



# ACTIVE LIVING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN DUTCH MUNICIPALITIES

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# Colophon

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## Preface

After completing the Bachelor's degree in Geography, Planning and Environment last year, this year it was time for the Master's in Spatial Planning, specialising in 'Planning Land and Real Estate Development'. A large part of this master consisted of writing the corresponding Master's thesis, which you are now reading. When choosing a topic for the thesis, the concept of active living caught my attention. I myself enjoy exercising and being active, and choosing this topic allowed me to combine this with my study, spatial planning. This way, I could look at how the built environment can encourage people to move more, which really appealed to me. Eventually, this became more concrete to a research project on the implementation of these kinds of active living projects.

In the end, I am satisfied with how the process of writing the thesis went. It took quite some time, but I am happy with the final result, which is the most important thing for me.

Finally, I would like to thank my supervisor Sander Meijerink, he guided me throughout the process and helped me a lot during the writing of my thesis. Without his help, writing this thesis would have been a lot more difficult. The same goes for the respondents I was allowed to interview, these interviews provided me with a lot of new insights. I would also like to thank these respondents for that.

I hope you enjoy reading my thesis.

Rik Schieven

## Summary

This Master Thesis examines active living policy implementation in Dutch municipalities. Active living is about bringing physical movement into people's daily lives to improve health. This thesis looks specifically at how policies, which promote this active living, can be successfully implemented. The corresponding main research question is: 'What conditions promote/obstruct the implementation of active living policies in Dutch municipalities?' The search for an answer to this question was done using two case studies: the Utrecht district Kanaleneiland and the Groningen district Vinkhuizen. By conducting in-depth research into active living policy implementation in these neighbourhoods, this has created a picture of implementation processes in Dutch municipalities.

First, the theory chapter searched for several variables that (according to existing literature) could influence the implementation of active living policies. Eventually, eight variables emerged: policy design, political context, public support / community involvement, stakeholder involvement, leadership, economic context, absence of conflicting policy goals and time & timing. These eight variables form the most important part of the conceptual model, thus forming the foundation for the rest of the research. During the conduct of the study, policy documents and interviews were used to examine the extent to which the eight variables are influential in practice in the Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen cases.

These two cases were ultimately able to largely confirm the theory and provide a good picture of which of the variables are the most important, and how these variables relate to each other in Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen. In this way, the main and sub-questions of the thesis were answered and led to some interesting insights. For instance, the combination of the variables political context and economic context turned out to play an important role. The variables policy design and public support/community involvement were also among the most important of the study, while the other variables were also found to be still influential, but to a lesser extent.

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# 1. Introduction:

Urban health has long been an important issue for research. The issue brings health and (urban) planning together. Urban planning is relevant to health studies because it has the potential to improve citizens' health. The reason for this is given by Vorovchenko (n.d.):

Urban planners and related professionals can transform the conditions in which people live and work, their access to facilities and services, their lifestyles and their ability to develop strong social networks. These are key determinants of the health, well-being and quality of life of people in cities.

An important topic within urban health is active living. Active living is about bringing physical activity into people's lifestyles to promote health. Here, the relationship between the spatial environment and active living is important, with the question being how a particular (urban) environment can be designed to implement physical activity in people's lifestyles. To achieve this, several Dutch municipalities have drawn up policies for this purpose. Thus, through active living policies, municipalities hope to encourage their residents to exercise more. This is because encouraging active living will ensure greater health among residents, and spatial planning can influence this in a positive way because planned urban development can be seen as the key to higher health levels in cities (Selim, 2021). The specific focus of this study is therefore on active living policies of some Dutch municipalities. It will look at differences and similarities between two Dutch municipalities in terms of active living policy, and especially in terms of the implementation of this policy. By identifying these differences and similarities, municipalities may be able to draw lessons on the issue of how to most successfully implement their active living policy in the future.

Since this study specifically looks at policies, it is important to note that these policies can be divided into three parts: design, implementation & effectiveness. The first part concerns the policy design itself, i.e. is there a policy in place, and what are the plans/ambitions of this policy. The second part concerns the implementation of the policy, here the question is whether the plans/ambitions of the policy are thus actually implemented in society and thus whether the policy implementation is successful. The third and final part concerns the effects of the policy, here the focus is whether the implemented policy actually leads to the desired effects. These three parts will not all be covered in this thesis. The main focus will be on policy implementation. There will however be some (little) attention in the research towards the design of the policy. The reason why design is still considered is because when research is conducted on policy implementation, it cannot be completely separated from the content of this policy. Later in the theory part, in fact, it becomes clear that the implementation success of a policy depends on the actual design of this policy, so this is why policy implementation cannot be completely separated from the actual content of the policy. But as already told, the main focus will be on the implementation of this designed policy. The research will look for what are success points and bottlenecks to actually implement the designed policy in society. Whether this policy design and implementation actually lead to the desired outcomes will not be looked into. In other words, the final policy effects are not examined in this study.

## 1.1. Research problem:

The percentage of Dutch people who are overweight is around 50%. 15.7% of the Dutch even struggle with obesity (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2023). It is mentioned here that the percentage of overweight between Dutch municipalities varies between 34.8% and 67.2%. This indicates that not only obesity itself, but also health disparities between municipalities can be seen as a problem. As mentioned in the introduction, this research focuses specifically on active living policy

(implementation). This research will try to provide new insights into the problems municipalities experience in implementing active living policies. This is important because no matter how well designed a policy may be in terms of content, these efforts may fail in their ultimate goal when the implementation of these policies fails (Owens, 2008). Dutch municipalities experience certain implementation difficulties too. These problems can vary greatly, but could include a lack of public support, financial difficulties or a lack of political support. What can be seen as the central problem within this study is that there is no clear picture of what causes these difficulties in Dutch municipalities, in other words: it is unclear what causes the implementation gap in active living policies. Although health differences between municipalities can occur in countless ways, the question arises to what extent the design and implementation of health policy influences this. The health differences between various municipalities can possibly mean that some municipalities are more successful in designing and implementing health policies than others, but whether this is completely true should be determined by this study.

## 1.2. Research aim & research questions:

The aim of this study is to gain insight into different active living policies, and into the implementation of these policies, in Dutch municipalities. First, the aim is to identify the policy design of two Dutch municipalities, in order to obtain a good understanding of the content of these policies. Once this has been done, the aim is to gain insight into the extent to which the content of these policies is reflected in practice. By comparing the design content with the outcomes in practice, a picture will be formed about the extent to which the implementation of the policies has been successful. If the policy content is reflected in practice, the implementation is likely to have been successful, and vice versa. Next, the research aim is to find out which conditions promote or obstruct the implementation of active living policies. In this way, municipalities can possibly learn from each other's policy (implementation), in the hope that this in turn will lead to a healthier population.

Based on the research problem and aim, the main question to this study is: **'What conditions promote/obstruct the implementation of active living policies in Dutch municipalities?'**. The associated sub-questions, which will help to answer the main question are the following:

- What do the active living policies of Dutch municipalities look like in terms of content?
- To what extent have active living policies been implemented in Dutch municipalities?
- What are, within Dutch municipalities, overarching success factors or bottlenecks regarding the implementation of active living policies?

The answers to these sub-questions will provide a clear picture of active living policy implementation. In this way, it will finally be possible to formulate an answer to the main question.

## 1.3. Scientific relevance

A considerable amount of research has been done on active living in the existing literature, however, Alfred (2019) examined the link between the built environment and active travel and identified that there are still knowledge gaps in this area. Most of the existing literature is focusing on the health effects of these policies, but research on their actual content and implementation is scarcer. Winters et al. (2017) suggest that there is strong evidence that active travel provides substantial health benefits, but uncertainty remains about which specific policies are successful, and which are not. What is added to this, and what is of great importance in this research, is the scientific relevance in terms of policy implementation, this is there because research on this specific issue is quite scarce and can be seen as a challenge; "The challenge is that we know much less about effective policy implementation than we do about policy development and adoption, ... so implementation is a

worthy topic of study.” (Rodriguez et al., 2016, p. 5). Oh et al (2021, p.2) mention on the topic of policy implementation:

Despite the importance of health policies in shaping public health, policy implementation science remains underrepresented in research. We argue that enhanced integration of policy questions within implementation science could reduce the time lag from policy to practice and improve population health outcomes to build a body of evidence on effective policy implementation.

## 1.4. Societal relevance

Although this thesis is not reaching enough to address the effectiveness of active living policies, this is where a big part of the societal relevance can be found. New insights on policy design and implementation could contribute to reducing health problems in Dutch cities. As indicated in paragraph 1.1 (Research Problem), a large proportion of the Dutch population is overweight. Research by Buettner (2012) shows that in areas with healthier lifestyles, people are happier. This proves that there is definitely a link between the physical living environment and health, both physical health and mental health. It is therefore very plausible that Dutch municipalities want to improve the health of their residents, and this can partly be done by improving the active living policy implementation process. Providing new insights into this implementation process will ensure that improvements can be made in the field of urban health in Dutch municipalities, which in this way can be seen as socially relevant. Article 22 of the Dutch constitution requires the government to take measures to promote public health (The Dutch Constitution, n.d.), improving the implementation process of active living policies will therefore be seen as such a measure. If Dutch municipalities that are less successful in implementing these policies can learn from municipalities that are more successful, it can in this way contribute to a better implementation process in the less successful municipality, which in turn will contribute to a healthier environment, and a healthier society.

To indicate the importance of a successful active living policy implementation (and thus its societal relevance), an example will be given about two similar policies. One of these has been relatively successful in the Netherlands, and the other relatively unsuccessful in the UK. These are the Dutch District Approach versus the English Health Action Zones (HAZ). The policies of both approaches are very similar while there are big differences in their degree of success, and this explains the importance of a good implementation process. First of all, the Dutch District Approach: The introduction of the Dutch District Approach shows that a successfully implemented policy can actually lead to more health. Timmermans et al (2020, p. 1):

The Dutch District Approach is an urban regeneration programme that was implemented by the Dutch government in 2008 with the aim to improve the living conditions of the 40 most deprived districts in 18 cities of the Netherlands.

As a matter of fact, Droomers et al (2014) conclude that future health progress can certainly be expected in the Dutch District Approach areas. Which proves the policy success, both in terms of design as in implementation. In contrast, Alcock (2004) outlines possible traps of such policies. A comparable program to the Dutch District Approach took place in the UK at the beginning of this century: Health action zones (HAZs). It is mentioned about this program in the UK that only limited time and budget were available to implement this policy, and that there was great pressure to provide evidence that the policy works. As a result, this policy in the UK was less successful than the Dutch policy. With these examples, Droomers et al. (2014) and Alcock (2004) illustrate that despite the intention of both policies being similar, the degree of success can be very different. This makes it

clear that good policy implementation and execution is crucial to achieve success. The advantage to a policy failure like the one in the UK is that future policies can learn from this, to ensure that mistakes made are not repeated in the future.

## 1.5. Readers' guide

The structure of the rest of this thesis will be as follows. First, chapter 2 will cover the theory, where existing literature and concepts will be discussed, followed by the conceptual model of this study and its operationalisation. In chapter 3 the methodology will be discussed, followed by the results in chapter 4 & 5. In chapter 4 this concerns the results for the Kanaleneiland case and in chapter 5 for the Vinkhuizen case. Chapter 6 will consist of the discussion, conclusion, reflection and recommendations. Finally, in chapters 7 and 8, references and appendices can be found.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1. Explaining concepts by literature review

There have been several studies in the literature that have examined the concept of active living, policy implementation & active living policy implementation. Relevant literature and concepts for this study will be discussed in this chapter.

#### 2.1.1. Active living

Legislation in the Netherlands requires municipalities to develop and implement local health policies. These policies are supposed to aim at the promotion of health across sectors and with a strong community involvement (Hoeijmakers et al., 2007, p. 112).

These healthy cities policies first emerged in the 1980s, initially mainly in Canada and Europe (Flynn, 1996). Due to the fact that today we live in a society where a large proportion of the population is overweight, physical activity is an important issue in public policy (Nasar, 2008). Because several studies like Zheng et al. (2022) and Alfred (2019) have already studied the effectiveness of urban health policies and urban health interventions, the focus of this study is at policy design and implementation. Before we will take a look at the design and implementation of active living policy, it's important to first explain the concept of active living itself.

Active living can be explained/summarized in one sentence: *Active living is about bringing physical activity into people's lifestyles to promote health*. Besides leading to health benefits, active living, or active mobility, also benefits the environment. This makes the concept of active living an especially interesting topic, in the current times of climate change (Biehl et al., 2019). Now that it is clear what active living means, the next paragraph will look at what active living-promoting policies look like.

#### 2.1.2. Active living policy design

Before looking at the implementation of active living policies, it is first important to take a brief look at the design of these active living policies. What does the content of these policies consist of and what measures can be taken to increase active forms of mobility?

Within active living policies, there are several ways to encourage residents to use active forms of mobility. These active forms of mobility involve walking and/or cycling (Alfred 2019). The literature mentions many ways to encourage these forms of active mobility, e.g. Alfred (2019) mentions the provision of cycling infrastructure, the pedestrianisation of shopping streets and the creation of local parks, and Biehl et al. (2019) name traffic calming measures to protect bicycle lanes. But the clearest framework to analyse active living policy design is given by Winters et al. (2017). This study distinguishes between four different types of policies that encourage active forms of mobility: Society-Level Policies, City-Level Policies, Route-Level Policies & Individual-Oriented Policies (Winters et al. 2017, p.280).

##### *Society-Level Policies:*

This refers to broader population-level transport policies to influence the relative utility of active travel. This can involve both limiting car use and promoting public transport. In terms of limiting car use, this involves speed reduction measures for cars, higher costs for car ownership and restricting parking. In this way, using the car as a mode of transport is made less attractive, increasing the use of active forms of mobility. In addition, promoting public transport also encourages more active travel. This for the simple reason that in order to move yourself to public transport, active trips are required.

### *City-Level Policies:*

This is about a city's general land-use policies, which affect the level of active travel. Urban design can ensure that walking and cycling increase. One way to do this is by making sure that distances between amenities are small, in this way a resident has to travel shorter distances which are therefore more attractive to walk or cycle. So this policy generally goes into ensuring that a town/area is laid out in such a way that there are good and short connections between relevant amenities.

### *Route-Level Policies:*

These policies deal with concrete investments in infrastructure that promotes walking and cycling. These include wide pavements, pedestrian crossings, walkways, cycle lanes, cycle paths separated from the motorway, the presence of sufficient bicycle parking facilities, etc. All concrete measures in infrastructure that make walking and cycling more attractive, both in terms of speed, comfort and safety. The assumption is that the more such facilities are present in the infrastructure, the faster people will use active forms of mobility.

### *Individual-Oriented Policies:*

The last form of policy design involves informational and educational policies. These involve encouraging people to cycle or walk. This can be through (financial) incentives, media efforts or publicity campaigns.

Using this framework of Winter et al. (2017), where active living policy content is divided into four different parts, the policy design of the relevant cases will be systematised in later chapters.

## 2.1.3. Policy implementation

The next paragraph will be about policy implementation. General literature on policy implementation will be discussed, after which the next paragraph will focus on more specific active living policy implementation literature. First, the term policy implementation will be introduced to explain why it is important to focus specifically on the implementation process. Second, different definitions of policy implementation are discussed. Third, the section discusses how policies should actually be implemented according to the literature, and which variables influence this process. Finally, this section ends with a conclusion containing a systematic overview of relevant variables.

First of all, the introduction. As mentioned earlier, two parts come before policy effectiveness, policy design and policy implementation. Thus, the impact a given policy has depends on both its design and implementation (Oh et al., 2021). "Policies cannot be effective until they are implemented" (Rodriguez et al., 2016, p. 1). Hupe & Hill (2002) conducted extensive research on the implementation of public policy, concluding that policy implementation is of great importance in the policy process. This is because, "the content of that policy, and its impact on those affected, may be substantially modified, elaborated or even negated during the implementation stage." (Hupe & Hill, 2002, p. 7). Here, it is important to mention again that implementation is here seen separately from policy design. Drafted policies are seldom carried out automatically; they require an implementation process. This implementation process is often the part of policy making in which setbacks occur, as policy intentions prove less successful in practice: "Most of this research assumes that because an evidence-based policy is adopted or takes effect, it is implemented as intended. This assumption, however, is often incorrect." (Chriqui et al., 2023, p. 1). The study by Bhuyan et al. (2010, p. 1) also reflects the importance of policy implementation, they do so by giving three reasons:

Firstly, it promotes accountability by holding policy-makers and implementers accountable for achieving stated goals and by reinvigorating commitment. Secondly, it enhances effectiveness because understanding and addressing barriers to policy implementation can improve programme delivery. Lastly, it fosters equity and quality because effective policy implementation can establish minimum standards for quality, promote access, reduce inconsistencies among service providers and regions, and thus enhance quality.

In the more modern literature into the importance of the implementation process, a discussion arose, namely the debate between the top-down and bottom-up approaches. This discussion indicates that implementation research can be viewed through different philosophies. Imperial (2021, p.1) explains both approaches:

The top-down approach argued that implementation problems are minimized through careful specification of procedures. From their perspective, implementation was largely an administrative challenge. Conversely, the bottom-up perspective argued that effective implementation allows policy to be adapted based on the interaction of a policy with the local institutional setting. For bottom-uppers, context matters, and implementation involves bargaining rather than the explicit control of higher-level decision makers.

Now that the importance of policy implementation is clear, it is time to look at what definitions are actually given to the concept of policy implementation in relevant literature. One of the most influential and comprehensive definitions is that of Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983, p. 20):

Implementation is the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually incorporated in a statute but which can also take the form of important executive orders or court decisions. Ideally, that decision identifies the problem(s) to be addressed, stipulates the objective(s) to be pursued, and in a variety of ways, 'structures' the implementation process. The process normally runs through a number of stages beginning with passage of the basic statute, followed by the policy outputs (decisions) of the implementing agencies, the compliance of target groups with those decisions, the actual impacts – both intended and unintended – of those outputs, the perceived impacts of agency decisions, and finally, important revisions (or attempted revisions) in the basic statute.

John (1998, p. 204) describes policy implementation as "the stage in the policy process concerned with turning policy intentions into action". O'Toole formulates three definitions for the term implementation, firstly, "what happens between the establishment of policy and its impact in the world of action" (2000, p. 273), secondly, "what develops between the establishment of an apparent intention on the part of the government to do something, or to stop doing something, and its ultimate impact in the world of action" (2000, p. 266), and thirdly, "the connection between the expression of government intention and actual results" (1995, p. 43).

So there are a lot of comprehensive definitions for policy implementation, these give a good idea of what implementation means but nevertheless, in this study, we choose to stick to the clearest, and therefore the simplest definition. This definition is that of John (1998, p. 204): "the stage in the policy process concerned with turning policy intentions into action."

Now that the definition of policy implementation is clear, the question remains on how to successfully implement a policy design, in order to achieve the desired goals in this way, and which variables are involved. Both these questions are first answered by Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983). First, relevant variables (according to the authors) can be found in figure 1. This can be seen as a comprehensive and perhaps complicated model, nevertheless it contains some variables that (as will be shown later in this study) will also be important in the study towards active living policy implementation. Secondly, according to Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983, p. 41-42), effective implementation, or in other words, achieving the goals of policy design, is achieved if:

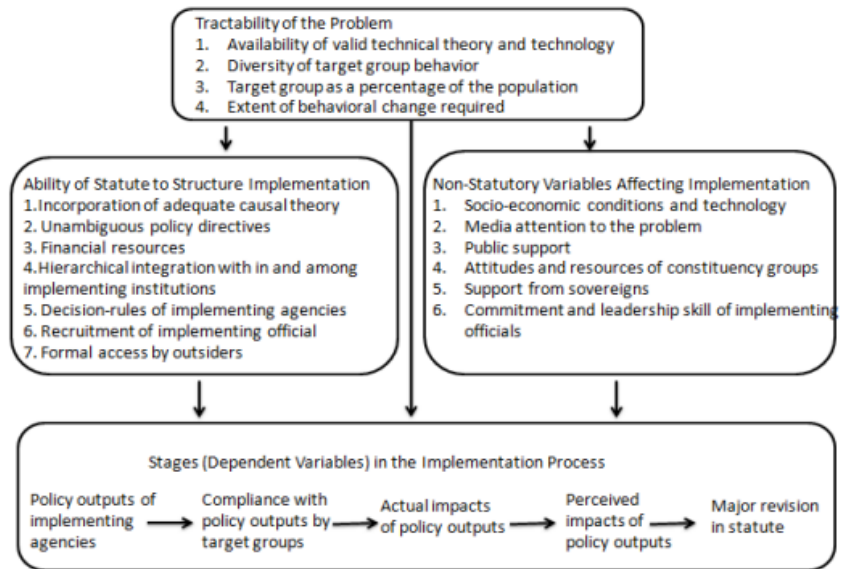


Figure 1, Variables involved in implementation process (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983, p. 22)

1. The enabling legislation or other legal directive mandates policy objectives which are clear and consistent or at least provides substantive criteria for resolving goal conflicts.
2. The enabling legislation incorporates a sound theory identifying the principal factors and causal linkages affecting policy objectives and gives implementing officials sufficient jurisdiction over target groups and other points of leverage to attain, at least potentially, the desired goals.
3. The enabling legislation structures the implementation process so as to maximize the probability that implementing officials and target groups will perform as desired. This involves assignment to sympathetic agencies with adequate hierarchical integration, supportive decision rules, sufficient financial resources, and adequate access to supporters.
4. The leaders of the implementation agency possess substantial managerial and political skill and are committed to statutory goals.
5. The program is actively supported by organized constituency groups and by a few key legislators (or a chief executive) throughout the implementation process, with the courts being neutral or supportive.
6. The relative priority of statutory objectives is not undermined over time by the emergence of conflicting public policies or by changes in relevant socioeconomic conditions which weaken the statute's causal theory or political support.

A more recent study on policy implementation is that of Mthethwa (2012), he mentions that several factors influence policy development and implementation, namely, the content of the policy, the nature of the policy process, the actors involved in the process, and the context in which the policy is designed and implemented (p. 2).

Finally, what can be considered one of the clearest studies on policy implementation is the study by Bhuyan et al. (2010). The reason why this study is very clear is because seven clear variables of importance are given here, and these are then explained through a table (figure 3). Bhuyan et al.

(2010, p.5) identify seven variables (as can be seen in figure 2) that are important during a policy implementation process:

- The policy, its formulation, and dissemination.
- Social, political, and economic context.
- Leadership for policy implementation.
- Stakeholder involvement in policy implementation.
- Implementation planning and resource mobilization.
- Operations and services.
- Feedback on progress and results.

An explanation for each of the seven dimensions can be found in figure 3.

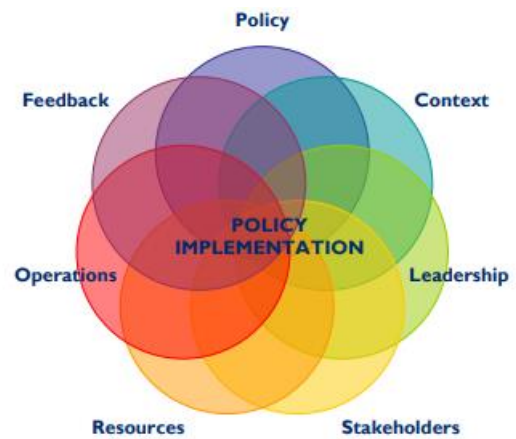


Figure 2, Policy implementation dimensions (Bhuyan et al. 2010)

	Dimensions of Policy Implementation
The policy, its formulation, and dissemination	Refers to the policy content, the nature of the formulation process, and the degree of dissemination. Are the policy's goals, objectives, and strategies clear and appropriate given the issues to be addressed by the policy? Do key stakeholders agree on the goals and strategies? Has the policy been disseminated to and understood by those responsible for implementation?
Social, Political, and Economic Context	Refers to the various social, political, and economic factors outside of the policy process that can either enhance or hinder effective implementation. Depending on the nature and scope of the policy, social norms such as gender inequality and governing processes such as decentralisation and other factors can affect policy implementation. What are the effects and consequences of these factors?
Leadership for policy implementation	Recognizes that strong leadership and commitment are essential to ensure the follow through, resources, and accountability needed for putting policies into practice. However, the leaders responsible for policy formulation might find their attention diverted elsewhere once the policy is adopted or the responsibility for leading implementation might shift to new individuals and groups. How effective is the leadership for implementation?
Stakeholder involvement in policy implementation	Recognizes that policy formulation is increasingly a multisectoral endeavor, yet this engagement might not continue during the policy implementation stage. Thus, it is crucial to consider the extent of stakeholder involvement in policy implementation and the nature of the relationships and collaboration among different stakeholders.
Planning for implementation and resource mobilization	Consider the planning, resources, and capacity needed to facilitate policy implementation. Does an implementation plan exist? Do organizations need new skills and training in order to implement the new policy? How will funding for new initiatives be ensured? How reliable is the resource flow?
Operations and services	Refers to the co-ordination mechanisms, operational systems, and capacity of individuals and organizations charged with delivering services outlined in the policy. What are the positive changes as a result of putting the policy into practice on the ground? What are the challenges?
Feedback on progress and results	Recognizes the importance of regularly gathering, disseminating and using feedback to assess progress toward achieving results. Who is and is not receiving information about implementation? How is the information used? Are the perspectives of beneficiaries or clients considered?

Figure 3, Policy dimensions with explanation (Bhuyan et al. 2010).

In short, it can be concluded that policy implementation is a crucial stage in the policy process, which often determines the degree of success or failure of a policy. Beyond establishing a definition for the concept of policy implementation, an important part of this section has been to identify relevant variables that influence policy implementation. These are the variables identified by Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983), Mthethwa (2012) and Bhuyan et al. (2010). These variables can be found in figure 4 (paragraph 2.2.). The next paragraph on specific active living policy implementation will search for relevant variables via a similar method. These variables will then be merged with the general policy implementation variables, and then the final relevant variables for this study will be formed.

#### 2.1.4. Active living policy implementation

Contrary to the previous paragraph on general policy implementation literature, this paragraph deals specifically with literature covering active living policies (implementation). Whereas implementation is important in any policy process, it is even more so in the field of urban health policy, because here people's health is at stake. This can be further explained by a quote from Siri (2016, p.1): "Cities offer real opportunities for improving health, but managed poorly, they can also create or reinforce significant health deficits". Implementing active living policies is thus an important part of the policy

process. This implementation implies that the policies made will actually be applied in practice. Different parties are involved in this implementation, in a later chapter it will become clear which stakeholders these actually are, but they include local governments, regional/national governments, residents, public transport institutions, project developers, etc.

The remaining of this paragraph will consist of a review of relevant active living literature. In this literature, as was done in the previous paragraph 2.1.3, a search will be made for relevant variables that influence the implementation process.

Successful health policy implementation is of great importance, and there have been some studies on this. First of all, Judge & Bauld (2006, p. 342) emphasise the importance of stakeholder dialogue in implementing active living policies, more stakeholder dialogue should increase the chances of a successful policy implementation. Secondly, Allen et al. (2020) conducted research on health policy implementation and identified a big number of factors that are important for whether or not implementation success is achieved: acceptability, adoption, appropriateness, compliance/fidelity, feasibility, penetration, sustainability, costs, adaptability, complexity, presence of champions, organizational culture and climate, policy implementation climate & readiness for implementation. Research by Oh et al. (2021) makes it clear that the degree of implementation success is largely context dependent, due to this it is not possible to say that variables will be relevant in every setting. In addition to the importance of context, the importance of ongoing evaluation and stakeholder engagement is also outlined in Oh et al.'s (2021) research.

A following relevant study is that by Forsyth (2023), like the studies by Judge & Bauld (2006) and Oh et al. (2021), Forsyth sees an important role for stakeholders in the active living policy implementation process. Forsyth mentions that cooperation between involved stakeholders is needed, and she warns that stakeholders rarely see active living as a top priority, making cooperation extra necessary. Besides stakeholder cooperation, Forsyth (2023) also mentions the importance of context and the absence of policies that may have conflicting interests, which was also previously reflected in Mazmanian & Sabatier's (1983) research.

Research by Rodriguez et al. (2016) also identifies some variables that influence whether an active living policy implementation is successful or not. Among other things, a policy should be implemented at the right geographical level, a policy should be generalisable in multiple settings, having financial resources is necessary, having public support is very important and, finally, time/timing is important. Glasgow & King (2009) mention the 5p model, in which the following five variables were central to a successful active living implementation: preparation, promotion, programmes, policy & physical projects.

In short, it can be concluded that implementation is also very important in specific active living policies. This chapter searched for variables that influence this implementation process. All the variables mentioned can be seen in figure 4 (paragraph 2.2.). This figure entails all the variables found, in order to give one clear overview.

## 2.2. Relevant variables

In the end, all the variables mentioned were collected in the previous sections. Paragraph 2.1.3. provided the variables from general literature on policy implementation, and paragraph 2.1.4. provided the variables from specific active living literature. In this section, the two will be compared and merged. By listing all the variables mentioned into one table, it was examined into which overarching groups these variables could be joined. In this way, almost all the variables mentioned in the literature were merged into eight new main variables for this study, namely: policy design,

context, stakeholder engagement, financial resources/costs, absence of conflicting policy goals, public support / community involvement, leadership and time & timing. Four variables mentioned in the literature do not come under an overarching main variable and are therefore not included in this study. Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983) identified 'structured implementation process' as a variable and Mthethwa (2012) identified 'nature of policy process' as a variable. These two were left out of this study because these variables are quite broad and deal with an entire implementation process and cannot be placed in a more specific category. The variable 'physical objects' was left out because in research by Glasgow & King (2009), the variable was vaguely formulated so its importance was not clear. Finally, the variable 'ongoing evaluation' by Oh et al. (2021) was left out because evaluation of policy implementation is conducted when assessing its effectiveness, and this is not part of this research.

As mentioned above, the remaining variables were merged into eight main variables relevant for this research and can be seen in figure 4 below. This figure systematically shows which variable from the literature belongs to which newly created main variable (shown in the top row of the figure).

	<b>Policy design</b>	<b>Social, political &amp; economic context</b>	<b>Stakeholder engagement</b>	<b>Financial resources / costs</b>	<b>Absence of conflicting policy goals</b>	<b>Public support / community involvement</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Time and timing</b>	<b>Remaining</b>
<b>Bhuyan et al. (2010)</b>	Policy	Context, operations & services	Stakeholders	Resources			Leadership		
<b>Mazmanian &amp; Sabatier (1983)</b>	Clear objectives	Required legislative power & support by sovereigns		Initial allocation of financial resources	No undermining by conflicting public policies		Leadership		Structured implementation process
<b>Mthethwa (2012)</b>	Policy content	Policy design and implementation context	Involved actors						Nature of policy process
<b>Allen et al. (2020)</b>	Appropriateness, compliance, sustainability, feasibility, complexity & policy implementation climate	Acceptability, adoption, penetration, adaptability, organizational culture & readiness for implementation		Costs			Presence of champions		
<b>Forsyth (2023)</b>		Context importance	Stakeholder cooperation		Absence of conflicting parties				
<b>Glasgow &amp; King (2009)</b>	Preparation, programmes & policy					Promotion			Physical objects
<b>Judge &amp; Bauld (2006)</b>			Stakeholder dialogue						
<b>Oh et al. (2021)</b>		Difference between contexts	Stakeholder engagement						Ongoing evaluation
<b>Rodriguez et al. (2016)</b>		Implementing at the right geographical level & generalisability in multiple settings		Financial resources		Public support		Time/Timing	

Figure 4, Relevant variables

As mentioned earlier and shown in figure 4, eight variables have been formed that will serve as the basis for the remainder of this study. The text below will briefly explain the choice for each of the variables. Here, the importance of the variable in question will become clear, and the literature from which this variable originates will be repeated once more.

- Policy design

First of all, the design itself is important, this is about whether goals in the policy are clear and achievable and whether the policy contains clear plans/strategies to achieve these goals. Allen et al. (2020) previously expressed the importance of multiple factors that can be seen as components that fall under the term policy design. The same goes for Glasgow & King (2009), they too expressed the importance of the programmes/policy itself in the success of implementation, as well as the preparation of this implementation.

Bhuyan et al. (2010) further specifies what the variable policy design entails, as can also be seen in figure 3. This general policy implementation literature indicated that the policy's goals, objectives and strategies should be clear and appropriate for successful policy implementation. Besides Bhuyan's study, the other two general implementation studies (Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983) and Mthethwa (2012)) also include factors that fall under policy design. Policy design is thus reflected in much of the literature reviewed, making it an important variable.

- (Social, political & economic) context

The importance of context was also mentioned in several active living implementation studies. It was mentioned by Oh et al. (2021) that implementation processes differ in different contexts. Rodriguez et al. (2016) added that successful policies should be generalisable in various settings, and the importance of context was also mentioned in Forsyth's (2023) study. Additionally, the study by Allen et al. (2020) discussed certain components that fall under the (social, political & economic) context too. The importance of context is also mentioned in every general implementation literature study. As a result, context, whether social, political and/or economic, appears in almost every literature reviewed. Therefore, the importance of the variable context is certainly clear. However, it is important to add that this variable interfaces with some other variables. For instance, social context is largely similar to the variable public support, and the same applies to economic context and the variable financial resources. For this reason, later on in this study, these variables will be merged. This will mean that social context will be included in the variable 'public support / community involvement', economic context will be merged with the variable '(financial) resources / costs' under the name economic context and political context will form its own variable.

- Stakeholder engagement

The concept of stakeholder engagement is found several times in the active living literature and is therefore considered an important variable in this study. Both Judge & Bauld (2006), Forsyth (2023) and Oh et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of stakeholder engagement to enable successful implementation. This engagement also includes cooperation between stakeholders. Without stakeholder engagement and cooperation, successful policy implementation will be difficult. Again, this is in line with the general implementation literature of Mthethwa (2012) and Bhuyan et al (2010). This last article by Bhuyan et al. warns against forgetting about stakeholder engagement. It mentions that although stakeholder engagement is often present in policy formulation, this is less often the case during the implementation process. But during the implementation process too, it is crucial that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the process, and cooperate with each other as much as possible, in order to maximise the chances of successful implementation.

- Public support / community involvement

A variable largely corresponding to (social) context and stakeholder engagement is public support/community involvement. The reason is that the community obviously belongs to relevant stakeholders as well. However, the role of this local community is considered very important, which is why a separate variable exists for this stakeholder. Public support / community involvement was particularly mentioned in the active living literature. Having community support is very important in order to successfully implement an active living policy. This is in part because these policies often involve measures that are directly reflected in the living environment of residents, such as infrastructure changes. The community is the actor that needs to be convinced to move more actively, making them a very important actor in the process. For example, if residents do not support the measures taken in their neighbourhood, they will be unlikely to use them. In addition, the opposite is also true, that when residents are involved in the process, they are more likely to actually use the measures taken. This importance of public support was given by Rodriguez et al. (2016) and was also discussed by Hoeijmakers et al. (2007). In addition, Glasgow & King (2009) discuss the promotion of the policy to earn public support in this way, and therefore also falls under the public support section.

In short, the most important thing about this variable, is that it was mainly discussed in the specific active living implementation literature. This is because active living policies have many interventions with direct impact on one's living environment, so support from residents will be extra important.

- (Financial) resources / costs

(Financial) resources is one of the most important variables because implementing a policy is simply impossible if these resources are lacking. Allen et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of costs, and Rodriguez et al. (2016) also concluded that financial resources are critical. This factor is also reflected in the general implementation literature. Here it is added that not only should there be sufficient financial budget, but also the distribution of which interventions receive which amounts of money is important (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983), because not every intervention can be funded equally. In addition, the study by Bhuyan et al (2010) also mentions the importance of (financial) resources.

- Absence of conflicting policy goals

The absence of conflicting policy goals is an important variable. Conflicting policy goals might not be present in every project, but when they are, they play an important role. This variable is very clearly identifiable, this is simply because when the goals of active living policies are undermined by conflicting goals of another policy, these goals get in each other's way. As a result, the degree of success/effectiveness of (one of) these goals is very likely to be reduced. This variable is mentioned both in the general implementation literature (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983) and in the active living literature (Forsyth, 2023).

- Leadership

To make active living policy implementation successful, it is important to have leaders present. When leadership is present it increases the likelihood of successful implementation. This is reflected in the research by Allen et al (2020) and according to them, this leadership consists of “field or practice leaders, people who can facilitate, and support practice change among professionals”. Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983, p. 41-42) come up with a similar description of the concept of leadership in the general implementation literature: “The leaders of the implementation agency possess substantial managerial and political skill and are committed to statutory goals.”. Bhuyan et al. (2010) add that it is

possible that the implementation process has different leaders than the design process, something that might be useful to remember during the analysis of this variable.

- Time & timing

Finally, time and timing matter, this was reflected by Rodriguez et al. (2016). Proper timing to implement a policy is important to maximise the chances of success this way. Timing is described by Rodriguez et al. (2016, p. 6) as:

Whether the timing of adoption and implementation is the result of internal or external factors, the alignment of when policies are adopted with other “windows of opportunity” is likely to play a role in their ultimate success.

Timing may be relevant as one period may be more suitable for a policy implementation than another. This can have various reasons, such as seasonal activities, economic changes, political changes, etc. Therefore, this variable is also strongly related to some others in this study. After determining the timing of implementation, it is also important to give the process sufficient time. Decisions should not be rushed, and a policy may not always be successful immediately after implementation, as it may need more time before it can be seen as successful.

### 2.3. Conceptual framework

Based on the previous sections, key concepts for this research have been identified. Thanks to the literature review, this led to the following conceptual models, in order to answer the research question via this way. The conceptual models are shown below in figure 5 & 6.

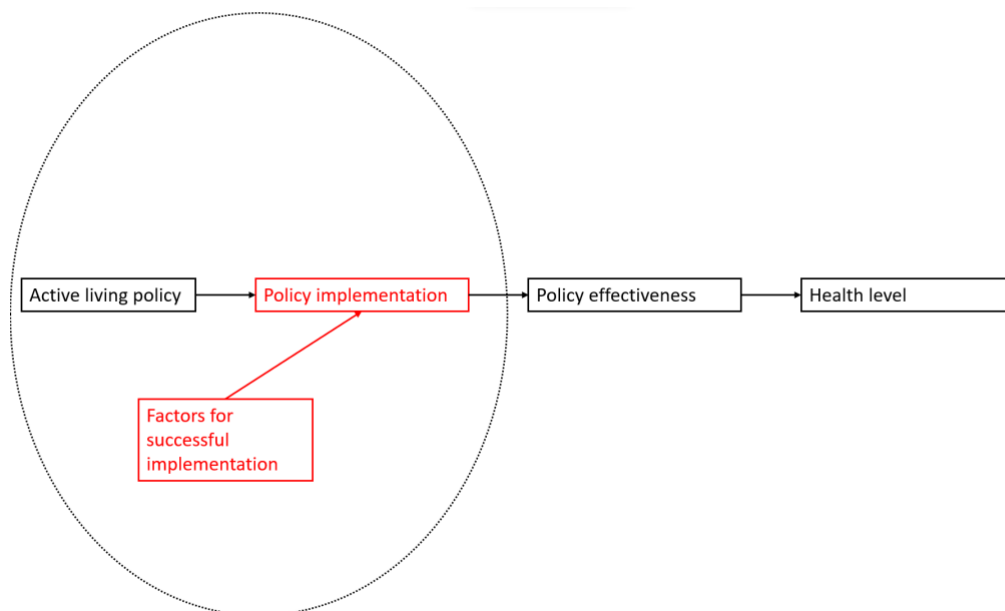


Figure 5, Conceptual model A

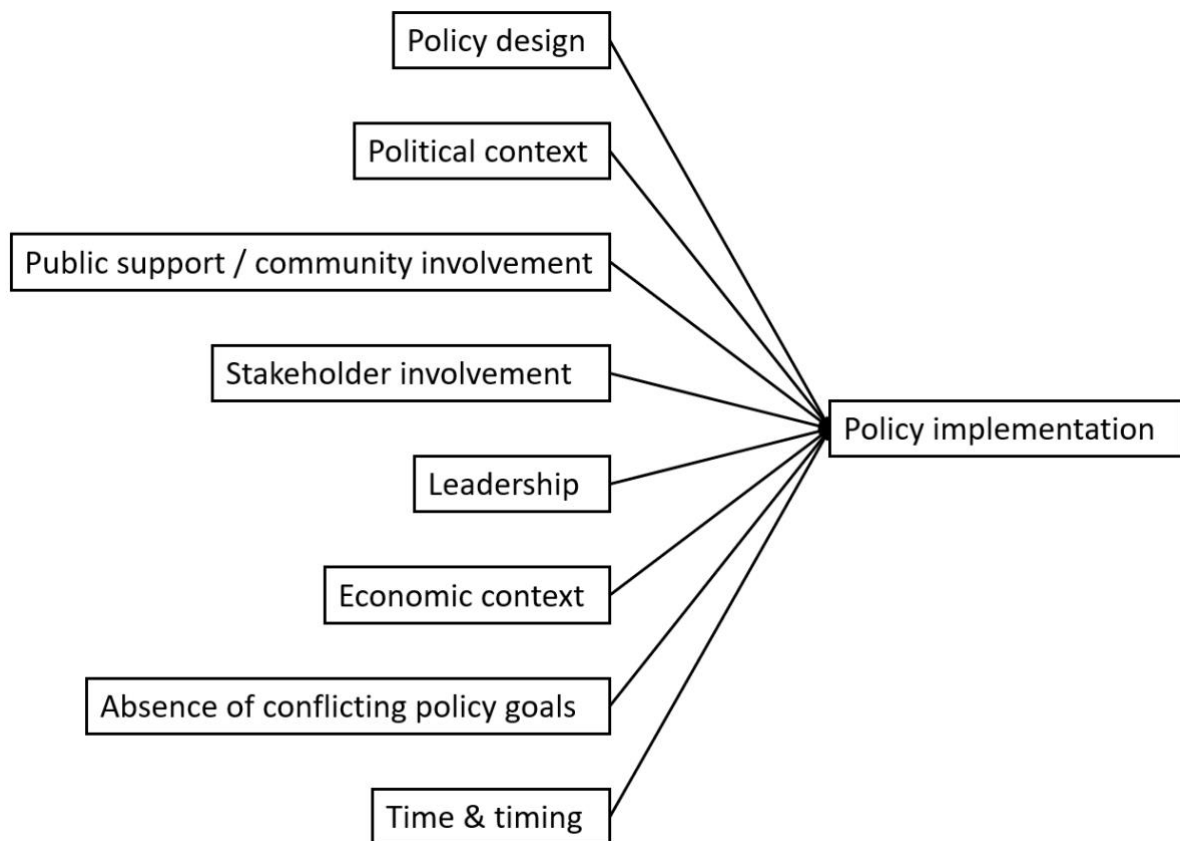


Figure 6, Conceptual model B (zoomed in on model A)

First of all, figure 5 shows the zoomed-out conceptual model of this study. First, we see the variable 'active living policy'. After designing this policy, this leads to the implementation of the design. Also, this implementation is influenced by some factors that lead to (un)successful implementation. What these specific factors are can be seen in figure 6. The variable policy implementation ultimately leads to a degree of effectiveness, which will influence the health level of a certain area. As indicated earlier, this study is limited to policy design and policy implementation only and does not look at its effects. In the conceptual model, this is indicated by the dotted line, with only the variables within the area of this dotted line being part of this research, with even further specific focus on the red section/figure 6. As mentioned, figure 6 zooms in on the red part of figure 5, showing which factors actually are important for (un)successful policy implementation. The chosen factors/variables were chosen based on the literature review. First, in paragraph 2.1.3. *Policy implementation*, the study looked at what factors are of importance in implementing a policy. Then, in paragraph 2.1.4. *Active living policy implementation*, factors that specifically applied to active living were looked at. These two chapters were compared with each other to look for overarching factors, which thus recurred in both the general implementation literature and the active living implementation literature. The factors/variables that matched, and were chosen for this reason, can be found next in the operationalisation part and in figure 6.

## 2.4. Operationalisation

Having chosen the eight variables and formed the conceptual model based on them, it is important to operationalise the variables. This involves making these variables measurable. For each variable, it is made clear what exactly it contains, and what questions are asked to make this variable measurable.

What these interview questions actually are will become clear in the text below, here these questions are drawn up in English, in the interview guide (see appendices) they can be found in Dutch.

- **Policy design**

Policy design is about the extent to which policy goals are realistic and feasible, in addition it is important that if during the process it turns out that this is not the case, the policy design is flexible enough to be adjusted. Two questions accompany this variable:

- To what extent were realistic goals set during the policy design process?
- Were any changes needed in the policy design during implementation in order to successfully implement the policy?

- **Political context**

Political context is an important variable because politics logically has major influences on policy plans and their implementation. For this reason, it is important to find out what these influences of (local) politics actually entail.

To reiterate, compared to paragraph 2.2. and figure 4, this variable no longer consists of both social, political and economic context, as social and economic context overlapped with other variables. For this reason, this variable now consists only of political context, social context falls under the variable 'public support / community involvement', economic context is merged with the variable 'financial resources / costs' (and will continue under the name economic context).

- How did local politics influence policy implementation?
- Are there specific local political parties that are strong supporters or opponents of the policy?

- **Public support / community involvement (social context)**

This variable, as the name suggests, investigates the extent to which residents are involved in the design and implementation process, and whether there is support among these residents for the policy implemented. The two associated questions are:

- How are residents involved in the process?
- Is there support among residents for the policy?

- **Stakeholder engagement**

The variable stakeholder engagement investigates the relationship between relevant actors during the process. Important here is to find out who the most influential stakeholders are, and how stakeholders cooperate with each other. This variable also has two associated questions:

- What did the cooperation between relevant stakeholders look like during the implementation process?
- Which stakeholders were most influential?

- **Leadership**

The variable leadership connects to the variable stakeholder engagement. With this variable, it is important to find out whether leadership persons or organisations were present during stakeholder cooperation, and whether this possible leadership influenced the implementation process. The corresponding question is:

- What role did leadership play during to implementation?

- **Economic context**

(Financial) resources concern all costs involved in implementing active living policies, making it a fairly broad variable that is also likely to be context dependent. Costs to consider are likely to be: investments in infrastructure, maintenance costs, costs of drafting the policy itself, promotional campaigns, etc. This variable examines to what extent there was availability to financial resources, and whether there were financial challenges in the process. The corresponding question is:

- Were there any financial challenges in implementing the policy? If so, which ones?

- **Absence of conflicting policy goals**

This variable is quite straightforward, namely it examines whether there have been goals in other policies that have interfered with goals in the active living policy, or made their implementation more difficult. The corresponding question is:

- Were there conflicting policy goals that complicated the implementation? If so, how was this dealt with?

- **Time & timing**

The last variable concerns time and timing. This concerns both whether policy implementation itself was given sufficient time, and whether a specific moment was chosen to implement the policy. The latter question could be related to external factors, for example, seasonal activities, elections, covid or possible other factors. The two related questions are:

- How did the timing of implementation affect the outcome? Were there specific times or periods that were favourable or unfavourable to implementation?
- Was implementation of the policy given sufficient time before it was determined whether or not it was successful?

Besides these questions about the chosen variables, there will be questions in the interview guide about the actual content of the policy, this will be started with in the interviews. The interviews will end by asking whether there were any variables of interest that were overlooked in the conceptual model.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research strategy

In this study, the choice was made to use a comparative case study. This means that two Dutch municipalities have been compared in terms of active living policy design and especially in terms of active living policy implementation. The chosen cases have been compared based on the variables set up in the conceptual model (figure 5&6). This comparative case study tried to analyse why the implementation of active living policies might be more successful in one municipality than in the other. This is done by comparing the implementation process based on the chosen variables, with the possibility that new variables may come to light while conducting the study not being excluded.

The two chosen municipalities are comparable to each other in terms of socio-economic background and size, this way reducing the chance that results are being influenced by external factors. A comparative case study was chosen to provide a clearer picture of implementation processes in Dutch municipalities, which would be more limited when dealing with only one municipality. In this way, the generalizability is higher in comparison to a single case study, which is explained by Goodrich (2014, p.3):

Comparative case studies cover two or more cases in a way that produces more generalizable knowledge about causal questions – how and why particular programmes or policies work or fail to work.

### 3.2. Research methods, data collection & data analysis

To answer the main question and sub-questions, this research is a qualitative study. A deliberate choice was made to focus on a relatively small number of municipalities in order to obtain in-depth knowledge on health policy at these locations. Quantitative research is less likely to obtain in-depth knowledge on a specific issue (Vogt, 2011), making it a less suitable method. In contrast, qualitative research is not about mapping figures, but on exploring and providing insight into a theme or issue (Reulink & Lindeman, 2005). Qualitative research thus provides more depth, making it a more appropriate method for this research, and specifically for dealing with a select number of cases. Because in-depth knowledge is thus required when conducting a case study.

In terms of data collection, a literature review was done first, to provide insights into studies that have already taken place in this field. This literature review provided a strong foundation for the remainder of this study and is supplemented throughout the study. Next, policy documents from relevant municipalities were studied. These include environmental visions, health monitors, etc. These policy documents gave a clear indication of the visions of

Interviewee:	Organization/function:	Date:
<i>Kanaleneiland (Utrecht)</i>		
AA	Social architect, Utrecht municipality	08-07-2024
BB	Advisor mobility behaviour, Utrecht municipality	08-08-2024
CC	Traffic advisor, district Zuid-West	26-08-2024
DD	District advisor, district Kanaleneiland	26-08-2024
<i>Vinkhuizen (Groningen)</i>		
A	Researcher at Hanze University of Applied Sciences & project leader Active Living initiative Vinkhuizen	02-07-2024
B	Groningen municipality, mobility department	08-08-2024
C	Project manager bureau PAU	05-09-2024
D	Researcher at Hanze University of Applied Sciences	27-08-2024
E	Vinkhuizen resident & traffic co-ordinator on behalf of residents' association Vinkhuizen	03-09-2024

Figure 7, Conducted interviews overview

different municipalities. To extend this further, interviews took place. These include interviews with regional policymakers and experts to provide an even clearer picture of local policies. The interviews, both with policy makers and experts, are semi-structured. Questions have been prepared in advance in an interview guide. An overview of all the conducted interviews can be found in figure 7. The advantage of a semi-structured interview is that it combines strictness in the topics covered and flexibility in the exchange (Schwab, 2021). Thus, in this way, there is a structured interview on the relevant themes while leaving room for the respondent's own input.

For data analysis, the interviews have been transcribed. Then the coding process started, using the programme Atlas.Ti. through coding, relevant parts could be connected, in order to draw connections and conclusions from them. The coding is done in two steps, firstly open/axial coding. Here, initial codes were assigned to different parts of the text in the transcripts in order to identify the theme of this piece of text. Next, selective coding was done, meaning that the initial codes were linked and merged when there are overarching themes. These overarching themes largely correspond with the different variables of the conceptual model. This form of analysis made the data for the results chapters very structured, which made writing these chapters easier.

### 3.3. Validity & reliability

#### 3.3.1. Validity

Regarding the validity of this study, two types of validity can be considered: internal and external validity. First, external validity. Because a qualitative, (comparative) case study is conducted between a smaller number of municipalities, it will be more difficult to generalise results to the rest of the Netherlands (however, the generalizability is still higher in comparison to a single case study). This is because each city and municipality has its own unique characteristics that can explain health problems (Vlahov, 2015). Causes for a successful or less successful health policy implementation in the treated municipalities therefore do not necessarily apply to other municipalities in the Netherlands. Because research is only conducted on a small number of municipalities, the results are largely site-specific, making knowledge generated not transferable or difficult to transfer (Grant, 2018). For this reason, the external validity of the study is relatively low.

Internal validity is about whether the research methods chosen actually studies the linkages that should be studied (McDermott, 2011). This involves ensuring that relationships are actually the result of the variables under investigation, and not the result of external factors. To ensure that these relationships are not the result of external factors, different research methods will be used, such as literature review and interviews. When the outcomes of these support each other, credibility, and thus internal validity, is up. Measures have also been taken during the interviews to ensure internal validity. In fact, respondents of different municipalities were asked the same questions. In this way, the same variables were able to be examined in different municipalities. Also, when selecting the cases, care has been taken to ensure that the municipalities are similar in terms of socio-economic background and size. In this way, the chance of external factors causing the results is minimised, thereby keeping internal validity high.

#### 3.3.2. Reliability

In the study, high reliability is ensured because data is collected through different means. In fact, there are several types of sources from which information is collected. These sources are literature describing general theories, policy documents specifically applicable to the municipalities in question and interviews with policy makers / experts. For this reason, there is triangulation in the research process. "Triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies

in the study of the same phenomenon." (Denzin, 2007, p. 1). This triangulation ensured higher reliability in research. This is because it looks at the situation through different angles. It is therefore possible to test whether the results from the policy document analysis and the interviews match. When this is the case, the reliability is higher than if information was collected only through one method. Data analysis also ensures high reliability in the study. This is because the coding process used the same codes for each policy paper and interview. This ensured that all data has been analysed through the same method, thus ensuring high reliability.

### 3.4. Case selection

For the case selection, cases were searched for that are comparable on some criteria. This way, it can be investigated which conditions play a role in the implementation process of both cases, and these conditions can be properly compared. In this way, it will become clear whether these conditions are largely the same in both cases, or whether there are major differences between the two cases. Within the chosen cities, we will further zoom in on a single neighbourhood in both cities. In doing so, the policy implementation process is thus examined at both the city level and the neighbourhood level. It should be mentioned here that an attempt is made to focus as much as possible on the neighbourhood level, however, these policies do obviously largely correspond to the city policies so the two cannot be completely separated.

The three criteria on which both cases were selected are as follows:

- A large Dutch city, with more than 200,000 inhabitants.
- An active living/mobility policy must already be in place.
- Regarding the specific neighbourhood: a neighbourhood with a low socio-economic status, i.e. a lower socio-economic status compared to other neighbourhoods in the city.

A large city was chosen because this is often where the most comprehensive active living policies are present. Obviously, these cities must already have an active living/mobility policy in place, simply for the reason that if this policy is not there, it cannot be implemented. Regarding the latter criteria, inspiration was taken from an article by Keuchenius (2022), this article quotes Van der Krabben, in which he mentions that the biggest challenges for creating an exercise-friendly space are in existing neighbourhoods, where many inhabitants have a low socio-economic status. This makes neighbourhoods with a lower socio-economic status interesting to investigate, as it can thus be seen whether more implementation problems are experienced here compared to the rest of the city.

Ultimately, the cities of Utrecht and Groningen were chosen. Both cities can be seen as frontrunners in the field of active mobility policies, and both have more than 200,000 inhabitants. Both cities have also drawn up a comprehensive mobility policy for the period up to 2040, with a strong focus on promoting cycling and walking. With this, both cities meet the first two criteria, then a search was made for a neighbourhood in both cities with a relatively low socio-economic status. This choice eventually fell on the Utrecht district Kanaleneiland and the Groningen district Vinkhuizen, in both districts attempts were made to improve active mobility there. A more detailed description of Utrecht, Groningen, Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen can be found in the relevant chapters 4 and 5.

### 3.5. Defining implementation success

In the previous paragraph, it became clear which two cities/neighbourhoods form the cases for the remainder of this research. These two cases will be discussed using the variables found, which can be seen in the conceptual model. Ultimately, this will paint a picture about the extent to which active

living policies have been successfully implemented or not in both cases. The last task left of this method chapter is to clarify how this implementation success is determined.

Preferably, this is done by simply comparing the predetermined goals and/or plans with the realised interventions. The more predefined goals/plans are realised in reality, the more successful the implementation can be considered. However, when this method is not possible, another method is applied. In that case, the degree of satisfaction of the parties involved is assessed. This satisfaction of persons or organisations involved will give a clear picture of the successfulness of the implementation process if necessary.

## 4. Results: Utrecht - Kanaleneiland

### 4.1. Case description

The city of Utrecht is a frontrunner in health, not only nationally but also internationally. Just recently, the Utrecht region was named leader in European health innovation by the European Commission (Provincie Utrecht, 2024), where, among other things, the healthy urban living environment played a major role. So it is certain that a lot of attention in the city goes towards a healthy living environment, and active living/active mobility also plays a major role in this. Keuchenius' article (2022) showed that implementation is most difficult in neighbourhoods with a low socio-economic status, and this makes it extra interesting to focus on Kanaleneiland. This way, it can be examined whether Utrecht's relatively successful policy is difficult to implement in this low socio-economic neighbourhood.

Kanaleneiland is located in the southwest of the city of Utrecht (as can be seen in the dark red part of figure 8. and has a population of over 17 thousand, a large part of which consists of people with a migration background. The neighbourhood has several problems, such as many children growing up in poverty, fewer young people graduating from school and poor health (Gemeente Utrecht, n.d.). These health problems could be reduced with a successful active living policy, and of course with its implementation.

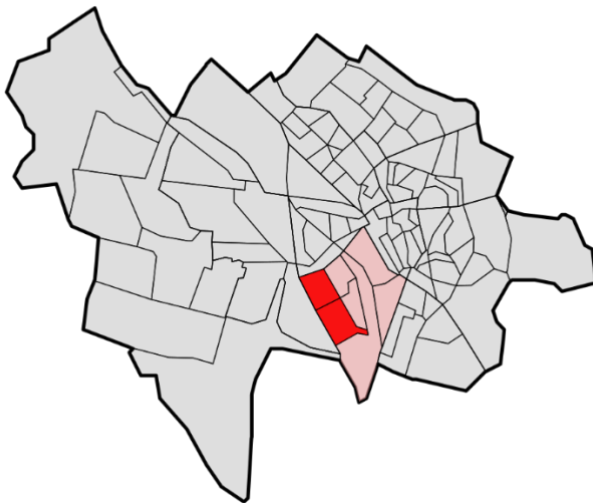


Figure 8, Location Kanaleneiland in the city of Utrecht (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek)

### 4.2. Policy analysis

Before looking at the implementation process in both districts, it is first important to identify what the policy actually entails. As mentioned earlier, the policy implementation cannot be seen separately from the policy design, which is why this policy design will be discussed first. These designs are discussed on two geographical scales, first the policy for the entire city, and then the policy for the specific neighbourhood.

#### 4.2.1. Policy in Utrecht

This chapter analyses the content of the active living policy for the city of Utrecht. These can be found in the city's mobility vision (Gemeente Utrecht, 2021), within this mobility vision, the relevant

chapters regarding walking and cycling are examined. The content of these is systematised in this chapter according to the framework of Winters et al. (2017) (found in paragraph 2.1.2.), here the policy design is divided into four types of measures: Society-Level, City-Level, Route-Level & Individual-Oriented.

First of all, the Society-Level (Gemeente Utrecht, 2021):

One measure that falls under this level is to give cyclists, and especially pedestrians, preference over cars. This creates areas where cars cannot be used, and walking and cycling are thus automatically encouraged. This is particularly applied in the busiest areas of the city, also known as A-zones. These areas include the city centre, the Utrecht Science Park and the Leidsche Rijn Centre, in these areas the priority is given to the pedestrian, with the cyclist present in the area as a guest. In addition, it is also a goal to improve pedestrian friendliness around public transport stations, and this is also a goal fitting the Society-Level. In this way, residents are more likely to use public transport, and since a trip on public transport is in most cases preceded by a trip on foot or by bike, this can also be seen as a measure that promotes active living.

Second, the City-Level (Gemeente Utrecht, 2021):

This level is about smart use of land-use policies ensuring that amenities are close together, resulting in shorter travel distances that can be done on foot or by bike. This is another focus in Utrecht; the city aspires to a smart layout of each individual neighbourhood. By providing each neighbourhood with a function mix of level, working and recreation, residents are less likely to be forced to travel longer distances, and distances can be more easily travelled actively. Stations, shopping centres, schools, elderly centres, health centres, sports centres and parks are mentioned as amenities that should be easily accessible (preferably on foot).

Next, the Route-Level (Gemeente Utrecht, 2021):

Many policy goals in Utrecht fall under the Route-Level. These include investments in infrastructure that promote both walking and/or cycling. Among other things, walking routes will be created in Utrecht, these routes should be located in an attractive space to stay in between walking, this can be done through benches, terraces, play areas and greenery. All these paths and routes will be made free of obstacles where possible, to promote good flow, obstacles to think of include busy roads and tram tracks. These walking network should serve not only for routes from A to B, but also as recreational routes. In this way, people can walk and/or run in their spare time in a healthy and attractive living environment. In addition, it is a goal of the municipality of Utrecht to make these walking routes as inclusive as possible so that everyone can use them, including people with disabilities, people with wheelchairs, people with children and the visually impaired. Intersections should be easy and safe to cross, with short crossing lengths and waiting times.

Also in terms of cycling, routes should be as comfortable and safe as possible in the city. Utrecht aims to have attractive cycling networks, whereby the city can be seen as a world-class cycling city. The biggest challenge here lies primarily in accommodating the expected growth in the number of bicycle users. To do this, existing bike paths will be widened where possible, and bicycle users will be spread over different routes, thus making overly busy points calmer. In addition, the municipality wants to better connect main routes to the regional network, in order to improve accessibility from surrounding villages and towns. Finally, Utrecht wants to separate slow bicycle traffic from faster (electric) bicycle traffic, to increase safety.

Finally, Individual-Oriented Policies (Gemeente Utrecht, 2021):

These measures concern persuading people to cycle or walk more through campaigns, for example. In Utrecht, this is addressed by the city trying to improve the cycling skills of residents, so that this will ensure more safety on bike paths, which in turn will make people more likely to take to their bikes. Individual-Oriented Policies are also related to the aforementioned Route-Level, which mentioned that new cycling routes are being constructed. However, this does not mean that cyclists will use these routes, so this needs to be actively pointed out to cyclists. This will be done through campaigns, information at choice points and using public infrastructure works to highlight alternative routes.

#### 4.2.2. Policy in Kanaleneiland

The previous paragraph discussed the general policy regarding active living for the city of Utrecht. Where this is important for context, the focus of this case is as much as possible specifically on the Kanaleneiland neighbourhood. For this reason, this chapter discusses the active living policy for the Kanaleneiland district.

However, Kanaleneiland's policy will differ little from Utrecht's, for the logical reason that Kanaleneiland is part of the city of Utrecht. Whereas the previous paragraph described Utrecht's more general policy objectives, this paragraph will be more specific about how they are expressed in the specific neighbourhood. The measures in the Kanaleneiland district can be divided into two of these four levels: Society-Level & Route-Level.

Society-Level (Gemeente Utrecht, 2022):

This level is about making car traffic less attractive in Utrecht, thus indirectly encouraging walking and cycling. Making car use less attractive will be done in four different ways in Kanaleneiland. First, roads will be cut up, meaning that these roads will no longer be throughways for cars, but they will be for bicycles and pedestrians. An illustration of what these cut-up roads look like is shown in figure 9 on the right. Secondly, on some roads the speed limit will go down from 50 to 30 kilometres per hour. Third, roads will be narrowed, again making driving a car less attractive here. Fourth, paid parking will be started in parts of the neighbourhood.

Route-Level (Gemeente Utrecht, 2022):

Whereas the Society-Level is still about indirect promotion of walking and cycling, the Route-Level is about direct promotion of walking and cycling. First of all, new bicycle routes will be constructed in the district, running in an east-west direction. This will ensure better accessibility of the district by bicycle. Also, the existing cycle network in the neighbourhood will be made more attractive and safer, there will be more crossing points, the realisation of cycle streets will be considered, there will be more lighting, clearer signposting and markings and more opportunities to park bikes. As for bicycle crossing points, there will also be more of them for pedestrians. As for the direct promotions for pedestrians, they largely match the indirect ones. The narrowing of roads for example. Besides being an indirect promotion of walking because it discourages car use, it already serves as a direct promotion of walking because the modification simply entails more physical space for the pedestrian.



Figure 9, Cut-up road example (Gemeente Utrecht, 2022)

### 4.3. Implementation success

Before looking at the factors influencing the implementation process in Utrecht - Kanaleneiland, it is first important to identify the extent to which the policies outlined earlier have or have not been implemented by now.

Respondent DD mentioned that active mobility promotion plans have existed since 2002. However, for many years it was not possible to implement these plans, mainly for financial reasons. According to him, this changed a few years ago due to more financial opportunities from the national government; there are now more concrete plans, some of which are already being implemented. As mentioned earlier, these current mobility plans for Utrecht were drawn up in the year 2021 and apply until the year 2040. The policy thus covers a 19-year time span, from 2021 to 2040, where today in 2024 we are still relatively in the early stages of implementation. Nevertheless, numerous projects are already underway or in preparation in the city. In Kanaleneiland, this currently concerns several projects, three of which include a focus on promoting active mobility. These three projects will be described below, all of which are currently in the (preparatory) implementation phase.

- Redesigning Vasco da Gamalaan and surroundings (Gemeente Utrecht, n.d.)

The reason for this redesign is that the sewer in the street needs to be renewed. Respondents CC & DD mentioned that when Utrecht has reason to tackle one specific issue, the whole area is tackled immediately in many occasions, and this is also the case with Vasco da Gamalaan. The redesign will create more space for pedestrians and cyclists, the maximum speed for cars will be reduced to 30 kilometres per hour, streets will be made narrower, there will be more crossing points and a bicycle route will be constructed. For this particular project, it is no longer just about a vision, but the concrete plans are already in preparation, to start construction in 2026. The project has therefore been definitively adopted.

- Redesigning Afrikalaan and its surroundings (Gemeente Utrecht, n.d.)

The reasoning for the project surroundings Afrikalaan is exactly the same as that of Vasco da Gamalaan. Because of the need to replace the sewers, the entire area will be tackled immediately. In terms of active mobility, the same measures will therefore be taken as outlined for the Vasco da Gamalaan area. This project is also definitively fixed, and is currently being prepared for the construction phase, starting in 2027.

- Redesigning Bernadottelaan, Bevinlaan and surroundings (Gemeente Utrecht, n.d.)

Again, this redevelopment is largely similar to the two previously mentioned. The area will undergo a large-scale redevelopment. What measures this entails with regard to active mobility is the same as for Vasco da Gamalaan and Afrikalaan and will therefore not be repeated. This project has also been finalised and will be constructed in the period 2025-2027.

### 4.4. Explanatory factors

This paragraph can be seen as the most important part of the results in Utrecht/Kanaleneiland. This is because it contains the core of the study, where the actual implementation of the active living policy will be analysed. This will be done separately for each variable. For each variable (which can also be found in the conceptual model), the role of this variable in Utrecht/Kanaleneiland will be discussed one by one. Finally, based on this paragraph, in chapter 4.5. a partial conclusion will be formed for the Utrecht - Kanaleneiland case, and then in combination with the chapters on the Groningen – Vinkhuizen case, a final conclusion can be formed.

#### 4.4.1. Policy design

First, the design of the policy itself, the importance of this design has been mentioned by several authors in the theory chapter. Regarding the analysis of the policy design, the policy goals, and the policy strategies to achieve these goals are looked at, as these goals and strategies need to be clear to increase the chances of successful implementation (Bhuyan et al., 2010). Besides the goals and strategies, the flexibility of the policy is also considered. If a certain policy goal or strategy turns out not to be feasible (or only to a limited extent), the policy should be flexible enough to be adjusted accordingly. This flexibility is particularly important in policy design, as it often happens that policy goals cannot be implemented 100% as conceived beforehand.

First, the policy goals, which are clearly described in the mobility vision (Gemeente Utrecht, 2021) for the city of Utrecht, and in the environment vision (Gemeente Utrecht, 2022) specifically for Kanaleneiland. This description of these goals is comprehensive and clear, and more importantly, realistic. Respondent BB mentions that the goals are realistic, in other words that the current plans can be implemented, and respondent DD also mentions this. Indeed, respondent DD says that the implementation of the plans is realistic, only that it takes a long time before they can be realised. The strategy of implementation is also clear, online it can be seen for each specific project in the city and district what the implementation will look like, and when it will happen (Gemeente Utrecht, n.d.). Third, as mentioned earlier, flexibility is the most important thing when it comes to policy design. This flexibility is there, respondent CC outlined. He mentioned that when there are sky-high ambitions for a project, there should always be enough flexibility left to implement only 70 to 80% of it. Simply because executing 100% of the plan is not always possible for various reasons. These reasons mostly relate to the economic context and are therefore also very much related to this variable, according to respondents AA, BB and CC. Respondent BB also outlines an example from which flexibility emerges. Namely, in the city there was a goal to eliminate X number of parking spaces within a few years, where after a while it turned out that this was not going fast enough. After this, the 'implementation speed' increased allowing the process to accelerate, so flexibility ensured that the plans were still successful.

#### 4.4.2. Political context

Second, the role of Utrecht local politics in active living policy implementation. The Utrecht coalition consists of five parties: GroenLinks, D66, PvdA, Student&Starter and Christenunie, and can therefore be seen as a left-oriented coalition. In general, this often benefits active living policies, as left-wing parties favour sustainability initiatives, and active mobility can also be seen as part of this. Respondent CC confirmed this for Utrecht, saying that Utrecht politics today follows a green, sustainable line. This ensures that throughout the city, and thus also in Kanaleneiland, a lot is possible in this area. Respondent AA also confirmed this, and sees big differences in Utrecht in the field of sustainable mobility because of this left-wing coalition, compared to, for example, a city like Rotterdam, which has a rather right-wing coalition, with Utrecht having more possibilities in this area. Respondent BB mentions that one may speak of luck as far as politics is concerned, because local politics is indeed very much in favour of sustainable mobility. He also mentioned that the current alderman for mobility is very much in favour of this, which helps to get various plans implemented. Particularly important is the fact that this trend has been going on for several years, so there is continuity. This way, various projects get enough time, which would not be there if new conflicting policy goals were drafted every four years from a new political ideology. What respondent BB names as the only 'downside' of local politics has to do with residents with a lower socio-economic status, of which there are a lot in the Kanaleneiland neighbourhood. Indeed, he argues that some perceptions of civil servants are too far removed from these residents. Although this should not directly be seen

as a negative point, but he did mention that this requires a different approach from politicians in these neighbourhoods with a lower socio-economic status, among other things to involve the residents in the process. But more on this would become clear in the next paragraph 4.4.3.

#### 4.4.3. Public support / community involvement

As the theory already showed, community involvement and thus public support is an important variable in the implementation process (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Because interventions to promote active living almost always involve measures in someone's direct living environment, this is extra important, and sometimes sensitive, as in this case.

What emerges is that, in Kanaleneiland, active mobility policies are a sensitive topic. As described in earlier chapters, the content of these measures means more space for cyclists and pedestrians, at the expense of cars, and this is a sensitive issue among some of Kanaleneiland's residents. Of course, opinions and preferences in any population always vary, so too in Kanaleneiland. But what emerges here is that a large proportion of residents are very dependent on the car, this is mentioned by respondent AA. As is known, many people with a low socio-economic status live in the neighbourhood, who are very dependent on the car. These people often have no money for public transport, and for long distances, walking and cycling are also not an option. Measures that discourage car use in the neighbourhood, such as paid parking for example, can make people unable to afford car use. According to AA, this can even cause people's entire social structure to collapse, and they are locked into their own neighbourhood, so to speak. AA mentioned that these policies are written at the city level, but they will not always work equally well in every neighbourhood. Respondent BB says that when drawing up active mobility policies, it is therefore difficult for some civil servants to identify with the wishes and concerns of these people. Respondent DD also mentioned that because people in a deprived neighbourhood like Kanaleneiland are often very dependent on their car, this creates some tension between wanting to promote active mobility, but also not wanting to abandon these residents.

There is therefore a mix in the neighbourhood between people who do support the policy and those who do not. For this reason, it is important to involve as many residents as possible in policy-making and implementation, in order to identify these wishes and preferences. Respondent DD says that a lot is done to try to involve residents. DD says that everyone gets the opportunity to be able to participate and think in policy-making, but that in practice it often turns out that this is only a small proportion of residents. Respondent CC did say that when a certain group completely disagrees with the entire policy, there is often little that can be done about it, because this is the political preference of the city. However, they do get the chance to react to specific measures, so that their wishes can also be taken into account in the plans to be formed. Respondent BB says that community involvement can sometimes be a tricky issue, because on the one hand you want a policy that involves as many people as possible, and on the other hand you don't want to go through a whole participation process for each individual measure. BB says that in neighbourhoods with a low socio-economic status it is especially difficult to get people to participate, for example because of cultural differences. According to BB, there are still gains to be made in the field of resident participation, and a more direct approach would work better. This should include going door-to-door, instead of sending e-mails inviting people to an information evening for example.

#### 4.4.4. Stakeholder engagement

Besides involving residents in the implementation process, other stakeholders are involved here, as mentioned earlier, residents can be seen as the most important stakeholders making them a separate variable in the study. In theory, the importance of stakeholder engagement was already emphasised

by both Judge & Bauld (2006), Forsyth (2023) and Oh et al. (2021), and it is also important in Kanaleneiland. First, it is important to identify what the relevant stakeholders in Kanaleneiland are.

By both respondent BB and respondent CC, the cyclists' union is identified as one of the most important stakeholders. There is frequent cooperation with the cyclists' union, which provides requested and unrequested advice to the municipality of Utrecht. Other stakeholders mentioned (by respondents BB, CC & DD) are entrepreneurs, schools, the province and public transport providers.

Secondly, it is important to look at how this cooperation between stakeholders works. Here, results were found similar to the involvement of residents. This is that all relevant stakeholders are involved, only that in some cases it is difficult to figure out how best to do this. Stakeholders do not always automatically come along to participate, and for this reason they need to be approached in an active way, according to respondent CC. This is done simply by, for example, walking into shop owners' doors to get input. Furthermore, there are periodic consultations between stakeholders such as the municipality, the province and public transport providers, according to CC, which also ensures smooth cooperation here. The same applies to consultations with the cyclists' union, respondent BB told us, here too there are periodic consultations with the municipality, which is very structured.

#### 4.4.5. Leadership

This variable is strongly related to the previous one, stakeholder engagement. To properly engage multiple stakeholders in the process, and to facilitate cooperation between them, it is important that one person or organisation takes the lead in this. This is because it increases the chances of successful implementation (Allen et al., 2020).

In Utrecht and Kanaleneiland, clear leaders can be found, as there are two, depending on the size and scale level of the project. For the larger projects in Utrecht, there is in fact an environment manager who takes the leading role, respondent BB and respondent CC explained. This person is responsible for the environment, maintaining contacts, cooperation, participation, nuisance, etc. For smaller more specific projects, there is a project manager here in addition to the environment manager, who has similar tasks to the environment manager, only operating in a smaller playing field. Both the environment manager and the project manager are people who operate on behalf of the municipality, so the municipality has the leading role. Besides these managers, citizens' initiatives may also give residents a leading role, but in Kanaleneiland this is not/slightly the case, which means that the leadership here lies largely with the environment manager and/or project manager. CC explains that the importance of these managers as leading figures there is high. He says that the level of commitment and inventiveness of them can be very decisive as to whether or not a project becomes a success.

#### 4.4.6. Economic context

Economic context is one of the most important variables for the simple reason that active living policies cannot be implemented without financial resources, something that has been mentioned by almost every research in the theory chapter. As already mentioned, the economic context has a strong correlation with the political context. The active living projects in Kanaleneiland and Utrecht are almost all projects implemented on behalf of the municipality. Therefore, they are also dependent on money flows from this municipality, which in turn is partly dependent on money flows from the state. In this respect, Utrecht is fortunate that local politicians are great supporters of active forms of mobility, so the municipality is also willing to invest more in this. According to respondent DD, only since a few years ago there has been enough money to start actually implementing active living plans. Compared to 10 years ago, the financial situation has therefore improved considerably

when it comes to active living plans in Utrecht, but this does not mean that there are now unlimited financial resources available, and that all plans can be implemented 100%. Respondents AA and BB both mentioned that the Utrecht municipality is currently in a difficult financial situation. For this reason, the municipality has to make financial cuts in all areas, including mobility. The impact of the planned financial cuts on each project will be considered separately. For each project, consideration will be given to which ones will go ahead or not, whether they might go ahead in a more restrained form, whether they might be postponed, etc. Respondent BB reports that in this way, there is constant weighing up which interventions make the most impact with relatively the least money, or in other words, how to achieve the best possible result with the least amount of money. In practice, this has not yet led to projects being cancelled completely in Kanaleneiland, but it does happen more often that projects are implemented in a more restrained way, because there are fewer resources available, according to respondents AA, BB and CC. In this regard, it is beneficial that the policy plans are quite flexible, so these adjustments can still be made. In this way, successful implementation is still secured.

#### 4.4.7. Absence of conflicting policy goals

The next variable deals with conflicting policy goals, which could potentially hinder the policy goals in the field of active living. In Kanaleneiland too, there are issues that conflict with active living goals.

Within spatial planning, there are always conflicting policy goals for a certain area; you can only spend every square metre once, says respondent BB. In a densely populated city like Utrecht, and a densely populated neighbourhood like Kanaleneiland, this is even more relevant, because there is simply relatively little space.

In general, many conflicting policy goals can be found. For instance, besides mobility goals, various goals can be found in the field of housing, recreation, greenery, nature, etc. Not all of these policy goals can be fully implemented in every area, so compromises will have to be made. However, the interviews revealed that the issue that conflicts the most in the district is parking. As is known, there are places in Kanaleneiland that will be tried to keep cars out, for instance by removing parking spaces or by paid parking. However, this conflicts greatly with the interests of residents of low socio-economic status, who are highly dependent on car use, according to respondent AA. In a sense, then, it could be argued that this particular parking policy conflicts with policy goals that stand for more equal opportunities in the neighbourhood, because it reduces the opportunities of people. This is because the people who are very dependent on their car can't afford to pay for public transportation too, so they don't have an alternative to car use. This is for the simple reason that they cannot get rid of their car because they depend on it, and thus there is no money left for public transport. This removal of parking spaces is not only a problem for individuals, but respondent BB also mentions schools. Schools in the area are facing a shortage of teachers, so these schools often depend on teachers who come from outside Utrecht, and are therefore dependent on the car. If these teachers cannot park their car near the school, or if they have to spend a lot of money to do so, the chances of them wanting to come and work here decreases, which reinforces the teacher shortage.

That there are conflicting policy goals is thus established, then the next question is how to deal with these conflicting policy goals. Respondent DD reports that the general line is clear, which is that fewer cars and more greenery are aspired to. However, in addition to this general line, it is also important to map out what kind of conflicts this might entail, and where necessary this will lead to choices having to be made as to which policy goal is preferred over the others. Because it is obviously not possible to facilitate fewer cars and more green everywhere. In projects, there are various departments within the municipality that have a certain ambition on that theme (e.g. mobility, green, living, etc.). These

departments then enter into discussions with each other to jointly arrive at one design for a particular area, according to respondent CC. According to CC, compromises and agreements must then be made by all departments, and this is almost always successful. The variable stakeholder engagement plays an important role in this, so that it is clear from each stakeholder where which interests lie. As for the conflict around parking, this is resolved by various regulations giving certain people discounts on parking and public transport, according to respondent AA. While this may not reduce the entire conflict, it does resolve part of the issue, as it reduces financial concerns of residents.

So while there are certainly several conflicting policy goals in the Kanaleneiland neighbourhood, most of these do not cause problems in the implementation of active living measures, simply because different policy goals can be combined. However, parking remains an issue in the neighbourhood, but even here solutions are offered in terms of discounts on parking and public transport for people with less financial possibilities.

#### 4.4.8. Time & timing

In terms of time, no major problems were found for the Kanaleneiland case. The policy plans have been drawn up for the period up to 2040, so there are still plenty of years left for implementation, and this therefore does not cause any problems. There is also a clear time schedule attached to specific projects, which provides clarity. Of course, for measures in some cases there are deadlines attached, which brings some time pressure, and here again the flexibility of the policy plans comes in useful. When time is limited, this is solved in a similar way as what is done with limited financial resources. Namely, projects are then implemented in a more restrained form where necessary. There is also enough flexibility to accelerate project implementation where necessary.

Besides timing, the question is how to determine when a specific project will be implemented. First of all, it is of course important here whether the financial resources are available before a start can be made. In addition, respondent CC gives another example of what determines the timing of implementation. Namely, this is the example already sketched earlier that when, for instance, the sewer needs to be replaced, the entire environment is immediately tackled, including mobility. In this way, external factors such as, for example, the need to replace the sewer can be the starting signal for the implementation of active living policies. Respondent BB argues that the importance of timing also largely lies in not changing something radically at once, but to do it step by step. For example, when a car-free street is to be made, it is first important to have alternatives such as public transport and cycling infrastructure in place before the car-free street is realised. This way, residents will already slowly use more bicycles and public transport. As a result, making a street car-free becomes a less rigorous measure, as less car use was already taking place. This example shows that in some cases it can be more successful to implement a measure step by step, instead of realising everything at once.

#### 4.4.9. Others

At the end of all interviews, respondents were asked whether, apart from the eight variables discussed, any other variables influenced policy-making and implementation. Generally, this revealed that few other variables had been influential. The only one mentioned was the influence of national politics, this was done by both respondent BB and DD. BB says that the city of Utrecht has sustainability goals that in some cases are ahead of national plans, and that these national policies can therefore make implementation more difficult. To illustrate this, BB gives two examples in the field of mobility. First, Utrecht wants to install speed cameras in streets where the speed limit is reduced from 50 to 30 kilometres per hour. However, placing these speed cameras is not possible according to national regulations, making it difficult to enforce this speed reduction. Secondly, making

public transport more expensive is mentioned, which is also something with which the city itself has little influence on. This also logically stands in the way of active living goals by making car use more attractive.

In short, the only 'additional' variable found in Kanaleneiland was the role of national politics/regulations. In some cases, these national politics/regulations have an impeding effect on the implementation of active living policies.

#### 4.5. Sub-conclusion Utrecht - Kanaleneiland

For the Utrecht - Kanaleneiland case, it can be concluded that each of the factors found in theory, are important in practice in Kanaleneiland as well. The implementation of the active living policy is still in its early stages, but for now, this implementation is quite successful. This is both based on the fact that pre-set plans are/have been implemented for now, and that stakeholders seem to be largely satisfied with the implementation process (see paragraph 3.5). To summarise: one of the biggest strengths is the flexibility of the policy design, local politics is very much in favour of active living, public support is somewhat divided among residents but a lot is being done to involve the population, stakeholder cooperation is structured, partly thanks to the presence of leadership, financial difficulties exist but are not yet seen as problematic thanks to the flexibility, conflicting policy goals are well combined and there are no problems in terms of time and timing.

However, there is still a question of which factors, or which combination of factors, were most important in Utrecht - Kanaleneiland, and this will be answered next. Answering this question was done by looking at which topics were most often mentioned by respondents and looking at which topics were often mentioned in combination with one another.

The most important combination of variables is that of the political and the economic context. Political preferences ensure that there are sufficient economic resources to implement projects, and this is a big reason why the implementation of the active living policy in this case goes smoothly. In addition, very interesting results were found for the variable 'time & timing', namely that active living measures are often implemented when another part of the public space needs to be tackled. In this way, active living measures can be implemented together with other developments, such as sewer maintenance. In this way, a comprehensive approach is created in terms of changes in public space. What variable is related to almost every other variable is the policy design, and to be more specific, the flexibility of the policy design. This flexibility ensures that problems surrounding other variables can be resolved by slightly adjusting the design of the policy. This applies to economic problems, time problems, conflicting policy goals and public support problems. Problems regarding these variables are resolved by this flexibility, so these problems do not stand in the way of successful policy implementation. This has so far led to the first implementations of initial plans, and satisfaction among relevant stakeholders. Therefore, it can be concluded that the implementation of active living policy in Kanaleneiland is successful for the time being.

## 5. Results: Groningen - Vinkhuizen

### 5.1. Case description

The second case of this study is the Vinkhuizen district, which is a neighbourhood in the city of Groningen. As could be read before, Vinkhuizen is a neighbourhood with a low socio-economic status, while the city of Groningen is considered to be a frontrunner in terms of health. For instance, Groningen was declared the healthiest city in the Netherlands in 2022 (Boon et al., 2022).

Vinkhuizen is located in the northwest of Groningen (see figure 10) with a population of over 11 thousand. As already mentioned, the neighbourhood has several problems in the social and economic field, when compared to other parts of the city (Gemeente Groningen, n.d.). Several attempts have been made in Vinkhuizen to encourage movement in the area. A first attempt in 2016 failed at the implementation stage, so was mentioned by respondent A. Following this, a new attempt was launched in 2020, and this second attempt is the focus of this study.

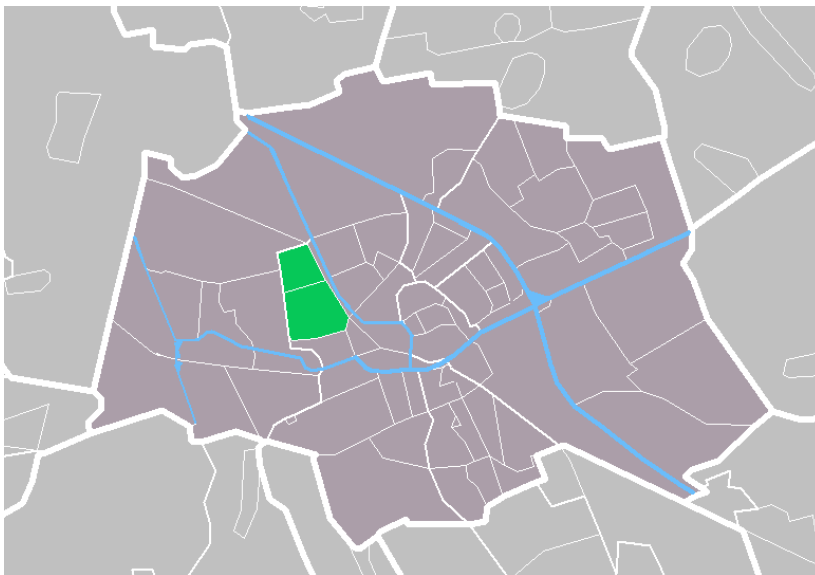


Figure 10, Location Vinkhuizen in the city of Groningen (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek)

### 5.2. Policy analysis

Before looking at the implementation process in Groningen - Vinkhuizen, it is first important to identify what the active living policy in the district actually entails. As mentioned earlier, the policy implementation cannot be seen separately from the policy design, which is why this policy design will be discussed first. These designs are discussed on two geographical scales, first the policy for the entire city, and then the policy for the specific neighbourhood.

#### 5.2.1. Policy in Groningen

This chapter analyses the content of the active living policy for the city of Groningen. These can be found in the city's mobility vision (Gemeente Groningen, 2021). Within this mobility vision, the relevant chapters regarding walking and cycling are examined. The content of these is systematised in this paragraph according to the framework of Winters et al. (2017) (found in chapter 2.1.2.), here the policy design is divided into four types of measures: Society-Level, City-Level, Route-Level & Individual-Oriented.

First of all, the Society-Level (Gemeente Groningen, 2021):

A measure which falls under this level is the aim to reduce the speed limit of all municipal roads in built-up areas from 50 km/h to 30 km/h. Also, more roads will be created where the car is the guest in relation to the bicycle and the maximum speed will be made low in these places, thus encouraging bicycle use. The second part of Society-Level measures involves making public transport more attractive, as this requires physical movements to stations, for example, and here too, attention is being paid to this in Groningen. This is done by improving walking routes towards public transport and building new ones where necessary.

Secondly, the City-Level (Gemeente Groningen, 2021):

This involves land-use policies that ensure that different amenities are close together and well connected, so that these shorter routes ensure that people travel them faster on foot or by bike. In existing built-up areas, this is done in Groningen by building new routes, and by shortening existing routes through more crossing points. When constructing new development sites, a prominent place should be given to the runner and cyclist, this ensures high connectivity within these sites and between sites.

Next, the Route-Level (Gemeente Groningen, 2021):

These are concrete investments in the infrastructure that promote walking and cycling. In Groningen, most measures fall under this level. Regarding walking, it is mainly about having sufficient space to walk, thereby improving both the comfort and safety of the pedestrian. Concrete measures for this include removing obstacles (such as terraces, parking spaces and shop displays) and placing benches along walking routes. As for cycling, it mainly concerns coping with heavy traffic on existing cycling routes. This is done by constructing, widening and maintaining cycle paths, but this is not possible everywhere because of physical obstacles. For this reason, efforts are also being made to spread bicycle traffic, as main routes are relieved. This is mainly done by diverting cyclists on these main routes via routes inside neighbourhoods.

Finally, Individual-Oriented Policies (Gemeente Groningen, 2021):

This involves persuading individuals to walk and cycle, through incentives, media efforts and campaigns. In Groningen, this component mainly concerns the pedestrian. This is because Groningen has had a bicycle network in place for a long time, and the focus towards the pedestrian only started later. For this reason, there is an extra focus on promoting walking in the city through various campaigns.

### 5.2.2. Policy in Vinkhuizen

As discussed earlier in the case description, the Groningen neighbourhood of Vinkhuizen has experienced great difficulties in the past to increase the level of exercise among residents. All this took place in the years 2016 to 2018. Despite several attempts to increase movement in the neighbourhood, these attempts were not successful (Keuchenius, 2022). Returning to the definition of policy implementation "the stage in the policy process concerned with turning policy intentions into action (John, 1998, p.204)", it can be argued that this was the stage in the process where things went wrong in the years 2016-2018 for Vinkhuizen. Respondent A indicated that the policy in place at the time did not adequately address the needs of residents in the neighbourhood. This caused changes in the infrastructure not to be used, or even demolished. However, the more detailed content of this previously failed policy implementation is as of now irrelevant, and this study will

focus on a new 'attempt' by the municipality to increase the level of movement in the neighbourhood.

Things improved in Vinkhuizen when a living lab was set up by the municipality of Groningen in 2020 to make the neighbourhood more exercise friendly. "A living lab is an experimental environment in which people, companies and education work together to develop and test new ideas, products or services in the 'real world', for example." (Saxion, 2023). In this way, the Groningen municipality is trying to change the neighbourhood using new forms of citizen involvement. The content of this project/policy is as follows. The project started by investigating what the then level of movement friendliness in the neighbourhood was, and then looked at how it could be increased. The research into movement friendliness in Vinkhuizen was done by setting up an app in which residents could individually indicate which spots contributed to movement friendliness, and which spots did not. In the end, all these individual places indicated by the residents were compared side by side. This way, it was possible to see whether the places indicated by individuals corresponded to each other, so that patterns could be established. After all the data obtained through the app was analysed (by both decision-makers and residents themselves), a few recurring themes were identified, respondent A outlined: greenery, grey, sports and play areas, walking routes & maintenance.

Based on these themes, the search for possible ideas and solutions to increase exercise-friendliness in the neighbourhood started. After several ideas came along, it was a resident who took the lead at one point, and from this ultimately came most of the content of the new policy, according to respondent A. Namely, this content focused on the topic of walking routes. When compared alongside the framework of Winter et al. (2017), the measures in this policy are all measures that fall under the so-called 'Route-Level Policy' (see paragraph 2.1.2). The first step in this policy is creating an art route, this art route involved a route of several kilometres along various art objects in the neighbourhood. Various studies were conducted into the accessibility, attractiveness and ease of the route, among other things. In this way, a route eventually emerged where people could travel the whole route, or a part of it, encouraging them to move. This art route was ultimately the starting shot of a form of policy in which several different routes through Vinkhuizen were created, including, for example, a sports route.

The ultimate main goal of the project/policy in Vinkhuizen was not only to encourage movement in the neighbourhood, and for this reason this was not examined on the basis of statistics after the project ended. In fact, a major goal of the project was also to see whether a new way of policy design/implementation, namely with a high degree of citizen participation, would ensure greater implementation success.

The Hanze University of Applied Sciences (n.d.) therefore describes the aim of the project as: 'The municipality wants to further improve the process of creating an exercise-friendly environment in cooperation with residents and other parties, so that residents eventually start moving more structurally. In doing so, the municipality would like to pay specific attention to residents who currently do not or little exercise'.

### 5.3. Implementation success

Before looking at the factors influencing the implementation process in Groningen - Vinkhuizen, it is first important to identify the extent to which the policies outlined earlier have or have not been implemented by now. In this way, the explanatory factors can be addressed in the next paragraph, based on the policy content and clarification as to how far plans have already been implemented.

First, the projects throughout the city of Groningen. This concerns progress towards the goals set in the 2021 mobility vision. This vision sets out general visions and objectives, what this implementation should look like in concrete terms has been drawn up in a special implementation programme (Gemeente Groningen, 2023). This implementation programme was drawn up in July 2023 and applies to the period until 2030. As for the policy plans of the city of Groningen, most of the plans were adopted in 2021, and their implementation has now been underway for over a year, since the summer of 2023.

Secondly and more importantly, the projects in the Vinkhuizen district. As seen in paragraph 5.2.2, the first project to encourage movement in the neighbourhood took place in the period 2016 to 2018. After this project failed, the next project was started in 2020, and completed just a few weeks back in 2024. Since for this project in Vinkhuizen, this means the entire implementation phase is already behind us, it is perfect to be able to look back on and examine. Because an open approach was used at the start of the project, no goals were set beforehand as to what should be implemented and when. As can be read in the previous paragraph, this became clearer during the project, through collaboration with residents. As possible themes that could be improved, greenery, grey, sports and play areas, walking routes & maintenance were identified. Whereas sports and play areas were created in the project in 2016 - 2018, which ultimately did not match residents' wishes, a different theme was identified this time. Through initiative from a neighbourhood resident, this led to one of these themes being seen as the main focus, namely walking routes. First, the walking route along various art objects was laid out in Vinkhuizen, and later this led to the construction of a sports route. The construction of these routes shows that the new approach with more citizen participation actually leads to the implementation of new interventions in the end.

## 5.4. Explanatory factors

This paragraph can be seen as the most important part of the results in Groningen/Vinkhuizen. This is because it contains the core of the study, where the actual implementation of the active living policy will be analysed. This will be done separately for each variable. For each variable (which can also be found in the conceptual model), the role of this variable in Groningen/Vinkhuizen will be discussed one by one. Finally, based on this chapter, in paragraph 5.5. a partial conclusion will be formed for the Groningen - Vinkhuizen case, and then in combination with the chapters on the Utrecht - Kanaleneiland case, a final conclusion can be formed.

### 5.4.1. Policy design

First, the design of the policy itself, the importance of this design has been mentioned by several authors in the theory chapter. Regarding the analysis of the policy design, the policy goals, and the policy strategies to achieve these goals are looked at, as these goals and strategies need to be clear to increase the chances of successful implementation (Bhuyan et al., 2010). Besides the goals and strategies, the flexibility of the policy is also considered. If a certain policy goal or strategy turns out not to be feasible (or only to a limited extent), the policy should be flexible enough to be adjusted accordingly. We first look at the city of Groningen, and then zoom in on the policy design in Vinkhuizen.

According to respondent B, realistic policy goals have been drawn up for the city of Groningen. As could be read in previous paragraphs, these goals were drawn up in the city's mobility vision (Gemeente Groningen, 2021). How it was determined that these goals can be considered realistic has to do with the economic context. This is because the goals are set realistically when looking at the available financial budget, about which more will become clear later in the economic context

paragraph. As for the strategies to achieve the policy goals, these are also clearly described. This is done in the so-called implementation programme (Gemeente Groningen, 2023), in which ambitions from the mobility vision are translated into concrete measures and projects. In this way, the strategies for specific projects are clear. Finally, there is also enough flexibility in the policy design, according to respondent B. It is indicated that, where necessary, projects can be implemented more quickly and/or that projects can be carried out in a more limited form, which both indicate flexibility.

In terms of design, something special was happening in Vinkhuizen itself. Respondent A outlined the goal of the project as follows 'Actually, the aim for us was mainly to see whether the new working method, i.e. using the app (there was an app in which residents could participate during the project), would lead to more or different exercise behaviour'. Because this way, measures were not determined beforehand but were created together with residents during the process. This therefore ensured that the strategy was to incorporate a lot of resident participation, but that it was not determined in advance what measures would be taken in the physical space. So for this reason, the project in Vinkhuizen was very flexible, which ultimately ensured a lot of success. The flexibility led to a lot of citizen participation and also to concrete measures to promote active mobility.

#### 5.4.2. Political context

Secondly, the role of politics in the field of active living implementation in Groningen and Vinkhuizen will be examined. First of all, it is important to note that the coalition in the municipality of Groningen consists of the following parties: GroenLinks, PvdA, Partij voor de Dieren, SP and Christenunie. This gives Groningen a very left- oriented coalition. This has certainly benefited the active living policy in the city and in the district, as these left-wing parties are generally strong supporters of sustainable forms of mobility such as cycling and walking. The coalition agreement between the parties also clearly states that car traffic should be reduced, and there should be more space for cyclists and pedestrians (Gemeente Groningen, 2022). So it can certainly be said that local politics can be seen as a great incentive for active forms of mobility, as all parties are unanimously in favour of it. This is confirmed by the respondents A, B & C.

In terms of the living lab set up in Vinkhuizen, local politics also proved to be a stimulus, according to the interview with respondent A. Earlier in this study, it was found that the biggest problems for active living policy implementation are found in neighbourhoods with low socio-economic status (Keuchenius, 2022). Vinkhuizen is also considered such a neighbourhood, and for these reasons local politics is already investing more attention and money in the neighbourhood, and this has also resulted in support for the active living initiatives in Vinkhuizen. So there is support from politics towards the neighbourhood, but what is remarkable is that this is not always perceived this way by residents. Respondent A mentions that residents are distrustful of the government. Respondent E, who is active on behalf of the Vinkhuizen residents' association, also mentions similar points. He says there is a gap in Vinkhuizen between political plans and residents' wishes. He says the residents' association is even disappointed by local politics. As an example of a political plan that does not match the residents' wishes, the construction of a better cycle link to the city centre is given, while most residents in Vinkhuizen have no interest in the city centre at all.

So what stands out in examining the role of politics in active living policy implementation is the difference between the support provided by politics, and the support experienced by residents. Something that also fits the next variable: public support / community involvement.

### 5.4.3. Public support / community involvement

As was already clear from the theory, having public support is very important in the implementation process (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Especially in the field of active living, this is an issue because measures to promote active mobility have a direct impact on the living environment of citizens, as is the case in Groningen and Vinkhuizen.

The municipality of Groningen also recognises the importance of this public support. In general, it can be said that the smaller scale a project/measure is, the more influence residents can have on it, this is clear from the interview with respondent B. She mentions that the large overarching plans, such as a mobility vision, that little citizen involvement can be found there. Although residents can have their say and react to this vision, this happens very little, simply because residents feel less involved. This changes when smaller projects are carried out, which involve concrete adjustments in people's own environment, making them feel more involved. Here, the municipality tries to involve residents as much as possible about how these projects are shaped.

However, the question of how best to involve residents remains a difficult one. As became clear in the previous paragraph, residents do not always feel that there is enough support from the municipality. A plan or a vision on which residents can submit an opinion, or react, does not seem sufficient to receive enough public support. This is not only because only a limited number of people do this, but also because with a small group of involved residents it is difficult to keep the representativeness of the neighbourhood residents high. Respondent D sums this up clearly, mentioning that municipalities would like residents to be involved, but that they still find it difficult how best to do this. Ensuring that citizen involvement is representative is also difficult she says, how to ensure that the voice of residents is actually heard, without it getting in the way of municipal procedures, routes and assignments. That residents themselves still indicate that their wishes do not fully correspond to municipal plans (respondent E) proves that the municipality can still take steps in this area, despite the fact that the motivation for it is present.

As for the living lab project in Vinkhuizen, community involvement was the key to its success. As mentioned earlier, involving residents was the core of the project, because this was the point at which previous attempts to promote movement in the neighbourhood failed. During the project, residents contributed to the design (the design of new walking routes for instance), and were constantly kept informed about the process, respondent A mentions. This involvement ensured that in this particular initiative, there was a lot of support among residents. Residents immediately see that ideas they raise are implemented by the municipality, which is very stimulating to create support. The art route is a perfect example of this, as this is an idea that was created by a resident, and thus actually ended up being implemented.

### 5.4.4. Stakeholder engagement

Active stakeholder engagement is also an important variable for successful implementation of a policy plan. Bhuyan et al. (2010) cautioned as that this stakeholder involvement is often present in plan formulation but should also not be forgotten in plan implementation.

So what is perhaps the most important stakeholder is the inhabitant, for this reason this stakeholder has been included as a separate variable. What other stakeholders besides residents are important is constantly different for each case, respondent D mentioned, and the way of cooperation is also very context-dependent. The question as to which stakeholders are involved and how, can therefore hardly be answered clearly, as this varies constantly. Nevertheless, it is clear from the interviews that this cooperation does exist, so that no problems are observed in Groningen in the area of cooperation

between stakeholders. Stakeholders that were further often named as relevant (by respondents B, C & D) are entrepreneurs, public transport providers, the cyclists' union and design agencies.

When looking at the project in Vinkhuizen, it emerges that it was a relatively small-scale project, which meant that relatively few stakeholders were involved. Of course, the municipality of Groningen is an important stakeholder, because they initiated the project, and the importance of residents as stakeholders has also been highlighted several times. Respondent A also mentioned a design agency that was responsible for marking various walking routes, and there was cooperation with a social team, which ensured good contact with the residents. Apart from these stakeholders, there have been contacts with other parties, but these parties have generally had little influence in the project and therefore cannot be seen as relevant stakeholders. To reiterate: in this project, the municipality and residents were by far the most important stakeholders.

#### 5.4.5. Leadership

What is important within facilitating stakeholder collaboration is having leadership. This was already evident in the theory, here it was stated that the presence of leadership promotes collaboration, and thus enhances the likelihood of successful implementation. Respondents C and D reported that the leadership role can vary from one initiative to another. For example, when there is a citizens' initiative, these citizens are also in the lead themselves. Respondent E mentioned that it can sometimes be difficult to indicate where the lead lies, this can be either a municipality or a contractor. While, according to him, it is also sometimes still difficult to tell these apart, as they are intertwined when there are strong connections with contractors and people within the municipality.

So while it does not always have to be this way, (especially in large-scale projects) the leading role does often lie with the municipality. Respondent B mentions this about projects that promote cycling and walking in Groningen: 'But the projects that we pick up when it comes to pedestrians and cyclists: we're just in the lead on that ourselves, because we're paying for it, we're initiating it.'

Regardless of who is in the lead, the importance of being in the lead is confirmed in Vinkhuizen. Although individual residents were sporadically in the lead for specific ideas (such as the art route), respondent A and his colleague can be seen as the leaders (on behalf of the Groningen municipality) in the overall project. Respondent A reports: 'I think if we had stepped out at one point, everything would have just collapsed'. This quote is a perfect example of the importance of an ultimate responsible person assuming a leadership role, whether this is an individual or an organisation. This is simply because an entire project can therefore collapse if this leadership is absent. All in the end, the research by Allen et al (2020), which demonstrated the importance of leadership, is thus confirmed with this example from Vinkhuizen.

#### 5.4.6. Economic context

Almost every research paper in the theory chapter has already mentioned the importance of having enough financial resources available, of course for the logical reason that if these are not there, a plan cannot be implemented. This also applies to the city of Groningen and the Vinkhuizen district.

Although financial difficulties/challenges exist in almost every project, in Groningen and Vinkhuizen this has not (yet) hindered the implementation of the active living plans, and is not expected to become a hindrance in the short term. All this has to do with the political context, a variable with which economic context is strongly related. Because, as thus mentioned earlier, Groningen has a strong left-wing coalition, politicians are willing to invest sufficiently in active living projects/initiatives. Clear agreements have been made about the amount of money and its

distribution, and described in the coalition agreement (Gemeente Groningen, 2022). The financing of active living projects therefore consists of these funds from the municipalities, supplemented by subsidies from various bodies. As long as the current coalition in Groningen exists, until 2026, the budget is thus reserved for the implementation of the projects. This provides financial security for the coming years. For the longer term, respondent B mentions, there is less certainty. This is because it is simply not clear which political parties will form a coalition in the future, and what the priorities of these other coalitions will be. The same applies to the national government, because the municipality also depends on state funds. With a possible new national cabinet, you simply cannot be sure that funds to improve cycling or walking infrastructure, for example, will still be obtained. In case this happens (that a coalition or national cabinet comes up with different priorities) plans will have to be adjusted or postponed. But here it helps that, as indicated in paragraph 5.4.1, the policy plans are flexible enough to be adjusted where necessary.

Thus, although it is sometimes difficult to obtain financial resources, respondents D & E mention, no significant economic obstacles have (yet) arisen for the implementation of active living policies in Groningen. This also applied to the implemented project in Vinkhuizen. Respondent A reported that the municipality received 25,000 euros for the project, with the requirement that co-financing of the same amount was provided by subsidies from other parties, which eventually succeeded. As a result, the project in Vinkhuizen, as with Groningen in general, did not encounter any significant economic problems to make its implementation possible.

#### 5.4.7. Absence of conflicting policy goals

What stood out in the study of Groningen and Vinkhuizen was that the question was not so much whether there are conflicting policy goals, but how these conflicting policy goals are dealt with. In other words, how is it determined which plan is preferable to the other when both cannot be implemented together?

Within spatial planning, there are numerous goals that can be given to a certain area. However, it is impossible to allocate them all, not only for financial reasons, but also simply because the space does not exist. These considerations also exist in Groningen. Where one may want to use an area to improve the cycling infrastructure, another may want more greenery, another more parking spaces, another a bus line etcetera. Respondent E argues that within the municipality of Groningen, these diverse ambitions are not dealt with well enough. According to him, there are in fact not only conflicting policy goals within the municipality, but also conflicting projects. Respondent E explains that there is too little cooperation between different project groups, resulting in multiple policy plans being drawn up for the same area, while not all of them can be implemented. To illustrate this, respondent E gives an example from the past. Namely, this was the desire to build new blocks of flats while at the same time there was a desire from another group to build a ring road next to these flats. These two goals were difficult to combine. Although this is not a direct example of active living policy goals, it does indicate that there are easily conflicting goals within the spatial domain, and so too in Groningen, and the question remains how to determine which policy goals are preferred. For each individual case, this is a consideration that has to be made constantly within a municipality, respondent D argues. Choices have to be made by the alderman or a council, based on official advice, and what these choices ultimately are depends on political preferences. When it comes to mobility, however, the so-called multimodal network framework can be used as a basis for this, respondent B mentioned. This is an overview of all mobility networks (cycling, public transport, car, walking), in which a ranking can be found for different locations as to which network is preferred over the others, and this is therefore varying for each specific location. In terms of conflicting spatial goals, this framework makes it easier to make choices. To illustrate: suppose a choice needs to be made in an

area between a new bus lane and new cycle path, the multi-modal network framework can be used to find whether bus or bicycle should be preferred in this specific area.

Due to the fact that the living lab project in Vinkhuizen was a smaller-scale project, it also involved less conflicting policy goals. Respondent A mentioned that there were certainly different policy goals in the area, but that these were relatively easy to combine with the measures taken to stimulate movement in the neighbourhood, there was one specific issue that was a bit conflicting, but didn't cause any major problem. This was namely the large presence of grey in the neighbourhood. In Vinkhuizen there is a lot of asphalt, a lot of pavements, etc. On the one hand, this is beneficial for the active living project, says respondent A, because this asphalt and these pavements provide good opportunities to walk on, and to build the designed walking routes on. On the other hand, these grey grounds also create a lot of heat, in other words heat stress. So it can be said that this was somewhat of a conflict during the project, but it did not cause any problems. It was solved in the simplest way by looking for places where grey could be combined with more greenery, by planting more trees, plants, bushes, etc., which they ultimately did.

#### 5.4.8. Time & timing

In terms of time given to the implementation of the policy goals, there were no major problems. A clear time plan is attached to the mobility vision and its implementation programme that runs until 2040, said respondent B. This includes clear agreements on which measures should be taken first and how much time is available for this. It has happened that projects in Groningen have been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances, but here too, it is therefore very beneficial that the policy plan made is flexible in its implementation (paragraph 5.4.1.). Specifically, in terms of time, this means that there is room for projects to be delayed or accelerated. Nevertheless, respondent B mentions that no major delays in implementation have occurred yet, but this is obviously also related to the fact that the implementation process is still fairly much in its early stages.

There may also be time pressure for specific parts of a policy, and this is related to the political and economic context, respondent D mentions. Again, this is related to the term of the current coalition (until 2026). As a result, there will be projects that need to be implemented before then, if you want to have the certainty the politicians invest financially in these projects, because this could also be different with a new coalition in a few years' time. So whether this time pressure is there or not is very context-dependent. This thus confirms the theory, which stated that timing depends, among other things, on the political context.

After drafting the active living policy, the question remains when which specific parts will be implemented, or in other words: the timing. The answer to this question is very short and simple, and is given by respondent E. Namely, it is simply when the money for implementation is available. Although there will obviously be other factors determining the timing of implementation, this flow of money remains the most important in this area; money simply has to be available before a plan can be implemented.

As far as the project in Vinkhuizen is concerned, the timing was therefore dependent on receiving the relevant subsidies (as can be read in paragraph 5.4.6.), according to respondent A. The time the entire implementation took turned out to be slightly longer than expected, namely several years. The reason given was that the method used was new, making it less clear which steps had to be taken and when. As a result, realisation was slower than hoped/thought, but this did not cause any major problems.

#### 5.4.9. Others

At the end of the interview, respondents were asked whether any other factors besides the variables discussed influenced the implementation process. This revealed that, in general, the variables discussed are very complete as far as the Groningen-Vinkhuizen case is concerned. Only one issue emerged as an additional factor, which was mentioned by respondent A. This was namely the effect the corona pandemic had on the implementation process. This could be seen as a rather surprising effect. According to respondent A, Covid proved to be very helpful for implementation. This was because it increased community involvement, as residents had more time available to participate in the project themselves. Apart from Covid, no further relevant factors were found.

### 5.5. Sub-conclusion Groningen - Vinkhuizen

As for the Groningen - Vinkhuizen case, it can be concluded that factors found in the theory also proved relevant in this case. Thus, this means that, in a certain sense, the results found confirm the theory. This chapter first outlined the context for the Groningen municipality for each variable, and then zoomed in on the specific project in Vinkhuizen. Because no concrete goals were set before the project in Vinkhuizen began, the degree of successfulness cannot be determined in this way. As mentioned in paragraph 3.5., the satisfaction of involved actors is therefore examined, and in general, the actors involved seem to look back on the project in Vinkhuizen with satisfaction. As a result, it can be mentioned that also in this case, a successful implementation has taken place. To summarise: the project was flexible, received political support, received a lot of public participation and support, stakeholder cooperation went smoothly thanks to the leadership present, there was sufficient budget, little to no conflicting policy goals and time/timing was no problem either. Added to this was the additional factor that Covid played a helpful role.

However, there still is a question question of which factors, or which combination of factors, were most important in Groningen – Vinkhuizen, and this will be answered next. Answering this question was done by looking at which topics were most often mentioned by respondents and looking at which topics were often mentioned in combination with one another.

When looking at which variable was most important, the variable 'public support / community involvement' emerges, as it was the basis for the success of the project. Although it was generally seen that residents' wishes do not always correspond to the municipality's plans, the approach in the Vinkhuizen living lab project proved to be very successful in terms of this community involvement. In addition, the results showed that the combination of the factors political context and economic context is very relevant too. This is because economic opportunities are largely determined by political preferences. Thus, although there is political, and therefore economic, support for active living initiatives today, it is true that a possible change in these political preferences in the future could potentially bring uncertainties. Lastly, the policy design proved to be very flexible which gave room for successful implementation. For all these reasons, all signs were green in Vinkhuizen for a successful implementation process, which turned out to be true afterwards.

## 6. Discussion, conclusion, reflection & recommendations

### 6.1. Discussion

This paragraph will be dedicated to a discussion of the results described in chapter 4 and chapter 5. For the first time, the Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen cases will be compared, revealing differences and similarities between the two cases. First, an overview of the different variables, and to what extent they influenced the implementation process in both cases, can be found in figure 11 below. The table aims to provide a visual indication of the amount of influence of each variable. This was done by giving each variable a number of stars, the more stars a variable is assigned, the more influence the variable has.

Kanaleneiland		Vinkhuizen	
Variable:	Influence:	Variable:	Influence:
Policy design	*****	Policy design	*****
Political context	*****	Political context	*****
Public support / community involvement	***	Public support / community involvement	*****
Stakeholder engagement	***	Stakeholder engagement	**
Leadership	****	Leadership	****
Economic context	*****	Economic context	*****
Absence of conflicting policy goals	***	Absence of conflicting policy goals	**
Time & timing	****	Time & timing	***
Others	**	Others	*
<b>Explanation:</b>			
*	Barely any influence		
**	Little influence		
***	Average influence		
****	Great influence		
*****	Most influence		

Figure 11, Variable influence

This study was done based on the conceptual model formed using existing literature. From this literature, eight variables were eventually formed that (i.e. according to theory) should influence the implementation of active living policies. The study showed that each of these eight variables is actually influential in practice. Whereby this research thus broadly confirms the theory. For this reason, table 11 shows that there is no variable that is not awarded a single star, as they all therefore have some form of influence. That the study's literature review gives a fairly complete picture of the relevant variables is confirmed by the factor 'others'. Indeed, few other factors were found that influenced the implementation process, but those that were found did not have a major impact. In short, the results found in practice very much match the expectations from theory.

Next, comparing the two cases, when the results of both cases are put side by side it is noticeable that they are broadly quite similar. The basis of this lies in the variable political context, as both Utrecht and Groningen have a fairly left-oriented city council. Because the municipality is the party that initiates active living policy and is responsible for its implementation, this leftist politics has a stimulating effect in both cases. This ultimately ensures that both municipalities provide sufficient

funding for implementation, something that might have been different with a different political situation. Therefore, the biggest similarity between both cases is that the combination of the variables 'political context' and 'economic context' have been very conducive in both Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen, making variables also among those with the most influence. The other variable seen as most influential in both cases was 'policy design', because in both cases the flexibility of planning was seen as very important. This variable policy design thus had many links to all the other variables, this is because flexibility in design can ensure that problems from other variables can be remedied.

As mentioned, there are many similarities between the two cases because of the similar political situation in both cities. However, this does not mean that there are no differences at all between the Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen cases. As a matter of fact, the active living policy in Vinkhuizen can be seen as a slightly smaller-scale project, compared to the policy in Kanaleneiland. This has made implementation in Vinkhuizen slightly easier in some areas. For instance, the slightly smaller scale of the project meant that there were fewer conflicting policy goals that could potentially hinder implementation. There was also a smaller number of relevant stakeholders involved, and a smaller number of stakeholders makes cooperation easier. Furthermore, in Vinkhuizen there has been even more focus on community involvement. This focus is also there in Kanaleneiland, but in Vinkhuizen this community involvement forms the basis of the project, hence this variable had even more influence here than in Kanaleneiland. However, probably the biggest difference between the two cases can be found in the preparation beforehand. On the one hand, in the Kanaleneiland case, clear goals and measures were determined prior to the project. Here, clear plans were drawn up on what measures should be taken and where they should take place. On the opposite, the Vinkhuizen project can be seen more as an 'open' approach. No concrete measures were drawn up in advance, but these were designed during the project in collaboration with the residents.

In short, when interpreting the research results, it emerges that they are very much in line with the expectations set by the literature study, the two cases are broadly comparable because of the similar political situation, but differences can still be found between Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen on more specific points. The next paragraph will form a conclusion based on the results and the discussion and will answer both the main question and the sub questions.

## 6.2. Conclusion

Based on the research conducted, this section enables an answer to the three sub-questions and subsequently to the main question of this research. To reiterate one more time, the main question of this research is: **'What conditions promote/obstruct the implementation of active living policies in Dutch municipalities?'**, with the sub-questions being:

- What do the active living policies of Dutch municipalities look like in terms of content?
- To what extent have active living policies been implemented in Dutch municipalities?
- What are, within Dutch municipalities, overarching success factors or bottlenecks regarding the implementation of active living policies?

First, an answer will be given to the first two sub-questions, and finally, as the third sub-question is substantively similar to the main question, one joint answer will be given to it.

First, subquestion one. Before looking at the implementation process, it was first important to determine what the active living policy looks like in terms of content. By researching the cases Utrecht and Groningen, or more specifically Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen, a picture emerged of what the content of this type of policy looks like in Dutch municipalities. It can be concluded from both cases that much is being done to replace the car in the city with walking and/or cycling. To

answer as simply as possible what this content then looks like, it can be said that car use is made as unattractive as possible wherever feasible, and cycling and walking as attractive as possible. What concrete changes to infrastructure this entails are interventions such as paid parking, lower speed limits, more cycle lanes, more space for pedestrians and planning that provides shorter distances between facilities. All this supplemented by measures that promote these interventions taken.

The second question is to what extent these drafted policies have already been implemented in practice. It can be concluded that both the municipality of Utrecht and the municipality of Groningen can be seen as progressive in terms of active living policies. In terms of implementation, relatively much progress has been made in both cases. This certainly applies to the project looked at in Vinkhuizen; the policy plans have now been put into practice, which means that the implementation process here is fully behind us. This is not yet the case in Utrecht, where implementation is still more in the early stages. The policy plans were adopted for the period 2021-2040, which means that implementation is now three years in progress. This implies that some measures have already been/are being implemented but certainly not all.

Finally, an answer can now be given to the main issue, namely the third sub-question and main question: **‘What conditions promote/obstruct the implementation of active living policies in Dutch municipalities?’** The Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen cases have provided a good picture of which conditions play an important role in the implementation of active living policies in Dutch municipalities. As already mentioned, all eight variables play a role in this research, but on the basis of the two cases, four of them are identified as most influential: ‘policy design’, ‘political context’, ‘economic context’ and ‘public support / community involvement’. The role these four variables play in Kanaleneiland and Vinkhuizen is crucial to the potential success of the policy. Political support for the policy ensures economic support that makes implementation possible, active involvement of the local community increases the likelihood of public support and thus policy success, and a flexible policy design enables the resolution of unforeseen problems. Because the conditions were present in both cases, this provided great promotion of active living policy implementation in the cases. At the same time, these very variables can also be seen as the biggest obstructions in other cases. When active living policies lack political support, economic support, public support and flexibility, their implementation is made enormously difficult or perhaps even impossible. However, this was not the case in the cases discussed in this study, so these variables served as a supporting factor here.

## 6.3. Reflection

### 6.3.1. Theoretical reflection

Conducting this research has given a good idea about the usefulness of the theory. The basis of this research was laid in the literature review of this thesis, this theory consisted of literature on active living, active living policy design, policy implementation and active living policy implementation. In these sections, a search was conducted in the literature for variables that influenced this active living policy implementation process, and finally put together in an overview (figure 4). Many different literature articles were used throughout the thesis, but the most important were the studies by Bhuyan et al. (2010), Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983), Mthethwa (2012), Allen et al. (2020), Forsyth (2023), Glasgow & King (2009), Judge & Bauld (2006), Oh et al. (2021) and finally Rodriguez et al. (2016). These were therefore the studies that helped to establish a conceptual model for the study, which formed the basis for the rest of the research. After completing the research, it can now be concluded that these studies in the theory chapter have been very helpful, for example, the study by Bhuyan et al. (2010), which created a model largely similar to the conceptual model used in this thesis, which has been very helpful during the process.

Reflecting back, it can be seen that this theory was also very useful for the reason that all the variables found in the conceptual model were found in both the Kanaleneiland case and the Vinkhuizen case. These two cases complemented the existing theory by providing a better picture of how the different variables relate to each other, and the importance of each variable. In addition, it became clear during the study that the variable 'social, political & economic context' could be better split. This due to the previously made clear reason that the social and economic context is very similar to other variables, so they could be better merged. Apart from this change, no further adjustments were needed to the conceptual model.

In short, the theory used has been very useful as it has provided a good basis for researching the two case studies. This research into these case studies in turn ensured that this existing literature could be supplemented with new insights. This concerns the new insights regarding the relationships between different variables, and the degree of importance of these variables. Here, one can think of the previously mentioned findings, such as correlation between the political and economic contexts, the importance of public support and the fact that within the variable 'policy design' flexibility in particular plays a major role.

### 6.3.2. Methodological reflection

Overall, the method used can be evaluated with satisfaction. Using a case study has provided a lot of in-depth information and insights into the implementation process of active living policies. By using not one, but two case studies, even more insights were gained compared to dealing with only one case study. One shortcoming regarding these cases is that they are quite similar. Because the cities of Utrecht and Groningen are very similar mainly in terms of political ideals. Also, both cases are quite successful in terms of active living policy implementation, so little insight was gained into a possible situation in which implementation processes are less successful. With today's knowledge, it might therefore have been interesting to choose two cases that are more different from each other, as this could provide even more insights.

In terms of obtaining data through this method, it went quite smoothly. Several policy documents provided a clear picture of the content of the policies, and the insights from the respondents were able to provide a lot of information on the implementation of these policies. So in terms of obtaining data, I wouldn't have done anything differently with the knowledge of today.

## 6.4. Recommendations

### 6.4.1. Recommendations for policy practice

In terms of recommendations for policymakers, it is necessary to look at how policymakers can increase the likelihood of successful active living policy implementation. Again, these recommendations come from the variables discussed. Specifically, the recommendation for policy practice is thus to make the variables treated (where possible) as much as possible in favour of a successful implementation. With some variables this is more possible than others. For instance, there are variables on which little influence can be carried out, such as the political and economic situation, this can only be done through elections. But there are also some where influence can be carried out, namely design, community involvement, stakeholder involvement, leadership and timing. Perhaps the most important recommendation for policymakers is to try to get resident involvement as high as possible. This can be done by actively seeking out residents and asking for their opinions, the same goes for involving relevant stakeholders. Therefore, what policymakers should not do is push their own wishes and ideals too far, instead they should try to put themselves in the shoes of local residents and stakeholders as much as possible. In addition, appointing a clear leader figure is also a

recommendation. The results showed that leaders can have a lot of influence during a policy implementation and are therefore very important. As mentioned earlier, the flexibility of the policy itself also continues to play an important role, so ensuring sufficient flexibility is also a recommendation. This can be done by leaving room in the planning, so that, for instance, delays or financial setbacks can be accommodated. Finally, a final concrete recommendation can be found in the Kanaleneiland case. It became clear that here active living measures were part of a comprehensive area development, which was started because sewer renewal was needed. This sewer renewal eventually became the starting shot for several developments in the neighbourhood, including thus the implementation of active living measures. The recommendation is therefore for policymakers to take this approach as an example. Utrecht is a good example here, as this approach can save a lot of time and money compared to an approach in which different measures would be implemented separately.

#### 6.4.2. Recommendations for further research

Finally, this thesis concludes with a recommendation for further research. This recommendation is fully consistent with the methodological reflection, and deals with case selection. The recommendation is to conduct similar research between two case studies that are more different from each other. A comparison between a city where there is a lot of (political) support for active living initiatives and a city where there is little (political) support for active living initiatives would perhaps provide even more interesting results. Indeed, one hypothesis would be that in a city with less political support more problems should be experienced during an implementation process, but whether this is true would thus have to be tested by further research. In addition, another recommendation would be to conduct a larger, quantitative study on a larger number of cases. Through this, even more conditions can be identified that influence a successful active living implementation process, and differences and similarities between cases can be argued with actual statistics. This way, there will probably be less in-depth information in specific cases, but it will give a clearer impression of the overall picture in multiple Dutch cities.

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## 8. Appendices

### 8.1. Interview guide master thesis

#### **Introductie:**

- Mezelf voorstellen en het onderwerp introduceren.
  - o Duidelijk uitleggen wat het doel van het onderzoek is.
- Kunt u iets vertellen over uw rol in het actieve mobiliteitsbeleid in gemeente X?

#### **Inhoud van het beleid:**

*Hier ook vragen aan toevoegen die specifiek gaan over het beleid in de stad van de desbetreffende respondent.*

- Kunt u iets vertellen over het actieve mobiliteitsbeleid in gemeente X?
- Wat waren de belangrijkste doelstellingen van dit beleid?
- Welke specifieke maatregelen zijn er allemaal genomen? Met andere woorden, welke concrete veranderingen zijn er doorgevoerd om actieve mobiliteit te bevorderen? Denk bijvoorbeeld aan:
  - o Fietspaden
  - o Wandelroutes
  - o Andere verandering in de infrastructuur
  - o Autogebruik ontmoedigen
- Komen de gewenste effecten van dit beleid overeen met de daadwerkelijke effecten?

#### **Vragen over de gekozen variabelen van beleidsuitvoering/beleidsimplementatie:**

##### Beleidsontwerp:

- In hoeverre zijn er realistische doelen gesteld tijdens het opstellen van het beleid, zijn dit doelen geweest die realistisch uitgevoerd konden worden?
- Waren er gedurende de uitvoering veranderingen nodig in het beleidsontwerp, om dit beleid succesvol uit te kunnen voeren?

##### Politieke context:

- Hoe heeft de lokale politiek de uitvoering van het beleid beïnvloed?
- Zijn er specifieke lokale politieke partijen die groot voorstander van het beleid zijn?

##### Betrokkenheid en support van bewoners/sociale context:

- Hoe zijn bewoners betrokken in het proces?
- Is er onder de bewoners draagvlak voor het beleid?

##### Stakeholder betrokkenheid:

- Hoe zag de samenwerking tussen relevante stakeholders eruit tijdens het uitvoeringsproces?
- Welke stakeholders waren het meest invloedrijk?

##### Leiderschap:

- Welke rol heeft leiderschap gespeeld tijdens de uitvoering?

##### Financiële middelen en kosten/economische context:

- Zijn er financiële uitdagingen geweest bij de uitvoering van het beleid? Zo ja, welke?

Afwezigheid van conflicterende beleidsdoelen:

- Waren er conflicterende beleidsdoelen die de uitvoering bemoeilijkt hebben?
  - o Zo ja, hoe is hiermee omgegaan?

Tijd & timing van de uitvoering:

- Hoe heeft de timing van de uitvoering de uitkomst beïnvloedt? Waren er specifieke tijdstippen of periodes die gunstig of ongunstig waren voor de uitvoering?
  - o Heeft de uitvoering op het juiste moment plaatsgevonden?
  - o Is er überhaupt nagedacht over de timing van uitvoering. Misschien vanwege seizoensgebonden activiteiten, verkiezingen, covid etc.
- Heeft de uitvoering van het beleid voldoende tijd gekregen, voordat werd bepaald of het wel of niet succesvol was? *(Met name van toepassing op een stad waar de uitvoering minder succesvol bleek).*

Overig:

- Zijn er factoren, buiten de eerder besproken onderwerpen, die van invloed geweest zijn op het uitvoeringsproces?

**Afsluiting:**

- Zou u iets anders doen bij een toekomstige uitvoering van vergelijkbaar beleid?
- Heeft u nog opmerkingen of vragen?