Resident groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Development Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coupling Professionals (and citizens)</th>
<th>De Hoogte, Groningen</th>
<th>Lozells, Birmingham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Coordinator, Groningen Local Authority</td>
<td>Neighbourhood Manager, Birmingham Local Authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing officers, Housing Association De Huismeesters</td>
<td>Community Involvement Officers, Housing Association Midland Heart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this section of the paper we will describe the various coupling activities. In the concluding section of this paper we will assess how effective these actions were to connect life-world residents and system-world agencies. We will end this section with summary of the interactions between the system-world (housing associations / local authority departments) and life-world.

**Coupling activities: Arenas**

*Neighbourhood Teams (De Hoogte)*
New arenas were created to facilitate the collaboration on a neighbourhood level between system and life-world actors. Neighbourhood Teams were introduced in De Hoogte in 2007 for each of the 14 neighbourhoods designated as priority areas. These neighbourhood teams consisted of local authority representatives, third sector support, care and welfare organizations, housing associations and residents. The teams were responsible for the coordination of services and contribute to the accomplishment of the Neighbourhood Vision drafted for each of the priority areas. The Neighbourhood Teams were encouraged to focus on what the neighbourhood needed, and cut through ‘red tape’ or deviate from citywide policies if these were at odds with neighbourhood needs.

**Neighbourhood Management Board (Lozells)**

Early 2007 the Birmingham City Council started a neighbourhood management pilot in 5 areas, including Lozells. A Neighbourhood Manager was appointed and a Neighbourhood Management Board created. This board was a chaired by local councillors and was a platform to discuss activities of the local authority, housing associations and other public service providers. The Neighbourhood Manager drafted a neighbourhood management plan that also listed the activities of housing association Midland Heart and tried to align the public services with the needs of the community. Interviewees, mention the neighbourhood management board and especially the activities of the Neighbourhood Manager as an important contribution to the regeneration of the area. This success did not prevent the termination of the pilot in early 2011 due to the government’s austerity measures.

**Neighbourhood Voting Days (De Hoogte)**

New mechanisms were also developed to more involve the community in system-world decision-making. One of these mechanisms is the Neighbourhood Voting Days (‘Wijkstemdagen’) introduced in De Hoogte and neighbouring Korrewegwijk. In preparation of Voting Days-organised ones or twice a year- residents could submit project-funding proposals. These Projects needed to contribute to neighbourhood regeneration outcomes, such as a cleaner of safer environment or more contacts between residents. Neighbourhood professionals agreed these on these outcomes with resident representatives. During Neighbourhood Voting Days residents could vote for their project of choice. Around €300,000 was available for each voting day. Projects with the largest number of votes received funding until the funding pot was depleted. Funded was provided by housing associations and the local authority through the local "New Local Agreement" framework.

Neighbourhood Voting Days in Groningen were seen by many as a successful example of community empowerment, however, the project proposals submitted for funding mainly originated from the neighbouring Korrewegwijk area, and were often not submitted by residents but by neighbourhood professionals. Because of this, and disappoint resident turn-out, the Neighbourhood Voting Day’s for De Hoogte was terminated and the Neighbourhood Teams was given a decisive role in the allocation of funding.

**Resident groups (Lozells and De Hoogte)**

The system-world itself prevents the development of viable connections with the life-world by creating or toleration resident participation structures that are largely tokenistic. De Huismeesters, for example, has created a resident participation structure in which in each neighbourhood a residents committee is recognised as the official participation partner for that area. This framework does not allow more than one resident organisation in an area, with the possible exception of resident committees for a specific housing estate. For some years the official participation partner for De Hoogte, the BBV resident committee (Dutch acronym for Residents Interests Association) existed in name, but still received funding from De Huismeesters. De Huismeesters tolerated this situation for some years and bypassed the BBV
by organising alternative community involvement mechanisms. De housing association undertook very little action to revive or terminate the relation with the BBV.

There are other examples of rather dysfunctional forms of resident participation. The Residents Planning Group in De Hoogte was created to advice De Huismeesters on the refurbishment of the 500 properties in Garden Village De Hoogte; the oldest but architecturally most valued part of the area. Instead of a lively and open platform to exchange ideas, the Planning Group remained a closed arena. A number of residents participated in the group, but there was no exchange of ideas or information between the group and the rest of the community. De Huismeesters asked the group’s participants to become a more representative voice for the community. This did not work out however. Residents wanted to only represent themselves and preferred to remain anonymous. Residents sometimes felt inhibited to openly participate in these kinds of events for fear of criticism (or worse) by other residents. De Huismeesters, and the external community support officer commissioned by the housing associations accepted this situation.

Agencies in the Groningen neighbourhood regeneration network appear to have a strong normative stance about the mode of resident participation interactions. These rules are at odds with the rules of communication in the life-world and do not accommodate for cultural differences. For example, the implicit rule that Dutch should be the working language of meetings with, but also the issue of mixed gender participation where men and women jointly participate in meeting and the principle of consistency and structure in the way resident participation is organised. Except for a community worker, interviewees rarely mentioned to under participation of the 20% ethic minorities in the area as problematic. Housing associations and local authority, maybe also most resident, prefer to arrange resident participation as an organisation with unique entities with a clearly defined brief, such as “Heel de Buurt” resident involvement platform or the Refurbishment Planning Group that was created by De Huismeesters to consult resident on the housing refurbishment in De Hoogte. Most professionals in neighbourhood regeneration would be rather uncomfortable with multiple resident organisations in one area, or meetings were residents could participate, through a translator, using their native language, or women-only meetings. The proportion of non-western residents in De Hoogte is relatively low (20% in 2011), these measures are therefore maybe not necessary, however officers involved in community consultation reported that very few residents with a non-Western background participate in neighbourhood regeneration activities.

In Lozells resident participation is more pluriform and better tailored to meet different cultural needs and values. Midland Heart in her work as community development in Lozells not permanent residents groups, but organizing small meetings around themes. The composition of the population groups can in each case be different. The housing association also organizes women-only meetings, sometimes only for women with a specific ethnic background. Translators are provided to support residents that are not fluent in English. These forms of participation are more diverse, more volatile, less clear, but also align better with the characteristics and values of the life-world. Undoubtedly, the far higher proportion of residents with non-Western origins in Lozells (around 90%) in comparison to De Hoogte (20%) influenced the different approaches to resident participation between the two case studies are influenced by. This diversity in resident participation could also be driven by UK government regulation and conditions set by the funders of neighbourhood regeneration activities.

Midland Heart was reluctant to work with permanent residents groups because they feared the ‘political tilt’ by local politicians. This is, in part, the result of the UK electoral system. British citizens elect their representatives for the city council (councillors) on ward level.

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9 Interview NL 19, 2011
10 Interview UK 08, 2010 and 2011
Birmingham has 40 Wards and the Lozells and East Handsworth Ward is one of them. The ward can elect three local councillors. In our case study interviews professionals and community representatives frequently mention events were local politicians, elected councillors or candidates for that position, used community groups for their own political purposes and ‘high jacked’ resident groups set-up by Midland Heart\textsuperscript{11}.

Consequently, Midland Heart preferred to involve residents in more informal and temporary initiatives to address concrete issues concerning the environment, such as fly tipping, rubbish collection, anti social behaviour. Partly as a result of this, the formal involvement of residents in the development of the Lozells Masterplan was limited. Although their were informal contacts with residents and local shopkeepers about options in the masterplan, residents could only give their final opinion on options developed by the Birmingham local authority and Midland Heart housing association and Urban Living during a series of public consultation events.

*Neglecting connections with the community because of network complexity*

In De Hoogte we found evidence that the time and attention needed for the interactions with other agencies involved in the regeneration process was so high that the connections with the community were neglected. De Hoogte was selected in 2007 as one of the 40 neighbourhoods in the national ‘Vogelaar’ regeneration program. As part of this program a Neighbourhood Action Plan was drafted. Interviewees report that the perspective of substantial amounts of additional government funding turned this plan into a whish-list of the actors involved) and a fine example of Garbage Can Decision-making (Cohen *et al.*, 1971). Residents were hardly involved in the development of this plan.

The priority status of De Hoogte led to a multitude of new actors and regeneration projects. This caused severe coordination problems. The jointed-up steering- and coordination groups set-up by housing associations and local authority were not able to manage and monitor all these projects. This led to frustration and anger among community members. Many felt that their area was stigmatised by the ‘problem neighbourhood’ label used by the national government. Residents were annoyed that the input they had provided during consultation meetings was not visible in undertaken activities. They were confronted with projects they had not asked for; projects that gathered pace very slowly and left behind no tangible outcomes. This was especially painful because the drafting of the Neighbourhood Action Plan for De Hoogte was preceded in 2007 by a massive round of door-to-door interviews conducted by local authority officers and housing association staff to talk to residents about their needs and problems. This backfired after residents did not see how their input had influenced what the institutions delivered.

During this period communication with residents was insufficient. In 2010, some community representatives from De Hoogte contacted the local media to denounce the slow progress made and the lack of transparency of how neighbourhood regeneration activities were organised and the opaqueness of how and by whom decision were made. The alderman responsible for housing, Frank de Vries, conceded in an interview with a local TV channel that the organisation of neighbourhood regeneration in Groningen was ‘indeed rather complicated’, but that he ‘fortunately, still understood how it worked’\textsuperscript{12}.

Housing associations and local authority tried to regain control over the myriad of projects. This took considerable time and was only achieve after the number of projects was reduced and the coordination structure was simplified. Progress was hampered by the complex

\textsuperscript{11} Interview UK 08, 2010 and 2011
\textsuperscript{12} Interview NL 14, 2011
constellation (and officer turnover) of steering committees, core teams, projects, project teams, neighbourhood teams, process managers, and program and project managers.\textsuperscript{13}

After this difficult start, relations between residents and the housing associations and local authority remained tense.

In Lozells collaboration between housing association Midland Heart and the Birmingham city council was not organised through fixed long-term steering groups or committees, but through a loosely organised partnership. Also in Birmingham these actors seem to be focused more on the system-world. In contrast with the situation in De Hoogte, this was not caused by the multitude and pluriformity of actors and projects, but by the attention needed to secure funding from the Homes and Communities Agency needed to deliver the actions included in the Lozells Masterplan.

Neglecting connections with the community because of funding overload

In De Hoogte the relative abundance of funding resources led to increased network complexity and resulted in a slow progress of regeneration activities. Also in Lozells relatively large amounts of funding were available for regeneration activities because the area was part of the Urban Living Housing Market Renewal Program (Leather et al., 2012). In both De Hoogte and Lozells the relative abundance of resources seems to have widened the divide between the life-world and system-world. Part of that was connected to the inability of agencies to turn these resources into positive neighbourhood outcomes. “There has been lots of regeneration money” a Midland Heart Community Involvement Officer stated that, “but none of it's has been grass roots. These organizations had money swilling ... but unfortunately the capacity of the people involved didn't tally with the amount of money that had run through their accounts”\textsuperscript{14}.

The reasons why the professional actors in De Hoogte and Lozells were mainly focused on what happened in the system-world varied, but the outcome was the same: although all professionals regarded resident involvement crucial important, the networks in which professionals collaborated found it very difficult to connect to the life-world.

The abundance of resources in the two priority neighbourhoods led to the involvement of more system-world actor and more projects, and underutilisation of community resources and residents’ capacities and talents. It also resulted in a lack of focus on what the areas really needed and which interventions really worked.

Housing association De Huismeesters was not depended on government subsidies for her stock investments in De Hoogte, i.e. the refurbishment of 500 properties and the new construction of several hundred new homes. The organisation was therefor largely unaffected by the government’s reduction of funding. De Huismeesters was also hardly troubled by the property market downturn, because most new homes were developed in the social rental sector and the low-cost homes for full ownership were still in high demand.

Circumstances were different in Lozells. Local actors needed government funding for the options in the Lozells Masterplan and Midland Heart needed financial resources for her refurbishment and housing deconversion program.\textsuperscript{15} Hardly any funding was available. The Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder terminated in 2011 and resources of the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) were reduced following the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. Local property market circumstances were so bleak that Midland Heart was not able to generate resources from properties sales and private investors where not willing to invest in

\textsuperscript{13} Interview NL 10, 2011; NL 12, 2011; NL 19, 2011
\textsuperscript{14} Interview UK 09, 2011
\textsuperscript{15} Interview UK 01, 2010
Ironically, the disappearance of most neighbourhood regeneration funding, forced local authority and housing associations to really set priorities and increase their focus on what communities wanted and could contribute to neighbourhood improvement. The reduction of resources also led to fewer actors and projects, simplified structures and, in De Hoogte, the end of deadlock. A Midland Heart officer described it as a “new dawn”; new community involvement staff was “not given a project”, but briefed to “see what was happening on the ground and find the places where to plug in and just give support”. Also in De Hoogte there was a clear resentment among residents and professionals alike of the myriad of projects and a wish to only do work with a limited number of organisations and neighbourhood professionals that new the areas and are familiar faces to the local community, and no more ‘temporary projects’.

There is a new dawn, and much of the ‘old’ way of working and the associated plans have faded into oblivion. In 2011, as part of a four year planning cycle, a new neighbourhood perspective for De Hoogte was developed. Remarkably, this document does not include one single reference to the previous Neighbourhood Action Plan. In Birmingham the Lozells Masterplan was ‘shelved’. A Midland Heart community involvement officer that came into post a few years after the finalisation of the plan, said that she -probably intentionally- was given a copy of the Lozells Masterplan.

**Coupling activities: professionals**

Our study also found evidence of professionals that were able to make valuable connections between system and life-world, such as neighbourhood managers, police officers and community support officers working for the local authority or housing associations. Peers and community representatives frequently mentioned these individuals as exemplary urban professionals because the were able to engage new residents in neighbourhood regenerations activities or simply because they showed empathy or were able develop relationships with residents (Van der Pennen and Van Borstel, 2013) Our research also found how these frontline professionals played an essential role as a liaison between the two worlds. In Birmingham, for example, Midland Heart Community Involvement officers were able, literally, to open resident’s doors to other system-world actors. For example, for housing association’s staff and contractors to enter the premises to check the central heating system or execute boilers repairs, while previously they were not allowed to enter. This may seem a marginal point, but particularly in Lozells with many residents with a Pakistani or Bangladeshi background it is not obvious at all that a woman will open the door to strangers when she is alone at home. It is therefore a considerable achievement of frontline officers to built trust relations that made this possible.

**Residents as ‘consumers’ of neighbourhood regeneration**

In both De Hoogte and Lozells housing associations regarded resident involvement as a very important element of neighbourhood regeneration. Notwithstanding this ambition, fruitful resident involvement turned out to be difficult and at times conflict-ridden (especially in De Hoogte).

Frontline professionals in Groningen and Birmingham frequently report accounts of passive residents, or residents that prefer to scrutinize and criticize what the city council and the
The large sums of money disbursed during Neighbourhood Voting Days, the support given to residents in delivering these projects, but also the overall institution-led approach to regeneration in De Hoogte has, according to a local authority officer 'spoiled' residents. By delivering all these activities without asking anything in return "we have turned residents into consumers [of public services]". The officer recalls a children’s’ event organised in De Hoogte were residents were sun bathing in their front gardens while a few yards away neighbourhood professionals were working up a sweat to make sure everything was ready on time. Residents sent their children to participate in the event only after all the preparations were ready. The same attitude is reflected in the statement of a community involvement officer working for Midland Heart:"

Are residents unable or unwilling to contribute to neighbourhood regeneration activities, or are they simply not asked? Our research findings indicate that all three factors played a role: unable because most residents in disadvantaged areas have to cope with so many personal problems that no room or energy remains to get involved in neighbourhood activities. Unwilling because residents feel they are entitled as taxpayers to neighbourhood regeneration as a public service, or regard it as the obligation of agencies to ‘fix the problem’ because, from the perspective of residents, these agencies created the problems in the first place. In this perspective the local authority is accused of neglecting the upkeep of the public realm and doggy garbage collection or the housing association is blamed for using the area as a concentration zone for problem households.

Our research findings also indicate that residents were often simply not asked to contribute. The relative abundance of resources in these two priority neighbourhood -as long as it lasted- made it possible for housing association and local authority to outsource activities. An external consultancy firm, for example, organized the first Neighbourhood Voting Days in De Hoogte in 2008. The costs of this equalled the sum of money allocated to neighbourhood regeneration proposals. Also the development of the Lozells Masterplan was commissioned to an external firm. Residents were not involved in the development. The public consultation was organised and paid for by housing associations Midland Heart and Housing Market Renewal pathfinder Urban Living. No community-based organisations were mobilized for this event. Residents were treat as consumers, and lured to the public consultation event with a clown’s act, free food and freebees to attract residents.

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22 Interview NL 12, 2011
23 Interview NL 13, 2011
24 Participant observation by author, Event UK-PO-03 / 2008
4. Conclusions

Assessing the coupling activities in the neighbourhood regeneration networks

In the table below we have summarised the effeteness of the coupling activities found in our case studies.

Table 2 Coupling initiatives in the neighbourhood regeneration networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coupling initiatives</th>
<th>De Hoogte, Groningen</th>
<th>Lozells, Birmingham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coupling Arenas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Teams</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Voting Days</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refurbishment Planning Group-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Public consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Plan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>on Neighbourhood Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Development Trust</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coupling Professionals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Coordinator GroningenLocal Authority</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neighbourhood Manager, Birmingham Local Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organiser</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing officers, Housing Association De Huismeesters</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Community Involvement Officers, Housing Association Midland Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall assessment</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The assessment above shows that connecting the system and life-world is not self-evident. We also illustrated that the causes for this divide can be found in both worlds.

Research findings show that ‘bridges’ often do not lead deeply into the living world but to remote outposts of the systems world, sometimes rather tokenistic and structured platforms of resident participation, such as the Neighbourhood Teams and the ‘Heel de Buurt’ resident involvement board. The number of residents willing to participate in these entities is limited. Projects aimed at specific issues are often more successful in mobilising residents outside of the ‘usual suspects’. The downside to this is that these projects often originate from the systems world, and housing association’s or staff members from other agencies are on a mission. The shift noticeable in the tactics of housing associations Midland Heart to not give community involvement officers a project, but provide them with a brief to support community initiatives.
**Coupling initiatives: arenas**

In Lozells housing association Midland Heart avoided the creation of fixed, long-term platforms for resident participation as part of their neighbourhood regeneration activities. They preferred more informal modes of residents participation focused on specific issues, such as the quality of the public realm. The main reason as stated by Midland Heart officers was the danger that participation platform would be used, or as a Midland Heart officer called it ‘high jacked’ by local politicians.

In the UK more progress is made. Lozells has a resident-led Community Trust and courses are given to train future community leaders.

In De Hoogte participation in coupling arenas (i.e. the Neighbourhood Team and the Refurbishment Planning Group) appear to be mainly confined to ‘professionalised’ residents that have made participation an almost full-time occupation. The housing association appears to be satisfied with this and uses alternative routes, such as public consultation event, to involve other residents. There is very little investment in creating more and more diverse interphases between both worlds. To mention a few: resident participation pursued by housing associations and local authorities are often, probably unconsciously, based on rules derived from representative democracy; resident committee members are expected to work as representative for the wider committee and be accountable to that community. As we have shown, that assumption is highly problematic in De Hoogte. Also problematic is the rule to only work with one resident committee in the area. Individuals and communities are too diverse to only work through one resident participation channel.

**Coupling initiatives: professionals**

Our research findings support the conclusion of the WRR in its report 'Trust in the Citizen' (WRR, 2012, p: 14) that only enlightened, talented and independent minded frontline workers (professionals) are able to make and sustain connections between the system and life-world. The case studies in De Hoogte and Lozells identified only a limited number of professionals able to develop these connections. When established, these connections are often taken for granted. Their value is largely overlooked and little policy attention is paid to the professionals able to make these robust connections. Many interviewees in Lozells, for example, felt the loss of their Neighbourhood Manager far more then the termination of the multi-million pound Urban Living program.

Our research wants to increase our understanding on the role of housing associations in regeneration governance. Housing associations are one of the most constant system world actors in disadvantage neighbourhoods: they own and manage the properties in these communities and are not able to ‘pack their bags’ and leave. This makes them an natural partner in bridging the fault line with life-world.

We have seen that housing association De Huismeesters in Groningen was better able to continue its system-world output by delivering refurbished and newly constructed housing according to plan. However, de organisation was less successful in the creation of arenas that coupled system and life-world or in supporting officers to make sustainable connections with life-world actors. In the UK, housing association Midland Heart was more dependent on government resources. The organisation was not able to deliver the full deconversion program, but was more successful in creating connections with life-world actors.

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*Interview UK 08, 2010 and 2011*
5. Discussion

Habermas (1981) sees the system-world as an essential element to support the environment. The life-world needs the system-world and vice versa, and strong networks are needed to connect both worlds. Our research supports this vision: system-world institutions are of crucial importance for neighbourhood regeneration to be successful. However, thinking about the design of the interphase between both worlds is grossly underdeveloped. Robust connections between life-world communities and system-world agencies are rare and vulnerable. Arenas connecting life-world and system-world are almost always based on system-world rules and rarely based on strong connections between individuals.

New mechanisms are needed. The question is whether system-world institutions, and in our case housing associations, are able to develop and sustain these connections. This however is not a new question. In 1992 the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Possible (Dutch acronym: WRR) already posed the question whether organizations could develop 'civic' values and behave like good fellow citizens (WRR, 1992, p: 89). Our research shows that the housing associations in our case studies are certainly motivated to do so, but are often still pre-occupied with the system-world and are still rather inept to successfully construct vibrant and sustainable connections with the life-world.

We content that these connections are possible if housing associations are able to bridge the divide between the system and life-world by making systems more human and not only provide residents with more responsibilities but also with more influence and power (also see Tonkens en De Wilde, 2013). For many residents in disadvantaged areas it may take many years to face up to that challenge. System-world agencies should make a sustained effort to implement these new ways of working. The challenge for agencies is not to recolonize the life-world. Not only the success of neighbourhood regeneration depends on this, but also the legitimation of system-world actors.

Hopefully this quest will not lead to the outcome as described in the tale of the Scorpion and the Frog (see box below), or is it in the nature of the systems world to colonise the life-world as it is in the nature of the Scorpion to use its sting, even if the outcomes are fatal …
The fable of the Scorpion and the Frog

“A scorpion asks a frog to carry him across a river. The frog is afraid of being stung during the trip, but the scorpion argues that if it stung the frog, the frog would sink and the scorpion would drown. The frog agrees and begins carrying the scorpion, but midway across the river the scorpion does indeed sting the frog, dooming them both. When asked why, the scorpion explains that this is simply its nature”.

The fable is used to illustrate the view that the behaviour of some creatures, some people or some organisations is irrepressible, no matter how they are treated and no matter what the consequences.
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