

# The European Community Initiative URBAN: help or hinder for local participation?

The case of URBAN Bijlmermeer (Amsterdam, the Netherlands)

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# Introduction

In 1995 the Amsterdam Bijlmermeer neighbourhood, a part of the Southeast district, was assigned funding by the European Commission, within the context of the Community Initiative URBAN. One of the program requirements was an organizational structure, composed of a Steering Committee and a Supervisory Committee. However, from the outset, there was a public outcry by the local (primarily) 'black' population, against this organizational structure. Especially the one-sided, mainly 'white' composition of the URBAN organizational structure, as well as the minor representation of ethnic minority groups and neighbourhood residents were heavily criticized. Many of the Southeast District councilors shared this opinion and supported the protest. The protest resulted in a heated discussion, that has become known as the 'black and white discussion' and that caused a huge delay in the implementation of the URBAN program in the Bijlmermeer: from May 1996 until January 1997 there was a program 'time-out'. However, the result of this discussion was a significant change in the organizational structure, as well as a serious shift with respect to the content of the original URBAN Bijlmermeer program.

The questions that I would like to address in this paper are: what were the original points of departure of the URBAN Bijlmermeer program? What precisely caused this public outcry and how did the discussion develop? And finally, what was the outcome, especially in terms of gains for the local population? To what extent could the increased participation be ascribed to the Community Initiative URBAN?

The information is derived from the case study that I am presently working on within the framework of the European UGIS-program, in which several EU member states participate. The more general question, at the beginning of the case study was: How has the presence of the Community Initiative URBAN changed the interplay between the various actors involved in the program? As this case study has not been finished yet, you have to keep in mind that much of the following material is quite preliminary. In my PhD research I will examine some remaining questions in more detail.

First of all, I would like to briefly introduce the Bijlmer neighbourhood and the Community Initiative URBAN.

# The Bijlmer neighbourhood

The City of Amsterdam is subdivided in fifteen districts. Every district is headed by its own administration. One of these districts, called 'Amsterdam Zuidoost,' ('Amsterdam Southeast') is located to the southeast of the City of Amsterdam. It can be characterized as a peripheral new social housing estate. The area to which is usually referred as 'the Bijlmer' or 'the Bijlmermeer,' is part of this district and is home to almost 50.000 people.

The Bijlmer construction, which started in 1966, attracted worldwide attention, as it concerned a large scale, and therefore unique 'functional town', based on the concept of the architect Le Corbusier. In the lay-out of this functional town, living, working, traffic and recreation were separated. The Bijlmer mainly consisted of high-rise (10-floor) deck-access apartment blocks in a honeycomb pattern. Of the total of 18,000 units, 13,000 were built in this way. Between the large, high-rise apartment blocks, spacious green parks were developed, traversed by bicycle and pedestrian routes. Car traffic was led above ground level and metro lines crossed the roadways (Projectbureau Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer, 1994; Stadsdeel Zuidoost et al., 1995; UBO URBAN Bijlmermeer, 1999).

The spacious and comfortable high-rise apartments, mostly developed as public housing, were intended for (lower) middle-class families from the old inner city areas of Amsterdam. However, soon after the Bijlmer construction had started, it became already clear that the way of building (high-rise blocks) was not in accordance with the markets; the people for whom it was meant did not move to the Bijlmer. This resulted in a lack of occupancy. Moreover, these vacant apartments attracted many people who for some reason could not easily find a place to live elsewhere. Between 1970 and 1975, preceding the independence of Surinam (a former colony of the Netherlands), many Surinamese came to the Netherlands and settled in the Bijlmer. Other immigrants, from the Netherlands Antilles, followed. In the middle of the 1980s, many fringe groups, such as refugees, migrants, illegal foreigners, and so on, found refuge in the Bijlmer area. As rents were high, people shared dwellings, which caused overpopulation in some blocks. Especially among the ethnic minority groups, the educational level was low and the level of unemployment considerable. People who could afford it, left the Bijlmer area and were replaced with an influx of deprived, many of whom newcomers. Whereas the area had become known for its unique spatial organization (separation of traffic, the lay out of (semi-) public space), this particular spatial organization turned out to promote and support un-safety, vandalism, and an increasing drug abuse (Projectbureau Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer, 1994; Stadsdeel Zuidoost et al., 1995; UBO URBAN Bijlmermeer, 1999). In the 1980s measures were taken to improve the Bijlmermeer situation.

Examining the ethnic composition of the population, the Bijlmer is characterized by a large diversity of people: more than 80 different cultures are represented in this area. In 1996, the year of the 'black and white discussion,' the share of ethnic minority groups in the Bijlmer area was already almost twice the share of these groups in the city of Amsterdam. The Dutch, on the other hand, made up less than a quarter of the total Bijlmer population. The largest ethnic minority group consisted of Surinamese and Antillean inhabitants: in 1996 their share was 43 percent of the total Bijlmer population. Moreover, these groups made up more than half (56 percent) of the ethnic minority groups in the Bijlmer. Another category that was quite substantial consisted of ethnic minority groups from non-industrialized coun-

tries (such as Africa, South America, Asia and eastern and southern Europe): in 1996 they made up about a quarter of the total Bijlmer population.

Table 1: Ethnic minority groups in Amsterdam city and in the Bijlmer neighbourhood, as a proportion of the total population in the areas concerned, in 1996 (in percentages):

	Surinamese or Antillean	Turkish	Moroccan	Southern European	Others from Non-industr. Countr.	Others from Industr. Countries	Dutch	Total
Bijlmer	42,9%	1,7%	1,8%	1,6%	23,4%	4,9%	23,6%	100,0%
Ams	11,1%	4,3%	6,7%	2,3%	8,3%	9,7%	57,6%	100,0%

Source: O+S, 1996

# The Bijlmermeer renewal operation

Over time and due to a combination of factors, the Bijlmer became one of the most problematic neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. The results of the measures that had been taken in the 1980s turned out to be disappointing: the Bijlmermeer image remained poor, the economic position of the population did not really improve. In July 1992, the Southeast District Council, the Nieuw Amsterdam housing corporation and the Amsterdam municipality settled for a large-scale integral renewal operation of the Bijlmermeer (Stadsdeel Zuidoost, 1995). The main purpose of the Bijlmermeer renewal operation was a reevaluation of the Bijlmermeer in order to create a neighbourhood with a favourable living climate. Initially it was primarily spatial renewal that was attended to, as it was judged to have the best chance of success in priming the Bijlmer renewal operation (Stadsdeel Zuidoost, 1998). But at the same time, a wide audience supported the understanding that social-economic renewal should be undertaken as well.

In the summer of 1994, the Amsterdam municipality was informed that an application for funding could be submitted with the European Commission, within the framework of the Community Initiative URBAN. Because of its emphasis on social-economic renewal activities, this European program would perfectly match with the needs in the Bijlmermeer. The Dutch government responded to the appeal and submitted a request for funding of the Bijlmermeer. In September 1995, the European Commission approved the 'URBAN Bijlmermeer program.' Financial support for the program would be derived from the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), on the basis of co-financing. Projects had to be tendered before December 31st, 1999. At about the same time that the European Commission approved the URBAN Bijlmermeer program, the news got out that (partly because of the URBAN condition of co-financing) the Dutch national government would financially support the Bijlmer renewal operation as well, within the Major Cities Policy framework (Stadsdeel Zuidoost, 1998).

# The Community Initiative URBAN

The Community Initiative URBAN (or briefly: 'URBAN') was launched by the European Commission in 1994, in order to contribute to the search for solutions for the high concentration of social, environmental and economic problems that were increasingly present in urban agglomerations. URBAN targets neighbourhoods in extreme deprivation and is known for its *integrated* approach, in the sense that it takes account of all dimensions of urban life. Further, URBAN programs are characterized by *divergent measures*, such as the launch of new economic activities, the promotion of local employment and improvements of the environmental infrastructure. Another characteristic, of major importance for for this presentation, is a considerable emphasis on *local participation* in the design and implementation of the program - the problems of urban deprivation are to be solved at the grass-roots level. Finally, the URBAN Community Initiative pursues a spatially focused approach, in which one neighbourhood or administrative district is targeted at the time. In the case of Amsterdam, the target area was the Bijlmermeer (European Commission, 1998).

The URBAN Bijlmermeer program had to be integrated in the ongoing social-economic renewal operation in the Bijlmermeer that had started in 1992. What did the program look like in 1995, with regard to the actors involved, their responsibilities, the organizational structure and the financial arrangements?

## Actors involved and responsibilities

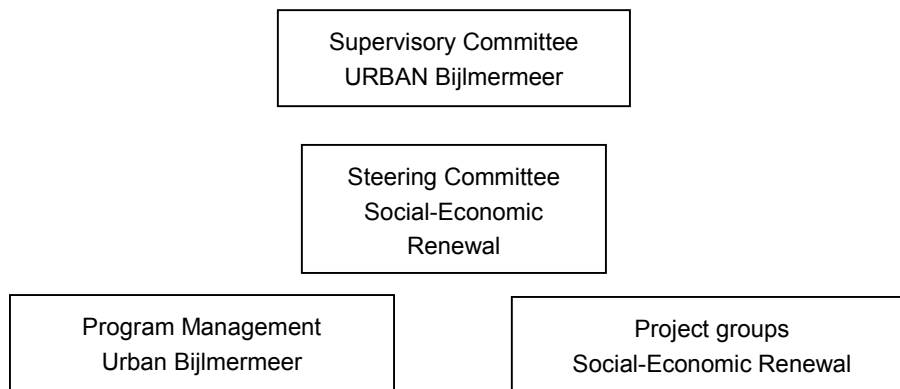
Several policy levels were involved in the URBAN Bijlmermeer program:

- the **European Commission**, that was the initiator en co-financier of the program. Through the European rules regarding the way in which the URBAN-programs had to be dealt with, the European Commission had a dominant influence on the realization and implementation of the URBAN programs, even though these were only partly financed with European funds (ERAC, 1998);
- the **Ministry of Internal Affairs**, that was a co-financier of the programs as well, via the Major Cities Policy funds. This Ministry was the contact point for the European Commission (or better: for the responsible European Directorates), and was hold responsible on behalf of the Netherlands for a correct implementation of the Dutch URBAN-programs. This Ministry further played an important role in formulating rules for the URBAN programs in the Netherlands, in agreement with the European rules (ERAC, 1998; NEI, 1999).
- the **Amsterdam city council and the Southeast district council**; both government levels influenced the decision making regarding the allocation of URBAN money. The Amsterdam city council had the final responsibility for the spending of URBAN-money in the Bijlmermeer (Van der AA, 1996). The Southeast district council was responsible for the development of the programs and the projects.
- Finally, several employees working with **public services** at divergent governmental levels were involved in the implementation of the URBAN Bijlmermeer program (in the 'program management' for example).

Apart from these political levels, all kinds of other organizations were involved in URBAN Bijlmermeer as well, such as the Chamber of Commerce, housing associations, the police, an educational consultative body, and so on. Strikingly, the majority of the actors involved consisted of public or semi-public actors.

## Organizational structure

According to European guidelines, an organization had to be set up, that would be responsible for the allocation of money to URBAN projects. On the other hand, though, the URBAN program had to be integrated in the ongoing renewal operation in the Bijlmermeer. In the resulting organization structure, as set up in 1995, both requirements were thus taken into account. It looked as follows (Comité van Toezicht, 1997):



The **Supervisory Committee** was in charge of the implementation of the URBAN Bijlmermeer program. On behalf of the Amsterdam municipality, alderman Jaap van der Aa, who was responsible for the ethnic minorities-, education-, social affairs- and employment-portfolio, was appointed chairman of this Committee. Other seats were reserved for representatives from other political levels (the European Directorate-Generals V and XVI (2), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (2), the Southeast district (3), as well as for delegates from (semi-) public institutions, such as a housing association (1), the police (1), the Chamber of Commerce (1) and an educational consultative body (1).

In October 1995, the Supervisory Committee established the **Steering Committee Social-Economic Renewal**. This Committee was authorized to approve the individual project proposals that were submitted for European funding. This Committee was presided by a representative of the Southeast district, but formerly mentioned alderman Van der Aa participated as a member in the Steering Committee as well. Altogether, the seats were reserved for the Southeast district (2, including the chair), the Amsterdam municipality (1), a housing association (1), the Chamber of Commerce (1), an educational consultative body (1) and the police (1).

Examining the composition of the two Committees, it is striking that neighbourhood organizations, ethnic- or religious organizations were not represented at all. Even though the Community Initiative URBAN emphatically intended to stimulate local participation (see page 6.)

A **Program Management** that supported the earlier mentioned Committees was established as well. This office was responsible for the daily course of events related to the implementation of the program.

Finally, four **project groups** were established, related to work, social development, quality of life and public security. The chairs and the secretaries of the project groups came from the Southeast district services.

## Financing

The URBAN money for the Bijlmermeer, derived from the European Structural Funds, consisted of about 10 million guilders. However, as mentioned earlier, co-financing of the projects was necessary, as the European Commission did not reimburse more than about half of the project costs (Bureau SEV, 1998). Based on this condition, the Dutch national government made 16.5 million guilders available within the Dutch framework of Major Cities Policy (GSB). The total amount of money, made available by the European Commission and the Dutch national government is presented in the table below.

Table 2: Amount of money, made available by the European Commission and the Dutch national government for URBAN Bijlmermeer (in guilders).

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	f 7.848.200,00
European Social Fund (ESF)	f 2.001.800,00
Contribution of the Dutch national government, as co-financing for the European ERDF/ESF contributions (GSB-I)	f 10.352.500,00
Money from the Dutch national government (not co-financing) (GSB-II)	(About) f 6.500.000,00

Source: Comité van Toezicht, 2000

Usually, when is spoken of the “Urban Funds’ for the social-economic Bijlmermeer renewal, the total amount of about f 26.5 million guilders, as mentioned above, is referred to (see, for example, UBO URBAN Bijlmermeer, 1999, page 7.) However, this is confusing, for a number of reasons.

First of all, the total investments in the social-economic Bijlmermeer renewal operation were actually much higher: URBAN acted as a ‘lever’ and thanks to this program the total investments amounted to 143 million guilders (including the above mentioned sum, but also including investments made by local and regional governmental levels, private investors and public institutions) (Comité van Toezicht, 2000). In this paper, for reasons of simplicity, the European and the Dutch national contributions are the main focus of attention, though. Next, the GSB-II contribution (see overview) was actually *not* a part of the URBAN program (Comité van Toezicht, 1997), but it “could be used freely within the content-based framework of the URBAN programme.” (UBO URBAN Bijlmermeer, 1999, p.7.) A final confusing issue relates to the authorization of the Steering Committee Social-Economic Renewal. It is stated that it was only qualified to allocate money within the context of URBAN (Stedelijke woningdienst Amsterdam, 1998). This probably implied the allocation of EFRO, ESF and GSB-I money, as mentioned above (Comité van Toezicht, 1997). But then who was originally in charge of the allocation of GSB-II money? At this stage of my research, the answer is not clear yet.

# The Black & White conflict

Shortly after the start of the URBAN Bijlmermeer program in 1995, there turned out to be serious problems concerning public support among the local population. In February 1996, black politicians, representing diverse parties, together with outsiders formed the 'Zwart Beraad' (literally translated: 'Black Consideration')(Leistra, 1996b). What they criticized in particular was the organizational set-up of URBAN-Bijlmermeer, because of the mostly white composition of the representatives and because of the lack of representation of the (mainly black) neighbourhood residents. This opinion was shared by many of the (black) Southeast district councilors. Shortly afterwards, Zwart Beraad came into conflict with the white district councilors (Leistra, 1996a). For that reason, the conflict is often referred to as the 'Black & White conflict'. The media extensively described the discussion, headlines referred to a 'social war' in the Bijlmermeer (Van der Hoek, 1996.) The Southeast district Council felt compelled to put the URBAN program on hold (Bureau SEV, 1998) and made a request to the Steering Committee Social-Economic renewal for a temporary time-out in the decision making process in order to solve the conflict (Comité van Toezicht, 1997). From May 1996 until January 1997 the implementation of the URBAN Bijlmermeer program was at a standstill.

However, as we will see later, although the conflict mainly focused on the organizational structure of the URBAN Bijlmermeer program, it surpassed URBAN, in the sense that it intended to denounce the poor representation of local population in various government agencies, in particular at the Southeast district level. From the early beginning, Zwart Beraad conferred on the matter with Van Der Aa, the earlier mentioned Chair of the Supervisory Committee and Alderman of the Amsterdam City Council (Leistra, 1996b). Van der Aa subscribed to most of the Zwart Beraad viewpoints: he acknowledged the dominantly white composition of the representatives in the organizational structure and agreed with the fact that one should aim at a higher representation of blacks at official Southeast district top jobs as well as in the Southeast district council. However, at the same time Van der Aa increased the pressure on the conflict, by stating that the Amsterdam city council would intervene if the conflict was not solved soon. For postponing a solution would mean taking the risk that the European Commission would withdraw the assigned financial contribution to URBAN Bijlmermeer (Leistra, 1996b).

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1996, the Steering Committee Social-Economic renewal agreed with the requested time-out and discontinued decision-making. A research institute (the Verwey-Jonker Institute) was asked to analyze the structure of the social economic renewal operation in order to overcome the deadlock (Van der Aa, 1996; Comité van Toezicht, 1997). The analysis and recommendations were published in a report in September 1996 (RIJKSCHROEFF AND VOS, 1996). This so called 'quick-scan' had been guided by a committee, which was chaired by Van der Aa and composed of representatives from the Southeast district, Zwart Beraad, political parties, religious organizations and the Ghanaian community (Van der Aa, 1996; Comité van Toezicht, 1997). In my opinion, the establishment of this committee was the first milestone in population participation in the decision-making process. From October 1996 onwards, the Steering Committee elaborated the Verwey-Jonker recommendations, but only did so together with this committee, under the name of 'extended Steering Committee' (Comité van Toezicht, 1997). The recommendations were then put before several residential-, ethnic-, religious and social organizations.

## A New Start

'A New Start' was the promising title of the policy document that was written by the extended Steering Committee. It was an elaboration of the recommendations of the Verwey-Jonker Institute that was discussed by the District council on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1996. What were the proposals? First of all, in order to improve the labour participation of the local residents, the promotion of employment of this group was stated to be of major importance. The Committee insisted on stimulating the government and business community in the district to put more effort in actively engaging people from (black) ethnic minority groups. They also proposed the establishment of grassroots panels, in order to give the Bijlmer residents the opportunity to increase their influence on the social economic renewal operation. Finally, and of major importance for this paper, the Committee presented a new organizational structure (Comité van Toezicht, 1997), that will be shown later.

Zwart Beraad and another ethnic minority organization (ABO) were asked to react to 'A New Start' (Bureau SEV, 1998). Their comments were published in another policy document, named: 'Zwart-Wit nader Beschouwd' (literally translated: 'a closer look at Black & White') (Zwart Beraad and ABO, 1997). The most important tenor of the story was a plea in favour of a proportional representation of the Bijlmer population in all the official decision-making bodies in the area. A major point at issue concerned the (new) composition of the Steering Committee and the Supervisory Committee, as proposed in 'A New Start'. The new Steering Committee (called 'UBO' in the new organization structure) for example, would consist of 11 seats and three of them would be reserved for representatives of black ethnic population groups. However, Zwart Beraad suggested reserving 'half of the seats plus one' in both the UBO and the Supervisory Committee for representatives of black ethnic population groups. In their opinion, the UBO needed to be extended from 11 to 19 seats and ten seats should be reserved for ethnic minority groups. Interestingly, their line of reasoning did not include a proportional representation of the 80 ethnic groups in de Bijlmer: 'non-white' seemed to be the distinctive characteristic of possible candidates for these seats (which might have been to prevent spreading discord among the black population).

Another important point was the recurring plea made for multiculturalisation of the Southeast District organization, I quote: 'by seriously beginning with the incorporation and integration of the black officials within the core structure...' (Zwart Beraad and ABO, 1997, pp.5-6.) A final issue concerned the URBAN program rules that were stated to be an obstacle for projects that focused on emancipation and participation of the Bijlmer population. Although it is not clear which rules are meant, those might be the criteria that were used to judge the submitted project proposals. Especially two of them qualified for criticism: first of all, the criterion that stated that the project submission needed to be done by an accepted and verifiable organization or institution. This criterion was hard to deal with for 'grassroots' (social groupings and residents) who, were not necessarily institutionalized. The other criterion that qualified was the co-financing criterion, which stated that co-financing of the submitted project proposals had to be guaranteed. Zwart Beraad argued that: "Every rule that requires co-financing by the population is doomed to fail in the Bijlmermeer" (Zwart Beraad and ABO, 1997, p.11). This criticism was understandable, as it was probably highly problematic for many grassroots initiatives to find funding. For that reason, Zwart Beraad proposed to drop the condition of co-financing and urged the local govern-

ment to stand surety for the obliged co-financing within the URBAN framework.

# The changes

At the beginning of 1997, the original organizational set-up was radically changed. Based on the adjusted organizational structure and the new priorities, the program was restarted (Comité van Toezicht, 1997). What were the outcomes, especially in terms of gains for the local population?

## Organizational structure

First, the extended Steering Committee was replaced with the **Uitgebreid Bestuurlijk Overleg (UBO)**. Most important in the context of this paper was the adjusted composition of the UBO (Reglement van orde van het uitgebreid bestuurlijk overleg vernieuwing Bijlmermeer, 1997):

- Whereas there had been no population representatives on the original Steering Committee, on the UBO 4 seats were reserved for representatives from ethnic minority groups and one was reserved for religious institutions.
- Moreover, whereas the Chairman of the original Steering Committee had been a representative from the Southeast District organization, the UBO would now be presided by an independent person. The *vice*-chairman would now represent the Southeast District instead.

Interestingly, the UBO would be qualified to decide on *all* the projects related to social-economic renewal that were funded with EFRO, GSB-I and GSB-II money (Reglement van orde van het uitgebreid bestuurlijk overleg vernieuwing Bijlmermeer, 1997). However, once more, the exact financing of the social-economic Bijlmermeer renewal and its administrative implications needs to be studied in more detail.

The first UBO meeting took place on April 3rd, 1997.

Secondly, regarding the **Supervisory Committee URBAN Bijlmermeer**, the most important change in the context of this paper was the fact that 2 seats were provided for ethnic minority groups. As the Committee decided with a majority of votes (Reglement van orde van het Comité van Toezicht, 1997), every vote was equally important. The chairman (Amsterdam Alderman Van der Aa) stayed in charge.

Thirdly, the four **project groups** were abolished and replaced with a Social Economic Renewal Bureau (Bureau SEV), under the command of the Southeast District clerk. Finally, the **secretariat** that had supported the earlier mentioned committees (program management) was repositioned and now subsumed under the Social Economic Renewal Bureau (Comité van Toezicht, 1997).

Although there were many improvements from the viewpoint of the population, not all proposals and demands were complied with: The UBO and Supervisory Committee, for example, would be extended with seats for representatives from ethnic minority groups and religious groups, but these groups were *not* allotted 'half plus one' of the seats. On the other hand, the UBO responsibility would be extended, as it would now be qualified to decide on all the projects related to social-economic renewal.

## Project Criteria

Another change related to the project criteria that were used by the UBO in order to determine whether submitted projects qualified for funding. Comparing these with the original ones (stipulated by the Supervisory Committee on December 20<sup>th</sup> 1995), major changes are noticeable: (UBO URBAN Bijlmermeer, 1999):

1. the project should focus on *cooperation between various parties in the Bijlmermeer*;
2. the project should be *multicultural* and therefore help to reinforce the multi-ethnic community;
3. the project should be developed/created by residents' groups, *from the bottom-up*;
4. the content, approach or organization of the project should be *innovative* and finally
5. the project should produce a *measurable result* and preferably have a *lasting effect*.

Whereas the first criterion (cooperation between various parties) was also part of the original set of criteria, the second, concerning the multicultural character of the project, was completely absent in the original program. Moreover, whereas projects originally had to demonstrate that they were socially broadly based and were assured enough involvement of the Bijlmermeer residents, in the new situation, this aspect was accentuated: the project now had to be developed or created by residents' groups from the bottom-up. The mentioning of 'residents' groups' (3<sup>rd</sup> criterion) is interesting also, as in the original program the only projects that were taken into consideration by the Steering Committee were projects, submitted by an 'accepted and verifiable organization or institution' (Comité van Toezicht, 1997, p. 29). Finally, at this stage of my research it is unclear what happened with the original criterion of co-financing of the submitted projects that had to be guaranteed. As far as I can see now, it was not one of the project criteria anymore (Comité van Toezicht, 2000; UBO URBAN Bijlmermeer, 1999), which could imply that the (local) government would now stand surety for the obliged co-financing of (some of) the project proposals.

## MP-bureau, grassroots panels and the 'Fonds voor Onderop'

However, despite numerous efforts to stimulate and support the 'grassroots' to submit proposals, the URBAN funds remained fairly inaccessible to the grassroots community. According to the UBO, this was caused in part by the European regulations. Unfortunately, it is unclear which regulations are meant. In order to help residents to formulate their initiatives and to submit these to the UBO, a Multiculturalisation and Participation Bureau was set up in the course of 1997 (UBO URBAN Bijlmermeer, 1999). The establishment of an MP-bureau was also supported by Zwart Beraad and ABO and was thus another gain for the population. The bureau was positioned under the executive Committee of the Southeast District and had to take into account both the starting points of the social-economic policy of the Southeast district and those of the URBAN program (Bureau SEV, 1998). The bureau not only supported grass roots, it also monitored the quality and progress of the programs, especially from the viewpoint of multiculturalisation (BART, 1999).

Finally, another initiative that was taken by the UBO and that could be considered a gain for the population was the earmarking of 2 million guilders for projects for and by the community, by establishing the 'Fonds voor Onderop' ('Bottom-up Fund') (UBO URBAN Bijlmermeer, 1999).

## Final Conclusions

Summarizing, it may be stated that the Community Initiative URBAN has determined in considerable measure the 'design' of the social-economic renewal operation in the Bijlmermeer. Besides, URBAN has been on the threshold of an increased population participation in the Southeast district. Moreover, URBAN is often called an important catalyst in the emancipation process of the local population (NEI, 1999).

Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether this increased population participation happened *thanks to* or *in spite of* URBAN. Could one argue that the URBAN program itself has stimulated the participation of the local population? According to the European Commission, part of the success of URBAN is (and I quote): "explicit commitment in embracing local citizens in the development and implementation of the programmes." Thus the citizens affected by the interventions are participating in the decision making process. The problems of urban deprivation are solved at grass-roots level." (European Commission, 1998.) However, examining the implementation of URBAN in the Bijlmermeer, the program rules were frequently referred to as restrictive for grass-roots initiatives, even by representatives of the local population. But, could this restraint actually be attributed to the European URBAN program itself, or had the Dutch government (or particular levels) been contributory to the way in which URBAN took shape in the Bijlmer?

Another issue related to the composition of the Supervisory Committee and the Steering Committee: to what extent was this composition dictated by the European Commission? For representatives from neighbourhood organizations could have been asked in the Committees in 1995 already. Could this lack of population representation be attributed to European rules or was it a missed opportunity for the Dutch government (at whatever level) to put local participation into practice, even though it was an explicit aim of the European program? The same holds for the project criteria: to what extent were they 'prescribed' by the European Commission? Co-financing of the projects, for example, had originally been passed on to the organizations that submitted project proposals. This had made it almost impossible for the population to submit 'bottom-up' project proposals. Could the Dutch government have acted differently, by acting as guarantor in advance? These are all important questions for further research.

Finally, it is obvious that the population participation in the Bijlmermeer has been encouraged and increased. However, it remains to be seen whether this increased participation will continue. As of December 1999, the UBO decision-making officially came to an end. The assignment of the Supervisory Committee will stop in 2002, when the funded projects need to be finished. Currently, many of the projects that started in the 1995-1999 time period, within the context of URBAN, are continued under the denominator of (and partly financed by) Dutch Major Cities Policy. In the near future, again European money will be invested in the Southeast district, but within the context of the European Objective 2 program, instead of the URBAN Community Initiative. The demarcation lines will be drawn in a slightly different way. Currently, the future organizational structure of the program is discussed. The European Objective 2 program and the Dutch Major Cities Program need to be closely examined, in order to see whether the population gains, built up within the URBAN Bijlmermeer context, will prove to be permanent.

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