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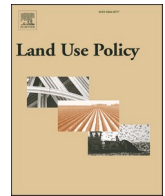
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Land for housing: Quantitative targets and qualitative ambitions in Dutch housing development[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The struggle of cities to achieve quantitative housing objectives can partly be explained by the struggle to cope with increasing value conflicts with other (qualitative) policy objectives, including the realization of affordable housing, climate adaptive areas, inclusive neighborhoods, and high-quality public spaces. In public debate in the Netherlands, too high ambitions and a ‘piling-up’ of policy objectives are often mentioned as causes of non-conformance of quantitative housing objectives. However, despite such non-conformance, a plan or policy may still function well by informing the decision-making process and invoking scrutiny of conflicting objectives. This paper aims to understand how municipalities cope with the implementation of housing developments with pluralistic policy objectives. Therefore, the performance of the policy objective to accelerate the production of housing is studied by exploring how value conflicts between this quantitative and qualitative objectives are addressed. A survey among Dutch municipalities and two additional in-depth case studies reveal that the non-conformance of the acceleration of the housing production not only results from exogenous processes, but is also a result of accumulating policy decisions favouring qualitative ambitions. The case studies reveal that municipalities especially struggle with trade-offs between qualitative and quantitative objectives. This result shows the relevance of additional research that focus on value conflicts in public policy implementation processes.

1. Introduction

The Netherlands face an urgent housing shortage. The need for additional housing in the Netherlands has been projected to be 1 million by the year 2035 (ABF Research, 2019). It is forecasted that about a quarter of a million of these houses are needed for the replacement of housing that will be demolished. The other 750,000 dwellings are needed to make up for the current housing shortage of more than 300,000 and to absorb expected growth in population and number of households (ABF Research, 2019). For years, however, housing production has been insufficient to catch up on increasing demand, and production is expected to remain insufficient in the next few years

(Economisch Instituut voor de Bouw, 2020). While in 1972 no less than 157,000 housing units were added to the Dutch housing stock, production now for years has not surpassed 75,000 units (CBS Statistics Netherlands, 2021).

For most of the post-WWII period, the Dutch national government played a central role in spatial planning. Even though municipalities had a very strong position drawing up legally binding land-use plans (Janssen-Jansen, 2016), the national government played a key-role in building national consensus on leading spatial concepts and strategies (Roodbol-Mekkes et al., 2012). Consecutive spatial planning memorandums provided national guidelines for spatial planning policies at lower levels of scale, including on the development of housing. Often

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guidelines were paired with subsidies for its implementation (Cammen and Klerk, 2012). In some examples, these guidelines even marked specific locations for large-scale housing developments,¹ which were developed under the authority of the municipalities in the following years. The last memorandum (2005) and the new Spatial Planning Act (2008) reflect the more recent trend of further decentralization of spatial planning and housing (Roodbol-Mekkes and van den Brink, 2015). The national government's withdrawal from spatial planning (e.g. refraining from large scale visions and guidelines), was confirmed in 2010 when the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment was abolished. Since then, municipalities are the most important government bodies responsible for the realization of an adequate supply of housing.

Next to quantitative housing production targets at the municipal level, new housing developments need to match several additional—required by law and regulation and extra-legal—qualitative policy objectives. Housing development projects provide an opportunity to realize major transformations towards climate adaptivity, energy neutrality, high-quality public space, compact city development, et cetera (Nicol and Knoepfel, 2014; Peterson et al., 2013; Tasan-Kok et al., 2013; Webb et al., 2016). Local authorities play active roles and are often ambitious frontrunners in such major transformation challenges (Amundsen et al., 2018). Next to increasing ambitions related to the type of housing and the different qualities of urban development projects, municipalities aim to realize large shares of the needed housing within the existing urban boundaries (Broitman and Koomen, 2015; Claassens and Koomen, 2017).

High ambitions are sometimes met by additional public investments (i.e. subsidies in different shapes) or cross-subsidization between profit-generating and cost-incurring parts of a larger development project (Buitelaar and Bregman, 2016). The (financial) capacity to implement different cost-incurring objectives thus depends on the actions of different state actors (especially municipalities), hybrid organizations (e.g. social housing associations), and private companies (e.g. investors and developers). In case cross-subsidization and subsidies are not sufficient, a choice may have to be made between different policy objectives or actors need to settle for a lower level of quality. On the one hand, high qualitative ambitions for urban development projects are portrayed as a “piling-up” of ambitions. This “pile” is suggested to be a reason for the delay and failure of housing development in the last decade (e.g. Kip, 2020; Van der Molen, 2019). On the other hand, a push to construct more housing in less time is argued to negatively impact quality and affordability and may disregard necessary quality conditions. Municipalities seeking to implement different quantitative and qualitative policy objectives need to handle such surfacing value conflicts. How municipalities cope with these conflicts and make informed decisions in case of non-conformance may give insight into the performance of policy.

Mostly, housing and urban development research is focused on policy and instruments, or the outcomes of policy and instruments from different perspectives. Less attention is drawn to how policy is being implemented (Shahab et al., 2021) and how these policies function from a broader perspective of performance (Shahab et al., 2019). This paper aims to understand how municipalities cope with the implementation of housing developments with pluralistic policy objectives. It explores policy implementation of quantitative targets and qualitative ambitions in municipalities. Therefore, value conflicts, resulting from the ambition to both accelerate housing production to alleviate housing shortages and pursue high qualitative ambitions connected to housing and urban development, are explored. Instead of evaluating the success of policy implementation based on one-dimensional indicators, the performance

of policy implementation is studied based on how municipalities are able to cope with increasing pluralistic policy objectives and related value conflicts.

Such pluralistic ambitions are very tangible and urgent in the Netherlands, where there are explicit claims for quantitative and qualitative targets, but the research is relevant to most other European countries with a shortage of housing – in particular in the affordable and middle segment – and high qualitative ambitions. The need for climate mitigative and adaptive measures, including urban densification, will increase the relevance of adequately coping with value conflicts in housing construction (Claassens et al., 2020; Haaland and Konijnendijk van den Bosch, 2015; Marquard et al., 2020). To reveal how Dutch municipalities are coping with the value conflicts, a mixed-method approach is applied, combining an explorative quantitative survey among Dutch municipalities, complemented with in-depth case studies of two mid-sized growing cities (Zwolle and Den Bosch). While the urbanization processes and struggles are well documented for extreme cases (e.g. the largest cities), a significant part of urban growth is taking place in smaller cities and city regions. This study aims to contribute to our understanding of how mid-sized cities cope with tensions quantitative and qualitative housing objectives and seek to optimize both conformance and performance of housing policy.

Before providing the empirical insights and analysis, it is necessary to reflect on policy implementation and value conflicts to better understand the theoretical framework within which the implementation takes place. After that, the detailed methodology will be briefly outlined. In the result section, first, the findings from the broad survey will be presented before diving into the specific case studies. The discussion and conclusion will then reflect on these findings and identify needs for future research.

2. Policy implementation and value conflicts

To understand the tensions between qualitative and quantitative policy objectives (i.e. housing ambitions), it is important to understand policy implementation, and how it deals with conflicts of policy objectives (i.e. value conflicts). Therefore, the following sections address the relation between policy programming and implementation, the differences between assessing implementation with conformance and performance approaches, value conflicts in policy implementation and coping mechanisms. These will be used to better understand the value conflicts of quantitative targets and qualitative ambitions of Dutch housing development.

2.1. Policy programming and implementation

Policy implementation can be considered as a “set of processes after the programming phase that are aimed at the concrete realization of the objectives of a public policy” (Knoepfel et al., 2011, p. 196). Policy implementation and policy programming (i.e. the definition of the objectives) are thus different phases in which actors pursue different strategies. Policy programming constitutes the “political definition of the public problem” (Knoepfel et al., 2011, p. 196). This entails that the problem definition – for example affordability of housing is a matter of undersupply of housing units – is a result of a political normative process. Policy implementation encompasses a “set of processes after the programming phase that are aimed at the concrete realization of the objectives of a public policy” (Knoepfel et al., 2011, pp. 136–137). When assessing policy implementation, conformance and performance approaches can be distinguished.

2.2. Conformance and performance of policy implementation

Classical policy implementation evaluation assesses the deficits between the current state of a system and the desired state (i.e. policy objective). This way of measuring policy implementation against its

¹ This was the case in the ‘Groei-kernen’ policy part of the Third National Memorandum on Spatial Planning (1974) and the ‘VINEX’-locations part of the Fourth National Memorandum on Spatial Planning Extra (VINEX) (1991).

goals can be understood as effectiveness (Needham et al., 2018) or conformance. It has merits to evaluate policy implementation with the criterion of conformance: it establishes a link between policy and its execution, which in turn increases justification for interventions, while it also provides credibility and accountability, as the success and failure are clearly connectable (Shahab et al., 2019).

Performance describes more recent approaches, such as the public policy analysis by Knoepfel et al. (2011). It considers multiple factors that can deviate and influence policy implementation, such as certain leeway and interpretations of policy objectives formulated, the administrative system, the political weight of target groups, or situational aspects. In several fields, including housing, policy implementation is dependent on the decisions of other non-state actors (Blessing, 2012). In other words, policy implementation is never 'self-executing'; policy programming is providing 'rules of the game' and the implementation is the game that still has to be played (Knoepfel et al., 2011, p. 198). "It is to be expected that, if an agency (planning subject) is making a plan which it cannot implement directly (a strategic plan, for example), then it should adapt its plan-making accordingly" (Needham et al., 1997, p. 871). Since direct and full conformance is unlikely, such an approach can be assessed in terms of policy performance. The performance is evaluated against "the usefulness of a policy in the decision-making process" (Shahab et al., 2019). It thus depends on whether and how the policy or plan influences actors and decision-making, relevant for the implementation of the policy or plan.

A performance-based evaluation helps to understand what happens to policy in the implementation phase. It acknowledges that also the implementation process of policy objectives can face different obstacles, especially if the agency formulating the policy or plan cannot directly implement it (Needham et al., 1997). Non-conformance does not necessarily mean the policy is not performing well. Performance evaluation thus in particular applies to complex and multiple policy objectives to be achieved in a multi-actor governance setting, such as housing development.

As for conformance, in performance evaluation, policy programming is guiding, but the implementation can deviate to some degree from policy programming, providing room for leeway and interpretations of policy objectives. Locational, situational, or contextual aspects influence policy implementation. The performance of policy implementation needs to be assessed against underlying values of policy programming. Values of policy programming are thus important to evaluate policy implementation according to performance-based approaches.

2.3. Policy implementation and value conflicts

Values "reflect a belief in something important and legitimate, something that can be used to justify actions or the establishment of more specific behavioral rules" (Langford, 2004, p. 433). Legitimation follows from the widespread acceptance of the value as being important, inside and/or outside of the organization. Such values can be about both procedural and substantive beliefs (Langford, 2004). Policy objectives are often aimed to improve outcomes of governance processes about shared values. Inherent values are most abstract and translated into operational values and norms that relate to improving specific societal situations that hamper the accomplishment of inherent values (Elsinga et al., 2020). The rootedness of policy in shared values provides legitimacy.

Tensions and conflicts arise if inherent values are implemented and being translated into operational values and norms, even though there usually exists a predominant consensus concerning the importance of different inherent values (Dignum et al., 2016). Obtaining one operational value or norm may have consequences in regards to obtaining other operational values and norms. Such trade-offs are considered value conflicts if an optimal solution cannot be identified objectively because of issues of incommensurability. Such conflicts are non-technical and require political decision-making. Value conflicts thus

arise in policy implementation and they may be non-existent and unforeseeable in the pre-implementation phase. Value conflicts in policy implementation may exist between different substantive values, and between substantive and procedural values. Potential conflicts between different procedural values are not included as these will be detached from specific urban development projects we will focus on later in this paper.

According to Campbell (1996) planners in practice need to reconcile and balance: "to 'grow' the economy, distribute this growth fairly, and in the process not degrade the ecosystem" (p. 297). While other substantive values, or sub-values, can be distinguished (see for example Elsinga et al., 2020), these values and related conflicts "go to the historic core of planning, and are a leitmotif in the contemporary battles in both our cities and rural areas" (Campbell, 1996). Godschalk (2004), similarly, argues sustainable development is about balancing economic development, ecological preservation, and intergenerational equity. Housing and urban development policy, including approaches like New Urbanism and Smart Growth, usually incorporate incommensurable values and aim to balance two or more of these values (Godschalk, 2004). Dierwechter (2014), however, shows how these approaches not necessarily solve value conflicts and may still produce negative effects, for example in regards of segregation of social groups.

Procedural ethical and democratic values aspired by public actors can also conflict with the different substantive values described above. For example, transparency may compromise the municipality's effectiveness in urban development projects, impeding optimization of results regarding social justice, economic growth, and/or environmental protection. Another example is provided by Hartmann and Spit (2015, p. 731), applying Scharpf's (1999) distinction between a substantively and procedurally formed legitimacy: "Input-legitimacy stems from the extent to which the demands of citizens are represented in the institutional system of politics; output-legitimacy involves the extent to which the achieved result matches the collective goals of citizens". While neither form of legitimacy may in itself be enough, there exist tensions between both forms of legitimacy as fair procedures do not necessarily result in fair outcomes (Ferrari, 2012; Jonkman and Janssen-Jansen, 2018).

2.4. Coping with value conflict as an indicator for performance

Non-conformance of a policy can be the result of value conflicts obstructing the full implementation of different policy aims. For example, if measures resulting in economic growth simultaneously negatively impact the socially optimal distribution, policy aims related to these values cannot all be realized in full. Even a careful balancing of both values may result in non-conformance in regards to multiple policy objectives. While other factors influence the level of conformance, continuing conflicts between aims related to economic, social, and environmental values are inherent to the practice of urban and spatial planning (Campbell, 2016). More and higher ambitions in terms of housing production and other qualitative ambitions including housing affordability, climate adaptation and mitigation, and quality of the built environment increase tensions if financial means are not accordingly increased (e.g. by increased project revenues or subsidies).

As argued above, non-conformance due to the occurrence of value conflicts does not mean a plan or policy does not function properly (Mastop and Faludi, 1997). Regarding value conflicts, the level of performance relates to the way a plan or policy plays a role in the decision-making process for coping with value conflicts. Value conflicts require decision-making and balancing of different aims. How a plan or policy aim is included in the decision-making process and adequately scrutinized with other conflicting plans and policy aims reflects the extent to which it performs adequately, despite possible non-conformance. Therefore, to better understand the performance of a plan or policy in case of significant non-conformance, the way the specific plan or policy objective is part of the decision-making process is

analysed. More specifically, the performance of a plan or policy can be analysed by assessing the way related value conflicts are dealt with. Well-performing plans and policies will not be realized no matter what, but will be carefully valued and scrutinized related to other, conflicting objectives. While [Shahab et al. \(2019\)](#) focus on performance in terms of the broad societal impact of a plan, here we conceive performance based on the procedural focus of [Mastop and Faludi \(1997\)](#) by looking at how a plan or policy informs the decision making process. Municipalities are the key-actor as makers of multiple policies and the agencies formulating policy objectives that may conflict in the implementation phase and require cooperation of other non-governmental actors to be realized (see [Fig. 1](#)).

3. Methodology

To understand policy performance in housing development of Dutch municipalities, a survey among Dutch municipalities is complemented with an in-depth case study of two municipalities. The survey explores the perceived performance of housing production policy by looking at: a) what the policy objectives are; b) what obstacles municipalities perceive regarding policy implementation; and c) how municipalities seek to increase policy implementation; and d) how policy objectives inform value conflict resolution by municipalities. It provides a broad view of the quantitative housing acceleration objectives of municipalities, perceived obstacles, and measures taken in regards to conformance. The case study of two typical mid-sized cities provides in-depth knowledge of how municipalities in practice apply strategies to influence housing construction, and how municipalities deal with the plurality of potentially conflicting housing objectives shedding light on the performance of policy. An in-depth (case study) approach is required to study the performance of housing policy. The mixed-methods approach thus enables linking in-depth performance assessment to (non-)conformance of housing policy objectives.

While the implementation of housing policy objectives requires actions of different non-state actors, we apply a single actor perspective that is focused on the role of municipalities. Municipalities are the key-stakeholder in enforcing and negotiating various policy objectives and coping with value conflicts within the process. Value conflicts arise within these organizations, both as a result of external influences and the way implementation is executed within the organization, including the different departments.

3.1. Survey

The survey among land and housing policy professionals was completed by 72 municipalities out of the total of 355 municipalities in the Netherlands. At some municipalities, direct contacts were addressed. For others, departments, the municipal secretary, or the general municipal email-address were contacted. The respondents represent three out of four major cities, 12 out of forty mid-sized cities, and 57 smaller municipalities. Since only one survey per municipality was conducted, the results reflect the perception of the individual respondent, which not necessarily aligns with perceptions of his or her colleagues.

The survey included questions on general characteristics of the municipalities, the housing policy aims, the performance in regards to the policy aims in the recent past, the preferred land policy model, the degree to which the municipality can achieve policy aims, and the obstacles restricting the successful implementation of the policy aims. The survey included 32 questions related to the three policy aims of 1) the realization of housing within existing urban boundaries (i.e. densification), 2) the acceleration of housing construction to alleviate housing shortages, and 3) additional objectives related to climate mitigation and adaptation. Questions were structured according to three elements of policy analysis ([Vining and Weimer, 2015](#)): a) policy objective, b) obstacles for successfully implementing policy objectives, and c)

assessment of ability to successfully implement the policy objective. Different policy objectives and obstacles addressed in the questions were derived from literature on housing policy implementation and land policy. The analysis focused on the three elements of policy analysis and distinguished, from the perspective of the municipality, endogenous and exogenous causes. Likert-scores are presented per question and average Likert-scores for groups of questions are ordered to identify the primary causes and measures.

3.2. Case study

While most research on urban development is focused on the major cities and most extreme cases, much of the urban growth takes place in a large number of mid-size cities and city-regions. Two typical mid-size and growing municipalities in the Netherlands, located outside of but well-connected to the Randstad, were selected: Zwolle and 's-Hertogenbosch (Den Bosch). Both municipalities (see [Table 1](#) for basic statistics) have a significant need for the construction of housing for the next 10–15 years. The aim for the construction of housing within the existing urban boundaries (e.g. densification) is at least 50% for both municipalities.² Next to these similarities, the municipalities differ in regards to how they cooperate with other stakeholders and which land development strategy is preferred. While Den Bosch applies a strategy of “active land policy, unless.” in which they actively seek to exploit opportunities to acquire land on which they can actively pursue planning and housing goals, the municipality of Zwolle is more focused on “actively facilitating” land policy and applying a menu to decide, based on the characteristics of a specific project which land development model to apply. Selecting these two municipalities ensures that different land development modes are used and enables a cross-case comparison in regards to the performance in relation to the implementation of similar housing policy aims through different land policy strategies. The typical cases may provide insights relevant for a larger group of mid-size cities. However, the two municipalities do not reflect the full diversity of municipal land policy, as the study of [Shahab et al. \(2021\)](#) shows.

For both cases, housing and land policy documents were analysed. In addition, respectively six and seven interviews were held with a variety of planning, housing, and land development professionals at the municipalities of Den Bosch and Zwolle. In contrast to the survey, for the case study multiple employees from different departments were interviewed. Different perceptions could thus be identified and cross-checked, also resulting in a more in-depth understanding of underlying argumentation and mechanisms.

The interviews were transcribed. Consequently, the policy documents and interview transcripts were coded using Atlas Ti. Codes were used that relate to three parts of policy analysis: objectives, obstacles, and measures ([Vining and Weimer, 2015](#)). After analysing a part of the material, the coding list was revised and the analysis was restarted.

4. Results

4.1. Survey: objectives, obstacles, and measures for conformance in Dutch municipalities

4.1.1. Objectives

The survey among representatives of Dutch municipalities shows that accelerating the production of housing to counter the shortage of housing is an explicit aim (54% (strongly) agrees). This holds in particular for mid-sized and larger municipalities. In response to increasing demand, almost half of the municipalities have recently

² Both municipalities have in recent years (2012–2017) realized even larger shares of constructed housing within the existing urban boundaries: Den Bosch 82% and Zwolle 61% (courtesy of Claassens and Koomen, see also [Claassens and Koomen, 2017](#)).

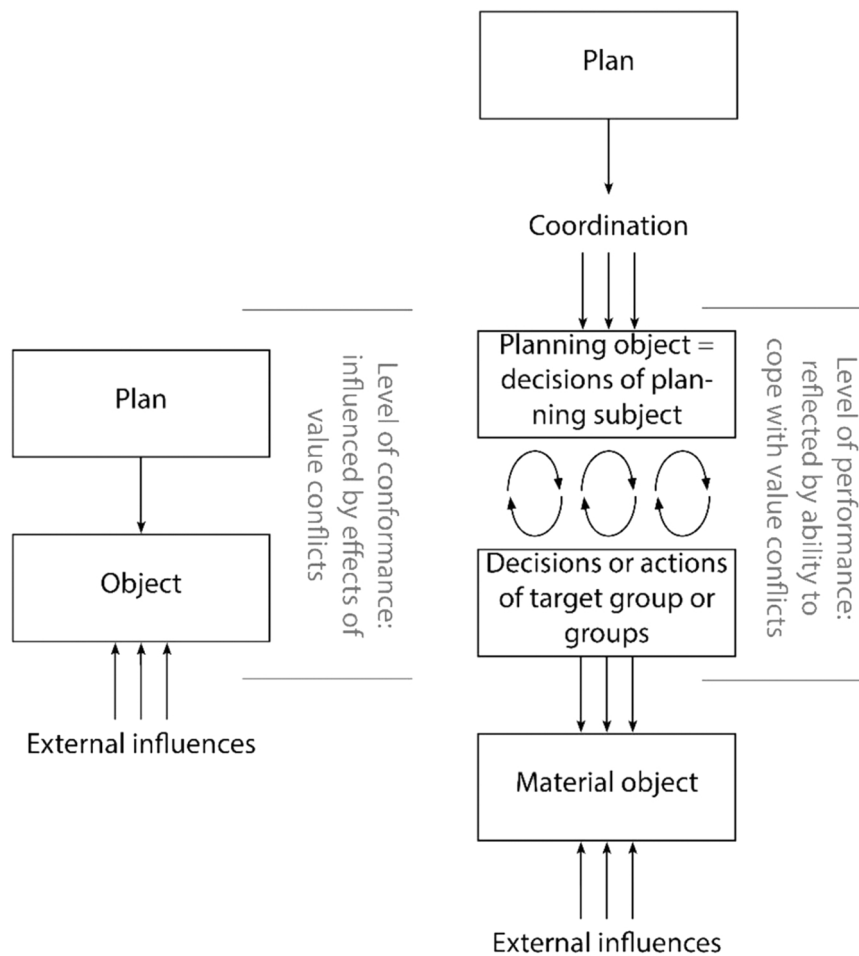


Fig. 1. Conformance and performance in plan implementation (adaptation from Mastop and Faludi, 1997).

Table 1
Basic information on Den Bosch and Zwolle (source: CBS Statistics Netherlands, 2018).

	Den Bosch			Zwolle		
	1997	2007	2017	1997	2007	2017
Inhabitants	126,516	135,648	152,411	101,902	114,635	125,548
Households	55,616	62,301	71,441	45,669	52,301	58,000
Dwellings	52,375	59,066	70,255	41,882	49,879	56,066
Share owner-occupied	–	48.6	51.9	–	50.0	52.5
Average house value	87,000	234,000	238,000	72,000	201,000	207,000

increased the targeted number of housing units to be built (Fig. 2). These are to a large degree the same municipalities. The survey shows that municipalities focus on building within the already built-up area: 44% aims to construct at least 80% of the housing within the built-up area and just 15% aims for less than 40% of new constructions within existing urban boundaries. Just over a fifth of the respondents notes their municipality has a quantitative housing development goal for the next

decade of less than 500 housing units. One third aims to add at least 2000 units.

4.1.2. Obstacles

In regards to perceived endogenous obstacles (outside of the direct influence of municipalities) obstructing the implementation of speeding-up housing construction, less than 20% of the respondents indicate that

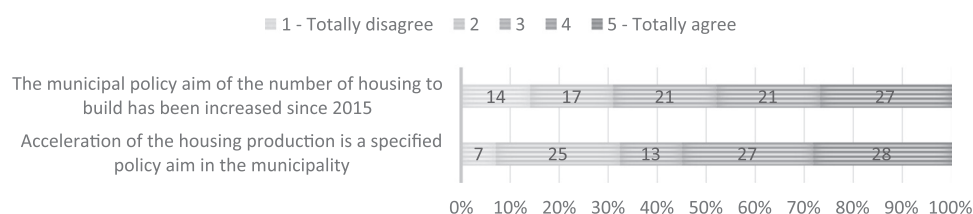


Fig. 2. Municipal housing objectives (n = 72).

municipal planning processes cause avoidable delays in housing developments (see [Appendix](#)). Concerning the response of municipalities to market proposals for housing projects, just seven percent think the municipality does not respond in a clear and timely manner. While a lack of plan capacity is pointed at by market actors as a major cause of low housing production in the Netherlands, municipal respondents have mixed views on the matter. Just less than a quarter of the respondents does think the plan-capacity in their municipality is not enough to be able to increase the pace of housing construction. Thirty percent is neutral and 41% is rather or very positive about the current plan capacity enabling the acceleration of housing construction. Although there is still a significant group that doubts the sufficiency of the plan-capacity, only six percent of the respondents state that they are prepared for future plan failure by increasing plan capacity and 26% only prepare for plan failure to some degree. About two-thirds of the respondents think that their municipality provides investors and developers with clear conditions for the housing development projects.

In terms of exogenous obstacles to accelerate housing construction, almost a fifth think there are not enough building materials and construction personnel available. Just five percent of the respondents are positive about the availability of materials and workers. Possibly, this is an obstacle difficult to assess, as appears from the quarter of the respondents stating 'unknown'. Despite uncertainty about inputs for housing construction, the respondents see ample interest from investors and developers, with the perceived interest in larger municipalities (> 40.000 inhabitants) higher than in smaller municipalities.

The average scores per question (see [Fig. 3](#)) shows that respondents agree most with the statement that the municipality quickly and clearly responds and that there is sufficient interest from market actors. The respondents agree the least on statements about the sufficient availability of resources (personnel and building materials) and that additional housing is planned to sufficiently compensate for delays.

4.1.3. Measures

Municipalities can take different measures to promote the acceleration of the housing production. Half of the municipalities are making additional arrangements with social housing associations to construct additional housing and one-fifth does the same with private actors.

In line with the position of most respondents who state that there is enough plan capacity, municipalities do little to increase the availability of land or entice developments by lowering land prices. Almost none of the municipalities are lowering land prices to stimulate the construction of housing. Regarding the frame of piling-up requirements for housing projects, only six percent of the respondents state their municipality is lowering such requirements to increase the speed of housing developments. Concerning potential trade-offs between substantive and procedural values, about a fifth of the municipalities aim to reduce the time used for planning procedures. Larger municipalities do more in this regard. Municipalities are very reluctant to hire more personnel to speed-up processes.

Related to land development models applied, despite the availability of land is often mentioned as a delaying factor, more than 85% of the respondents argue their municipality does not acquire extra land to increase the production of housing. A similar figure is related to the sale of extra building plots (83%). This shows the ambition to accelerate housing production is not likely to significantly result in municipalities engaging more in active land policy.

The ordered average scores per statement ([Fig. 4](#)) shows the overall scores are low, revealing that despite the policy aims most proposed measures are not implemented by municipalities. While in several countries active land policy is regarded as a promising direction to meet housing policy goals (e.g. [Gerber et al., 2017](#)), the survey shows that this is not a direction municipalities in the Netherlands are moving towards. Additional agreements with housing associations are the primary measure to meet quantitative housing objectives. The most important obstacle perceived was the lack of personnel and building materials.

This exogenous obstacle cannot be solved by the municipalities themselves, which can explain their reluctance to take measures.

4.2. Case study: objectives, obstacles, and measures for performance in Den Bosch

4.2.1. Objectives

A primary policy aim for the municipality of Den Bosch is to provide different groups with sufficient opportunity to find suitable and affordable housing ([Drie Partijen Overleg 's-Hertogenbosch, 2016](#); [Municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch, 2017b](#)). In addition, the supply of social housing is to be increased to alleviate pressure, and available housing for middle-income households should be increased ([Municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch, 2017a](#)). Special attention is directed towards the growing group of elderly, which requires housing located near services and public transport ([Municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch, 2017b](#)). The objective set by the province and municipality is to add 8000 housing units until 2025 and a corresponding yearly production of up to 900 units, of which at least 50% within the existing urban boundaries. A quarter should exist of social rented housing and 15% of middle-income housing (with rents between €710 and €900 or a sale-price of at most €185,000). There was an explicit aim to speed up housing production, to move part of the production to the earlier years.

4.2.2. Obstacles

Respondents from the municipality argue that their ambitions are too high. This does not result in many projects being canceled. Rather, it is considered a part of the process of negotiating with developers. The attractiveness of Den Bosch is mentioned as an advantage, making it also a good place for investors to develop housing (Interview municipality of Den Bosch, 2018). Increasing building costs for developers, on the other hand, are mentioned as a reason why it is more difficult to realize extra-legal ambitions, for example regarding sustainability. The extent to which the municipality can achieve objectives thus depends highly on the market circumstances. The extent to which parts of a project are negotiable differs from case to case (Interview municipality of Den Bosch). Therefore it is seen as a luxury position to be able to not cooperate at times, if the negotiation result is unsatisfactory.

The increased focus on densification makes it more difficult for the municipality to accelerate housing production. A respondent explains, for example, how multiple inner-urban developments in one part of the city can have cumulative effects. Weighing the pros and cons of proposed developments becomes more complex as next to the contribution in regards to policy objective, also the impact on the neighborhood matters. Different respondents state there is a tension between the objective to densify on the one hand and the policy aim to include residents in the planning process. One respondent says it is important to be very clear about the decision to densify and explain that the interests of residents will be taken into account, but that densification will take place anyway.

Different respondents from Den Bosch see the capacity of the building industry and strategic decisions of developers as an important obstacle to accelerate the building production: "The land is ready, but they don't start. The key to speeding-up housing construction is the building industry" (Interview municipality of Den Bosch). In different projects, developers hold building claims giving them the right to build a certain amount of houses. These contracts, however, usually do not include a deadline before which the development needs to actually start the development process. Therefore, municipalities are limited in their abilities to enforce certain developers to actually develop.

4.2.3. Measures

To deal with the 'piling-up' of ambitions, the municipality seeks strategies to prioritize and balance policy aims at the project level. It is mentioned that the policy targets are used flexibly. Both the quantitative and qualitative aims are regarded as averages. To monitor the extent to

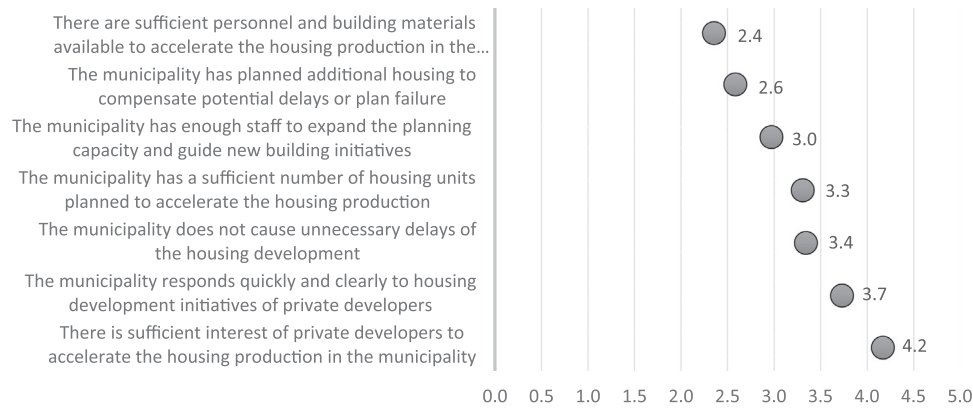


Fig. 3. Average scores from 1) *totally disagree* to 5) *totally agree* on obstacles for meeting housing objectives (n = 72).

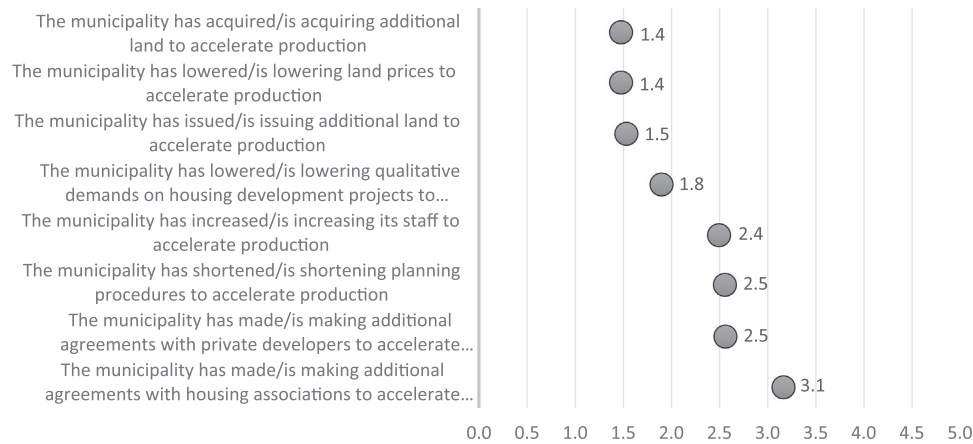


Fig. 4. Average scores from 1) *totally disagree* to 5) *totally agree* on measures to meeting housing objectives (n = 72).

which projects together contribute to different policy objectives, the land department is cooperating closely with the housing department.

Prioritizing and balancing different aspects of a development that are being negotiated, is firstly done by civil servants of a project team and within the related departments. If in negotiations with market actors some policy objectives are better incorporated than others, the negotiation result is assessed in its entirety. In these processes, developers are also challenged to convince the municipality to cooperate. Progress of development is also regularly discussed with the responsible aldermen. In case a project deviates from the boundaries set by the city council, the project will be presented again with the argumentation why it still fits the overall policy of the municipality (Interview municipality of Den Bosch).

Negotiations with market actors are argued to be a balancing act for municipalities: “Only enforcing will not suffice. It is also about persuasiveness and building trust that if something does not go according to plan you will be accommodating in another area” (Interview municipality Den Bosch). Notwithstanding this flexibility, the municipality of Den Bosch also made clear decisions in the past on where to concentrate developments. Other developments were deliberately postponed to avoid competition between plans. This strategy secured success and quality of projects started, but it may also have implications on the number of houses developed.

The increasing number of additional policy objectives are argued to complicate negotiations with developers. Some issues, however, have turned into formal legal requirements on the national scale. This is welcomed by respondents of the municipality, as it provides clarity, decreases the bandwidth on which different municipalities are competing, and limits the number of subjects that need to be negotiated.

The municipality of Den Bosch itself also specifies requirements for all developments: “It makes clear what is important for us. Over time, it has become quite the list. Some things on the list, however, are somewhat more negotiable than others” (Interview municipality of Den Bosch).

The dependence on developers to accelerate the housing construction results in doubt about whether potential measures of municipalities could have an impact. It is argued that the municipality has to be sure it has sufficient capacity to follow up on all initiatives. It is mentioned as the most important way to influence the speed of housing construction. Strategies applied to secure implementation of policy objectives, however, have primarily been aimed at securing qualitative objectives.

4.3. Case study: objectives, obstacles, and measures for performance in Zwolle

4.3.1. Objectives

The municipality of Zwolle considers the city as an attractive growing city and aims to strengthen its position in the region and be the center of the northeast of the Netherlands. This, and the need for additional housing, requires housing construction within existing urban boundaries (at least 50%) and creating higher densities. The housing production target is set by the province and municipality at 6000 housing units by the year 2027 and 10,000 by the year 2040. This corresponds with 600 dwellings a year. For the first two years, the target has been changed to 800. The policy aim is to realize 30% social housing, 40% middle-income rental housing, and 30% more private-sector rental and owner-occupied housing.

4.3.2. Obstacles

The land department of the municipality of Zwolle was confronted with severe losses after the Global Financial Crisis and had to write off land value. As a consequence, active land policy has become more of an exception, and the municipality is aiming to “actively facilitate” urban development initiatives. The crisis has also resulted in a so-far unresolved reduction in the organization’s capacity (especially regarding land development expertise).

Also, the number of policy objectives to be realized through housing development is reported to have grown. This is not yet perceived as a cause for plan-failure, but regarded as a growing risk: “We call it the piling-up of ambitions. We need to be aware of what this means for the feasibility of projects” (Interview municipality of Zwolle). The vast number of policy objectives requires prioritization and decision-making: “That is something we are not good at, but we need to make a clear decision and go for it. The Concilium³ says we need to speed up. The city council says we need to speed up. But then we need to make the decision. (...) We are afraid to make choices” (Interview municipality of Zwolle). Although the municipality did already decide to accelerate housing production, it is undecided how and where this should take place, and what this means for other qualitative ambitions.

Implementation of policy objectives at the project level can also be difficult because the formulated policy objectives are not very concrete. These objectives need to be translated into requirements. The decision-making is left to the project level at which value conflicts emerge. If the translation of the broadly defined objectives cannot be made within a project, coordination with the policy-department is required. This takes time and sometimes needs to take place parallel to negotiations with private actors, while the planning department aims to make more integral assessments of new proposals in a shorter amount of time (e.g. in the control room).

Just like Den Bosch, Zwolle is struggling to control the (effects of the) accumulation of developments in existing neighborhoods. A respondent explains this is the case with transformations of former office buildings in small apartments. These developments sometimes cause tension, because they attract new residents with different lifestyles or because they put pressure on public space and local services. Even if the municipality thinks a certain transformation project is undesirable, it may not be able to block it when it fits within the existing land use plan.

The overall lack of capacity in the building industry is also mentioned by most respondents in Zwolle and adds to the perceived insecurity on whether projects will be implemented according to plan: “We are dealing with market actors operating throughout the country. They can only put builders to work on one location at a time. If they could have a margin of profit of 12% in Rotterdam and 6% here, you know where they would go” (Interview municipality of Zwolle). Also, there is doubt whether market actors will be able to actually speed up if the municipality would prepare additional plans and land.

4.3.3. Measures

The municipality of Zwolle makes an initial integral assessment on new projects in the so-called “control room”, to be able to respond to submitted initiatives more quickly. This control room refers to a team of representatives from all relevant departments. This was installed to provide a quick and clear answer to proposed new developments, for a positive impact on construction in the city. Despite the use of this control room, a respondent wishes the municipality would make more explicit choices on the priorities for different parts of the city upfront. There are deemed too many policy objectives to be implemented in a single project: “rather think of four objectives and do them well. Maybe you’ll

³ A collaboration between the municipality and other non-governmental housing provision actors operating in the municipality of Zwolle. The Concilium was initiated in 2009 to cooperatively respond to the impacts of the global financial crisis.

achieve more along the way, but I would rather focus and do a few things good than leaving it open” (Interview municipality of Zwolle). Also, other respondents ask for decision-making at a strategic level, on both priorities among policy objectives and preferences of which type of development is desired for which part of the city. A priori decision-making at the strategic level would reduce the complexity of internal coordination regarding specific projects.

Land policy and financial objectives are argued to be subordinate to substantive policy goals. A respondent states that in case of unforeseen benefits, additional qualitative policy objectives would be implemented, rather than using this benefits for additional developments elsewhere. This course of action implicitly represents the way value conflicts are dealt with. Although it reduces complexity as the options of where, when, and how to spend these revenues are strongly confined (to the place and duration of the project), it does not contribute to a more integral consideration of where and how ambitions are realized.

5. Discussion

In this study, we focused on the way municipalities conceive their conformance and performance in relation to plural housing objectives. The survey, however, only reveals the perceptions of one employee per municipality. Their perceptions do not necessarily align with perceptions of others within the organization. Moreover, the focus on municipalities poses limitations, since a diverse group of other stakeholders also play indispensable roles in housing development (see [Nieland et al., 2019](#); [Özogul and Tasan-kok, 2020](#)) and the two case studies do not represent the full variety in municipal housing and land policy strategies ([Shahab et al., 2021](#)). Nonetheless, studying the way municipal actors conceive housing development is important to better understand how value conflicts are dealt with.

When assessing implementation of housing policy of Dutch municipalities, one must conclude that not all policy objectives are achieved (i.e. conformance) or even pursued effectively (i.e. performance). The survey showed the primary obstacle for speeding-up house construction is a perceived lack of personnel and building materials in the building industry. Survey respondents state their municipalities to some degree aim to shorten planning processes and increase municipal capacity, but do hardly lower standards or make more land available at lower prices. The case study confirms the survey results that municipalities are reluctant to speed-up housing production at the cost of qualitative policy aims. The alignment of the case study results with the findings of the survey suggests explanatory mechanisms (e.g. insecurity regarding other stakeholders’ actions) may be generalizable to a larger population. This is to be confirmed by a larger-n study including multiple perceptions including multiple stakeholders.

The performance, looking at how a plan or policy informs the decision-making process ([Mastop and Faludi, 1997](#)) and how is coped with value conflicts, is obstructed by 1) a lack of clarity on prioritization of quantitative vis-à-vis qualitative objectives within the organization of the municipality, and 2) the dependence on external actors to implement policy goals and uncertainty about their ability to implement plans. Municipalities are reluctant to accept a *certain* loss in quality and a worse negotiation result against a *possible* gain in speed. The lack of prioritization and the uncertainty concerning actions of other actors leads to an unclear status of policy objectives and municipal inaction.

In several other European countries including Germany and Switzerland, active land policy is seen as highly promising to more effectively deliver sufficient (affordable) housing ([Debrunner and Hartmann, 2020](#); [Gerber et al., 2017](#); [Shahab et al., 2021](#)). Despite the large experience of Dutch municipalities, active land policy is not applied as part of a strategy to accelerate housing construction. Financial losses after the GFC have resulted in changed municipal land policies ([Hartmann and Spit, 2015](#); [Oosten et al., 2018](#); [Woestenburg et al., 2018](#)). The survey has not revealed a shift back to more active land policy in response to the additional objective of accelerating housing

construction. Future research, in line with [Shahab et al. \(2021\)](#) could shed light on the many gradients of intermediate/situational types of land policy on the performance regarding the implementation of plural quantitative and qualitative housing policy objectives.

The described obstructions, influencing the performance related to speeding-up housing construction, ask for increased understanding and thrust concerning what different (public and private) actors are able and willing to deliver. Next to intensified collaboration on the local level (see the case of Zwolle), a better understanding of the industry capacity and the actual bottle-necks obstructing construction capacity could inform municipal decision-making on investments and have a positive effect on the policy performance and show how (at a national level) building capacity could be increased and made more robust.

6. Conclusion

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from this study, is that municipalities have some considerable problem-solving capacity when it comes to dealing with the ‘piling-up’ of ambitions. However, another way to understand the findings is that this study merely provides a glimpse into the problem-solving strategies of municipalities and that information asymmetries between the municipality and target groups (e.g. whether market actors have the capacity to actually implement additional plans) results in inaction (e.g. not making additional plans) affecting both conformance and performance. The survey showed municipalities are reluctant to trade-off qualitative objectives for quantitative objectives, despite stated ambitions. While mid-sized cities play

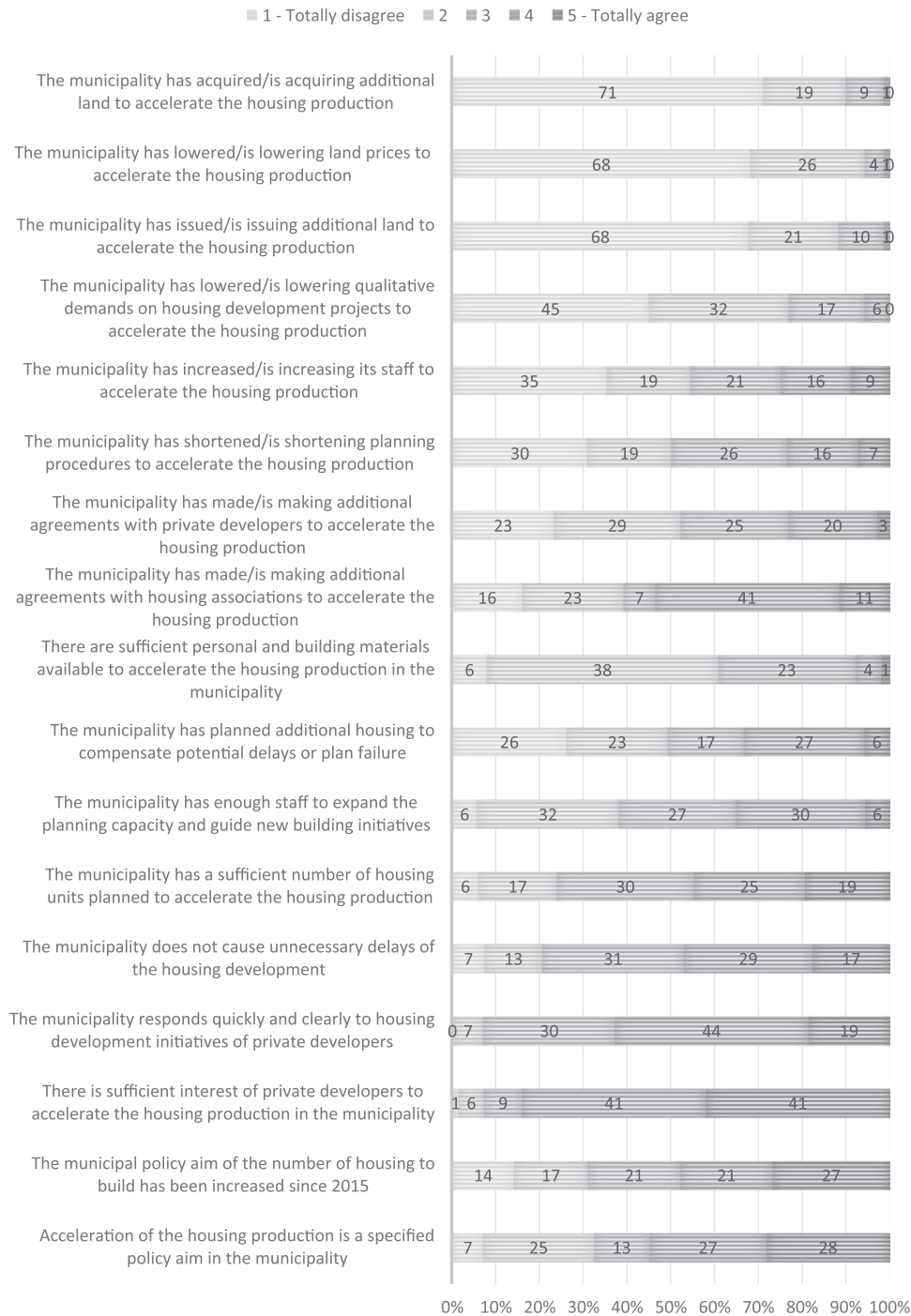
an important role in meeting national housing goals, they struggle to match these goals with qualitative objectives. The two cases differ in the way they are internally focused (Den Bosch prioritizing development areas) and externally focused (Zwolle seeking collaboration with external actors) to increase performance. These strategies, however, seem out of proportion to the high priority given to speeding-up housing construction.

Applying the performance perspective in line with [Mastop and Faludi \(1997\)](#) enabled to better understand why non-conformance occurs and to what extent the policy (objectives) still inform decision-making and processes of coping with value-conflict. The results suggest that studying the process of decision-making from a multi-actor perspective could further enrich our theoretical understanding of policy performance and of the conditions required for an increased conformance and performance of the policy objective of speeding-up housing construction within the housing governance context. Understanding how land for housing is provided and how coordination between stakeholders takes place, both through land policy and more informal collaboration, can help to alleviate the conditions for housing development.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Arend Jonkman: Conceptualization, Methodology, Analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Rick Meijer:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Thomas Hartmann:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing.

Appendix



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