

Bachelor Thesis

Acting on Equity? How Municipalities (fail to) deal with Evidence in Education

Between Technocracy and Post-truth: Understanding Evidence-based Policy

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Abstract

In this thesis, the research aims to understand how the same evidence can be interpreted and acted upon differently in local policymaking processes. The research question is posed as follows: *“Why does one municipality in the Netherlands (Almere) act on the available evidence in developing their local educational policies while another (The Hague) does not?”*. Based on two hypothesis, an answer to the research question was formulated. The first hypothesis concerns rational choice theory and its characteristics and the second hypothesis is about framing theory and its respective features. A combination of primary and secondary was used in a content analysis in order to analyse the two hypotheses. Following the analyses, it can be concluded that rational choice theory offers a better explanation for the differences than framing theory. Almere and The Hague have different values and goals and their cost-benefit analysis took into account their varying budgets. Almere focuses on strengthening the relationship between the school, parents, and children with a focus on environment of the child in order to facilitate them with reaching their full potential. Whereas The Hague is more school-oriented by focusing on smoothening the transitions between the different types of schools and tackling the issue of under-advising. Furthermore, their budgets and cost-benefit analysis also different, also partly because of the difference in values and goals.

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1. Introduction

Equity in education has become a more prominent issue over the years. A recent study published by the Dutch Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) – ‘Inequality of the young child’ (Ongelijkheid van het jonge kind) – shows that in the Netherlands, children of parents with a lower income or a lower level of education begin at a disadvantage before entering primary school (CPB, 2020-b). Moreover, these children are unable to completely compensate for this disadvantage during their whole school careers. Equity in education is about providing children with equal learning opportunities at school. Parents do not always have the resources and opportunities to support and invest in their children. It is thus important to create a more level playing field that can compensate for the disadvantages produced by background differences and that every child is given equal chances for future success. Consequently, equity implies that students’ background or economic and social circumstances should not be significant for the differences in academic performance as these are factors over which they have no influence (OECD, 2018). The societal relevance lies in the sense that it can help municipalities understand how they can include evidence in their policymaking processes in order to produce appropriate policies for their particular municipality. Subsequently, equity in education offers children equal opportunities in life regardless of their background and leads to better academic performances, which can have long-term consequences as well. Therefore, this research could help policymakers decide which measures facilitate equity in education and discourage inequality and discrimination. Moreover, by providing equal opportunities to children in education, they can experience better opportunities in the future labour market, and ultimately, in life. In other words, equity in education strives to improve the quality of life of future generations, leading to a better society and serving the common good. Many policymakers agree about the value of equity in education and there is ample evidence about the particular policy measures that foster it most. Still, there are significant differences between policymakers in ‘acting upon equity’. This thesis focuses on how local policymakers (fail to) deal with evidence in education to find out why this is the case.

It is often believed that evidence-based policymaking (EBP), meaning policy decisions are made based on scientific evidence, can make policies ‘better’ as policymakers can make more well-informed decisions (Jasanoff, 1990; Guston, 2001; Parkhurst, 2017). However, a limit of EBP is that it often does not consider the societal contexts of implementation or the values that equally play into policymaking. By solely focusing on what scientific evidence tells us, you miss an important aspect of politics (Jasanoff, 1990). There is abundant literature on EBP but this literature is limited in two ways. First, social scientific studies of EBP predominantly analyse the use of evidence in national policymaking. As a consequence, it is not often contextualised to the local level. The local role of evidence provides a fresh angle to the EBP debate as comparisons are made between municipalities that can make use of the same overarching evidence but choose different policies nonetheless. This is tied into a second limit:

there are many single case studies while comparative case studies are often not considered. The comparative case study that follows the varying local policies therefore supplements research on EBP. Thus, taking into account the previous findings, this study aims to contribute to the literature on EBP by applying a contextual perspective on the local level and extend the analysis on EBP by including a comparative case study. This is done with a focus on local governments in the Netherlands. The main goal is to explain the differences between interpretation and use of evidence in local educational policymaking to understand why certain municipalities based on the same overarching evidence on equity in education opt for certain policy measures while others do not.

This contextualisation to the local level can particularly be observed considering the Netherlands is a decentralised unitary state. Accordingly, the Dutch education system can be seen as highly centralised on the one hand and highly decentralised on the other. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is responsible for the quality of the education system and sets the national education policy for all education in the Netherlands (OECD, 2014). That said, municipalities have a high degree of autonomy as they are responsible for certain areas of education policy, and they can informally influence local school policies. Furthermore, “under certain policies, such as the Local Education Agenda (LEA), co-operation is mandated between municipalities and other levels of government.” (OECD, 2014, p.14). Several studies identify and assess the issue of equity in education, however, it is often not assessed how these types of evidence (fail to) affect educational policies (CPB, 2020-b). Furthermore, following the decentralised education system, the overarching national education policy thus allows for varying interpretations by municipalities on a local level.

The municipalities that are analysed for the comparative case study are the municipality of Almere and the municipality of The Hague (Den Haag). The policy measures this thesis focuses on are ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’. The reasons for selecting these two policies and municipalities are threefold. First, scientific evidence clearly indicates that ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’ can facilitate the learning processes of children and improve their academic performance, and thus reinforce equity in education (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Avvisati, Gurgand, Guyon, & Maurin, 2014; Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). Parental involvement entails increased parent-teacher communication, e.g. from weekly conversations to participation in parent councils. Through parental involvement, weaknesses can be addressed more easily, and children’s behaviour is more likely to improve when their parents are more involved. Mentoring and coaching consists of peer tutoring and/or one-to-one tuition by teachers or teaching assistants. Through this, children can work together in pairs or smaller groups and assist each other in their learning process or receive more specified and focused guidance. These measures are thus able to boost academic performances of children with educational disadvantages.

Second, equity in education is perceived as an important topic in each of these two municipalities. In both of them, a substantial number of children experience an educational disadvantage. One in six children grows up in poverty in the municipality of Almere and one in five children belongs to the highest risk group for educational disadvantage (OCW, 2021). Furthermore, 28 per cent of the 56.010 children from the municipality of The Hague fall within the group with the highest risk of educational disadvantage (CBS, n.d.).

Third, the municipalities of Almere and The Hague differ in terms of choosing policies where there is evidence of effectiveness. The municipality of Almere has decided to implement the educational policy of parental involvement and mentoring and coaching in their educational policy, whereas the municipality of The Hague has thus far not implemented the policy of parental involvement and mentoring and coaching. These two local political contexts are thus selected because one municipality acts on the basis of the available evidence while the other does not.

As this research seeks to understand how the same evidence can be interpreted and acted upon differently in local policymaking processes, an explanatory research question is formulated and is posed as follows:

“Why does one municipality in the Netherlands (Almere) act on the available evidence in developing their local educational policies while another (The Hague) does not?”

To answer this question, theories of rational choice and framing are applied in order to explain why the different municipalities either include or exclude ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’ as key educational policy measures.

Furthermore, five sub-questions have been formulated of both analytical and empirical nature to help answer the research question:

1. How can the theories of rational choice and framing explain the use of evidence in local policymaking processes?
2. What is the available evidence on ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’ as measures to improve equity in education?
3. How does the municipality of Almere interpret and act upon the evidence?
4. How does the municipality of The Hague interpret and act upon the evidence?
5. To what extent can rational choice theory or framing theory explain the differences between these two municipalities and their use of evidence?

This thesis starts with introducing the theoretical framework that will serve as the starting point of this research in chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes the methodology by explaining the used procedures during the research in terms of data collection, analysis, and operationalisation. Next, the available evidence on measures that increase equity in education are addressed in chapter 4. Chapter 4 also consist of the analysis where the use and interpretation of evidence in the municipality of Almere and The Hague are

discussed. Subsequently, following the analyses, the key findings are highlighted and discussed in chapter 5, as well as an overall conclusion of the study with an answer to the research question and the limitations of the study.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Evidence-based policy

With good governance of evidence, evidence is used as a measurement tool that facilitates the policymaking process while also including social values and the societal context, and scientists could participate in this process as advisers (Parkhurst, 2017; Jasanoff, 1990). Good governance of evidence is necessary to tackle the issues of misuse of evidence, technocracy, and bias. Advocates of EBP are concerned about the politicisation of science, where politicians misuse, manipulate, or cherry-pick evidence to pursue their own political interests (Parkhurst, 2017). This is also described as technical bias in the use of evidence. Here, “evidence utilisation does not follow principles of scientific best practice (which can include invalid uses of individual pieces of evidence, as well failing to systematically include all the relevant evidence that best answers a particular question), which therefore leads to poorer policy outcomes than would otherwise be possible.” (Parkhurst, 2017, p.7). Opponents of EBP, however, are concerned about the depoliticisation of politics. This involves how social values can be obscured or marginalised through the advancement of certain types of evidence. This can be defined as an issue bias that perceives how evidence utilisation can influence the political debate by shifting the attention to specific questions or concerns in a non-transparent manner. Technical bias highlights the importance of scientific rigour, while issue bias expresses the significance of democratic representation. Subsequently, good governance of evidence addresses these forms of bias as it strives to ensure that the used evidence is ‘inclusive of, representative of and accountable to the multiple social interests of the population’ (Parkhurst, 2017, p.8). In other words, good governance of evidence suggests that political and social values play a role in the use of evidence, and it raises some issues with the use of evidence. However, it does not provide a theory that could explain why evidence is actually (not) acted upon in local political contexts.

To make up for that missing theoretical underpinning, this thesis introduces two theories that offer different explanations for why at times scientific evidence is used, and it is not at other times. This refers to the analysis of policymaking processes and the feasibility and desirability of policies. Municipalities in the Netherlands vote by the simple majority rule. However, there are various policy alternatives to address equity in education. This leads to collective decision-making in the local policymaking process with an outcome, the policy, that is binding for all actors in the educational system.

2.2. Rational choice theory

Rational choice theory is the first theory that can be applied to the local policymaking context. To apply this theory, it must lead to certain expectations or predictions about individuals’ behaviour (Ostrom,

1991). The theory involves the assumption that individuals weigh the potential costs and benefits of actions before deciding on a course of action. In other words, “The essential working parts of an individual model of choice involve assumptions made about (1) how actors value outcomes (and the actions leading to these outcomes), (2) how actors acquire and process information, and (3) what formulas are used by actors to select their own strategies.” (Ostrom, 1991, p.241). The first assumption involves the preference of actors, which policy alternative do they find the most appropriate? This leads to a complete and transitive ordering of the available policy alternatives that take into account the preferences of actors and how they value these alternatives. The second assumption refers to whether actors have all available information about the relevant data that is necessary to make decisions. The third assumption concerns the calculations that are made to predict and explain individuals’ behaviour. These calculations lead to the maximisation of personal benefits minus personal costs.

Rational choice theory is thus used to model the decision-making of individuals. As a result, it can be used to explain the decisions of policymakers that have led to certain policies. In accordance with the rational choice theory, policymakers thus seek out information, try to check it for bias, compare the costs and benefits of the alternatives, and try to make the best decision for the jurisdiction they represent. Rational choice theory could hence explain how political decisions are made and why evidence is (not) acted upon. The three assumptions of rational choice theory lead to a testable hypothesis about why parental involvement and mentoring and coaching is included in the local educational policy of one municipality and excluded in the other municipality.

Hypothesis 1: The theory predicts that both municipalities have actively sought out information and know about the available evidence (second assumption). Different outcomes are thus due to other factors. For instance, the main values or policy priorities of the municipalities differ. This can lead to differences in how certain outcomes are valued, leading to varying preference orderings and ultimately to different decisions (first assumption). Or some policy measures are more expensive than others and the available budget did not allow them to pick the one they preferred. The calculations of costs and benefits thus differs between the two municipalities (third assumption).

All in all, the same knowledge about the available evidence led to contrasting decisions and a different allocation of resources. Based on the theoretical background and regarding the context of this study, if this theory is true I expect to find differences in either the valued outcomes or the way the municipalities weigh the benefits against the costs of particular policy measures. This could offer an explanation as to why evidence is sometimes (not) acted upon in local political contexts.

2.3. Framing theory

In addition to rational choice theory, a second theory of framing is introduced as a rival explanation of the difference between the two municipalities. The most prominent difference between the two theories

lies in the search for information. Framing theory does not involve an active search for information and all available evidence. Framing theory could explain why decision-makers use information more selectively due to the way in which an issue is perceived in the political arena. Framing theory covers attempts of actors to make sense of a problem, seeing that “out of the many possible frameworks in which one can understand a problem one chooses and isolates a particular framework, thus steering the direction in which action is to be undertaken or inhibiting such action.” (de Vries, 2016, p.187). Through framing, one can imply that certain issues need attention over other issues, and specific measures are needed to solve these issues. This means that not all information can make it to the political decision-making process as it is not ‘recognised’ as relevant or important. Subsequently, framing filters and shapes the use of information and can thereby lead policymakers to select certain kinds of evidence and make a different decision.

The way political issues are defined has an impact on policymaking. Framing is often referred to in the literature as a process of selecting, emphasising, and organising parts of complicated topics in accordance with underlying evaluative or analytical criteria (Daviter, 2007). Existing literature on policy framing research is profoundly influenced by the work of Baumgartner and Jones (1991, 2002; see also Jones 1994b). Baumgartner and Jones’ research highlights that framing is essential to understand the dynamics of policy. Moreover, this understanding can be established through analysing how framing effects interact with the institutional organisation of politics (Daviter, 2011). Following this perspective, decisionmakers’ attention is focused on a simplified depiction of intricate policy alternatives (Baumgartner and Jones 1991). This is possible as a result of the institutional channels, or policy venues, through which policy issues are processed. These information processes generate bias towards particular types of information and interests over others which can lead to the inclusion or exclusion of specific information. Subsequently, the type of framing effects will vary depending on the policymaking system. Furthermore, when values are expressed in the early stages of the decision-making process, the corresponding fundamental objectives and attributes distinguish which type of information is deemed relevant (Keeney, 2004). Framing thus influences the processing of information. Moreover, there are competing views about what the problem is, if and why it matters, how it works, and what should be done about it. Framing can be used to present information in a way that leads policymakers to believe certain alternatives are more important than others.

In contrast to rational choice theory, framing theory leads to the expectation that information is treated differently in the different municipalities. For instance, framing in a local context can lead to the belief that the issue of equity in education should be handled differently in the respective municipalities. Moreover, this implies that the policy measures of parental involvement and mentoring and coaching can be overshadowed by other measures and are thus not considered as solutions that can solve the problem. This could explain the different use of evidence in a local context as well.

Hypothesis 2. The theory predicts that municipalities have not actively sought out information and are thus not aware of all available evidence. Different outcomes are thus due to the different manner in which certain information is obtained. For instance, the way information is processed through the different institutional channels of the municipalities differ, leading to a selective focus of attention of the decisionmakers. This varying focus of attention can then generate bias and a selective use of information. Or there is a difference between the values and prejudices of decisionmakers in the municipalities. This can lead to decisionmakers judging the appropriateness of information and ultimately what the municipality can and should do differently.

In sum, the varying knowledge of the available evidence led to contrasting decisions and different policy measures. Based on the theoretical background and regarding the context of this study, if this theory is true I thus expect to find differences in the processing of information through different institutional channels or the values and social prejudices of decisionmakers of both municipalities. This could offer an explanation as to why evidence is sometimes (not) acted upon in local political contexts, and why parental involvement and mentoring and coaching is included in the local educational policy of one municipality and excluded in the other municipality.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This research is a comparative case study and takes a qualitative research approach based on deductive reasoning. By comparing separate cases, the differences in the mechanisms behind the use of evidence can be evaluated. Moreover, a case study allows for an in-depth analysis of each case that enables the opportunity to compare two municipalities and their different local educational policies. By using a qualitative research approach, the literature, and theories derived from this literature, can inform us more about the related theoretical insights and concepts needed to study the topic of interest (Boeije, 2010). The theoretical insights and concepts are then used to identify, understand, and explain the underlying mechanics behind the use of evidence in educational policymaking. Data is collected through a combination of primary (interviews) and secondary data (literature study). This data is then analysed through a content analysis to identify and link common themes and categories that distinguish the underlying mechanisms of the use of evidence in policymaking. By using a content analysis, all possible aspects of the themes and concepts are related to the appropriate indicators and other theoretically related variables, and the policymaking and decision-making processes are analysed.

To answer the research question, the municipalities are compared based on their local educational policies and their decision-making processes. The policymaking and decision-making processes are compared through:

1. The goals of the educational policy in general and with regard to equity in education in particular
2. The kind of information or evidence that is used in the decision-making process
3. The deliberation in light of the available resources.

Through comparing these general aspects it can be determined which theory is the most appropriate to explain the decision-making processes – is information used selectively or is all information carefully considered? How either of the theories is observed is illustrated below, in the operationalisation.

Accordingly, through the collected data, the general aspects can be observed and compared. Moreover, the dynamics of each municipality can be disclosed, and it can provide a more focused look into the political arena of each municipality. Through this, it can be perceived how one of the theories explains and incorporates the local societal contexts and values that influence decision-making by establishing how decisions are made and why in the local context of each municipality. Subsequently, it can be determined why one municipality acts on the available evidence in developing their local educational policies and the other does not, which is the research question.

Potential threats to qualitative research could include unintentional bias in selecting the data, the grounds on which data are selected, and possible confirmation bias. However, one can counter these threats by strengthening objectivity, e.g. through using empirically adequate theories, acknowledging potential biases and conflicts of interests and not merely believing whatever one wants, it has to follow from a process of logical and rational thinking. Additionally, being transparent about how the data is selected and which steps are taken during the research also contributes to objectivity by evaluating the nature of the process.

3.2. Case selection

To answer the research question, the local educational policies of two municipalities are compared, and these municipalities are the units of analysis of this research. As previously mentioned, this research focuses on the use of ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’ with regard to educational policies and equity in education in the Netherlands. The website ‘gelijke-kansen.nl’, commissioned by the OCW and part of the ‘Gelijke Kansen Alliantie’, provides an overview of which municipalities emphasise both themes and which do not. Based on this, a municipality is selected that focuses on these types of evidence in their educational policies and a municipality that does not. Another criterion entails the use of a dashboard developed by the CBS and commissioned by the OCW that maps the distribution of children per municipality that are at risk of educational disadvantage using tables and heat maps (CBS, n.d.). Following this, municipalities with a high risk of educational disadvantage are selected. A high risk of educational disadvantage is chosen to better compare the different use of evidence in the policymaking process with the aim of increasing equity in education. The selection of the two municipalities is done following these two criteria.

Therefore, as previously mentioned, the municipality of Almere and the municipality of The Hague have been selected. In the municipality of Almere, one in six children grows up in poverty and one in five children belongs to the highest risk group for educational disadvantage (OCW, 2021). Moreover, the Almere municipality is pursuing the themes of parental involvement and mentoring and coaching in their educational policy. In contrast, the municipality of The Hague does not actively pursue the themes of parental involvement and mentoring and coaching, while 28 per cent of the 56.010 children from The Hague fall within the group with the highest risk of educational disadvantage (CBS, n.d.).

3.3. Operationalisation and data collection

This research uses a combination of primary and secondary data. The secondary data involves a literature review of about five hundred pages of text of policy documents, academic literature and reports, e.g. from institutions such as the OCW, CPB, CBS, OECD, and the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. The literature is used to answer the first two sub-questions about how rational choice theory and framing can be used and which evidence is available to explain the different use of evidence in the two municipalities. Consulting the literature provides a theoretical background that functions as a foundation for the research and as support for new insights.

The third and fourth sub-questions are addressed via content analysis and interviews. The corpus of the document analysis consists of policy documents from the municipality of Almere and The Hague. These documents were obtained either via official websites from the municipality, or websites associated with the municipality, or they were provided by the respondents of the interviews. The documents mostly consist of council letters, advice letters, proposals, LEAs, coalition agreements, and progress reports. The documents are generally from a timeframe of 2018-2021 as the term of the highest governing body of the municipality, the municipal council, is four years (re-elections are in 2022). Consequently, the analysis of these documents was performed through ATLAS.ti. To start with, significant in comparing the two municipalities is the LEA of each municipality – “LEA 2019-2022 SAMEN DOEN” (Almere) and “Haagse Educatieve Agenda 2018-2022” (The Hague). By setting these LEAs side by side, the differences in approaches and policy measures come to light. Through conducting interviews, second, a more in-depth understanding is provided of how and why these differences in approaches and policy measures came to be. In the municipality of The Hague, one interview takes place with a policy advisor specialised in equity in education and the other takes place with the director of education and culture of the municipality. In the municipality of Almere, one interview takes place with a project manager of an initiative that promotes equity in both primary and secondary education, and the other interview takes place with a local politician. Interviews are conducted with the associated local policymakers of both municipalities to discover more about the specific difference in educational policymaking and what they consider as ‘useful’ evidence and why. The interviews provide a better insight into to what extent this difference can be explained by the theories of rational choice and framing.

The interviews thus lead to more information about the organisation of EBP in local policymaking. The interviews are semi-structured, as this method allows going more in-depth, with a fixed set of questions while also leaving some room to expand on the response of the interviewee, allowing for new questions to be brought up.

The interview guide will include three sets of questions:

Goal-oriented questions

- What are the main goals in local educational policymaking?
- How important is the issue of equity in education for the municipality?

Information-oriented questions

- Which information was used in the decision-making process?
- Did policymakers actively seek out all information?
- How did the respective municipality look at the evidence?
- How useful was the evidence to the policymakers?
- What led to the inclusion or exclusion of the evidence?

Deliberation / calculation

- What were the available alternatives to parental involvement and mentoring and coaching?
- Was there political (dis)agreement about these alternatives?
- Budgetary possibilities and constraints
- Allocation/available of resources

Using the collected data, the previously mentioned theories are operationalised to decide to what extent the inclusion or exclusion of parental involvement and mentoring and coaching can be explained by either the rational choice or framing theory. So, how are these theories measured and observed in each municipality? As mentioned earlier, the comparison of several general aspects leads to the selection of a theory. By observing the following aspects, it can be distinguished which theory can explain the different interpretation and use of evidence in the municipalities.

Following the rational choice theory, the following aspects are considered;

- Are there differences in how alternatives are valued between the municipalities?
- Are there differences in goals between the municipalities?
- Is there an active search for information?
- Are they aware of all the available information?
- Is there a cost-benefit analysis of the policy alternatives?
- Is resource allocation very significant?

Alternatively, following the framing theory,

- Are there differences or similarities in values between the municipalities?
- Are there differences or similarities in goals between the municipalities?
- Is there a selective use of information?
- Are they not aware of all available information?
- Are there values and prejudices present in the analysis of policy alternatives?
- Is resource allocation not that significant?

3.4. Data analysis method

As previously mentioned, the LEAs of both municipalities are compared to assess the difference in the educational policies in a local context. By setting these LEAs side by side, the differences in approaches and measures come to light. However, this does not explain the differences in decision-making processes. Next, the collected data is analysed using a content analysis in order to draw conclusions from the collected data. By coding the collected data, common themes and concepts can be identified in both primary and secondary data (Boeije, 2010). Subsequently, the themes and categories are linked, and the underlying mechanisms of the use of evidence in policymaking can be distinguished. Following the theories of rational choice and framing, certain codes can be identified and categorised (table 1) that provide a better overview of the collected data. These classifications allow for a more in-depth understanding of the interpretation and use of evidence in policymaking, leading to the answering of the sub-questions. The patterns that are investigated throughout the data analysis will then help to answer the research question.

Table 1

Codebook

Theory	Theme	Code
1. Rational choice theory	1.1. Goal	1.1.1. Differences in values between municipalities
		1.1.2. Differences in goals between municipalities
	1.2. Information	1.2.1. Active search for information
		1.2.2. Knowledge of all available evidence
	1.3. Deliberation	1.3.1. Cost-benefit analysis of policy alternatives
		1.3.2. Resource allocation very important
2. Framing theory	2.1. Goal	2.1.1. Differences/similarities in values between municipalities
	2.2. Information	

	2.1.2. Differences/similarities in goals between municipalities
2.3. Deliberation	2.2.1. Selective search for information
	2.2.2. Incomplete knowledge of available evidence
	2.3.1. Presence of values and prejudices in analysis of policy alternatives
	2.3.2. Recourse allocation less important

4. Analysis

This section offers a careful analysis of the collected data and documents in order to answer the research question of this thesis. This chapter consists of three parts. First, the available evidence on ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’ as measures to improve equity in education is discussed. Second, the use and interpretation of evidence in Almere are addressed. And finally, the use and interpretation of evidence in The Hague are considered. As previously indicated, the collected data and documents are analysed using a content analysis in order to draw conclusions about the analysis and findings. Accordingly, the codebook from table 1 is used to search for common themes and concepts in the data to eventually distinguish between the different use of evidence in local policymaking. The codebook will be further discussed below in order to explain the themes and concepts that are coded for in the collected data and documents.

4.1. Available evidence

Evidence has suggested that ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’ can facilitate the learning processes of children and improve their academic performance, and thus reinforce equity in education (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Avvisati et al., 2014; Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). Parental involvement typically consists of an increase in parent-teacher communication, this could, for example, involve weekly conversations between parents and teachers or parents’ participation in parent councils. Through parental involvement, weaknesses can be addressed more easily, and children’s behaviour is more likely to improve when their parents are more involved. Mentoring and coaching consists of peer tutoring and/or one-to-one tuition by teachers or teaching assistants. Through this, children can work together in pairs or smaller groups and assist each other in their learning processes, or they receive more specified and focused guidance. These measures are thus able to boost the academic performances of children with educational disadvantages. So, what does the available evidence say about how ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’ could improve equity in education?

According to Kraft and Rogers (2015), policymakers and schools fail to address intervention strategies that make use of one of the most significant out-of-school influences on students’ academic success, namely, their parents. Schools do not actively engage parents in their child’s education and they do not

provide the parents with adequate information about their child's studies and academic performance. This is unfortunate as existing literature often refers to the positive relationship between parental involvement in their children's education and academic performance (Barnard, 2004; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Fan & Chen, 2001; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Todd & Wolpin, 2007; Kraft & Rogers, 2015). Kraft and Rogers' study focuses on 'the effects of a light-touch communication intervention aimed at increasing parents' efforts and effectiveness at supporting their child's success in school' (Kraft & Rogers, 2015, p.49). The intervention consists of informing parents of high school students that are in a credit recovery program on a weekly basis through individualised messages about the performance and behaviour of students and how this influences the chance of them moving on to the next year. This teacher-to-parent communication empowered parents to support students' efforts to earn course credit towards graduation, the messages decreased the percentage of students who failed to earn course credit from 15.8% to 9.3%, meaning an increase of the probability that students passed a course by 6.5 percentage points during a credit recovery program. This is a 41% reduction in the fraction of students who failed to earn course credit. This reduction resulted primarily from preventing drop-outs, rather than from reducing failure or dismissal rates. The intervention shaped the content of parent-child conversations with messages emphasizing what students could improve, versus what students were doing well, producing the largest effects. For participating students, these course credits could be the difference between being on-track or off-track to graduate from high school. In the process of increasing student passing rates, this intervention improved student attendance, and shaped outside-of-school parent-student conversations.

Research has shown that the first few years of a child can be very determining in a child's educational development. This is why early childhood education and care is one of the most prominent interventions that tackles inequity in education as a form of prevention. However, there is still a significant number of children that are already experiencing educational disadvantage in either primary or secondary education, and these need attention as well by applying particular intervention strategies. One of such strategies involves mentoring and coaching. An intervention could, for example, involve one-to-one tutoring, this involves a teacher, teaching assistant or another adult giving a pupil intensive individual support (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). It may happen outside of normal lessons as additional or as a replacement for other lessons. On average, individual guidance leads to five months of learning gain. Short, regular sessions of about 30 minutes that occur 3-5 times a week over a fixed period (6-12 weeks) appear to have an optimal impact. In addition, individual supervision should be linked to normal lessons and teachers should closely monitor progress. Subsequently, professional teachers seem to have the greatest effect. Another intervention entails peer tutoring, it includes a range of approaches in which learners work in pairs or small groups to provide each other with explicit teaching support (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). Peer tutoring could involve cross-age tutoring, in which an older learner takes the tutoring role and is paired with a younger tutee or tutees;

peer assisted learning, which is a structured approach for mathematics and reading with sessions of 25–35 minutes two or three times a week; and reciprocal peer tutoring, in which learners alternate between the role of tutor and tutee. The common feature of these types of interventions is that the responsibility for aspects of teaching and for evaluating their success lies with the students. In general, peer tutoring results in a learning gain of five months on average. Positive effects are found for both the tutors and the tutees and for a large age group. All students seem to benefit, but students with a low socio-economic background and low achievers benefit more. Peer tutoring is particularly effective if the tutors are supervised to ensure that the quality of the peer interaction is high. In cross-age tutoring, some studies show that an age difference of two years is optimal and that intensive blocks are more effective than longer programs. Peer tutoring is less effective when it replaces normal teaching, suggesting that peer tutoring is best used as an additional measure.

Parental involvement and mentoring and coaching are two policy measures that are included on the website of the ‘Gelijke Kansen Alliantie’ (OCW, 2021). Both municipalities are members of this alliance and the municipalities’ policymakers are thus acquainted with the evidence that is presented above. Moreover, these measures are once more presented in the ‘Nationaal Programma Onderwijs’, which is a national programme designed for schools in the Netherlands to help reduce the backlog of the corona measures (OCW, n.d.).

4.2. The first hypothesis: analysis of the documents and interviews in Almere and The Hague

Hypothesis 1: The theory predicts that both municipalities have actively sought out information and know about the available evidence (second assumption). Different outcomes are thus due to other factors. For instance, the main values or policy priorities of the municipalities differ. This can lead to differences in how certain outcomes are valued, leading to varying preference orderings and ultimately to different decisions (first assumption). Or some policy measures are more expensive than others and the available budget did not allow them to pick the one they preferred. The calculations of costs and benefits thus differs between the two municipalities (third assumption).

4.2.1. Codebook

Rational choice theory is central to the first hypothesis. Before the analysis of the use and interpretation of evidence in both Almere and The Hague concerning the first hypothesis, the codebook for the rational choice theory will therefore be discussed to provide a more in-depth explanation of the themes and concepts that are coded for in the collected data and documents. The codebook is split into the two theories, rational choice theory and framing theory. Next, both theories are categorised into three themes: goal, information, and deliberation. As stated earlier, this is because the policymaking and decision-making processes are compared through these three themes. Subsequently, the interviews also included three sets of questions that were goal-oriented, information-oriented or deliberative-orientated.

Finally, codes were linked to the three themes based on the theories. Six codes are assigned to the rational choice theory, these are: Differences in values between municipality (goal); Differences in goals between municipality (goal); Active search for information (information); Knowledge of all available evidence (information); Costs-benefit analysis of policy alternatives (deliberation); Resource allocation very important (deliberation). The first one codes for differences in values and in how policy alternatives are valued and whether some are preferred over others. The second codes for differences in goals that the municipalities would like to realise with their policies. The third codes for whether policymakers have actively searched for information. Subsequently, the fourth codes for whether policymakers know about all available evidence. The fifth codes for whether policymakers make use of a cost-benefit analysis that assesses the policy alternatives in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and costs. Lastly, the sixth codes for the importance of resource allocation to realise the policy measures. (For a quick overview see table 1).

4.2.2. Results

Following the categorisation of the three themes, the data shows that the coding theme ‘goal’ was the most used in the analysis of both municipalities. This includes the codes ‘Differences in values between municipality’ and ‘Differences in goals between municipality’. Throughout the documents it became apparent that there is a significant difference in how the policy alternatives are valued through the emphasis on certain alternatives, and the differences in values and goals between the municipalities. For example, it was evident that the municipality of Almere highlights the environment in which a child grows up as a factor that can contribute to inequity in education and thereby highlights the cooperation between different domains. Almere stresses the relationship between the parents, the school and the child by implementing initiatives that are able to reinforce this relationship. This was especially clear in the following quotes:

“The commitment and involvement of the parents is one of the crucial factors for the development of the students. A worrying development is that a group of children with disadvantages (for example in language, from poverty, etc.) are now entering school and are no longer able to make up for that disadvantage in their later educational career.” De raad in het publieke domein, “Publiek verantwoorden”, Gespreksverslag, 2019.

“Another element that is very important for our approach to poverty is we do not believe that the government can do it alone. In any case, it is also a task for society. As a society you should not actually accept poverty and we also need those ears and eyes of society, whether at school or elsewhere.” Participant B “Dubbelinterview wethouders Almere”, n.d.

On the other hand, the municipality of The Hague appears to put an emphasis on the transitions between the different types of schools and with it the issue of under-advising. The Hague has recently invested in the professionalisation of teachers and smoothening transitions in order to have the students

experience a lesser gap when they, for instance, go from primary to secondary education. The professionalisation of teachers can not only improve the quality of education, but it can also facilitate teachers in providing independent educational advice, which is also important because under-advising is an aspect of inequity in education. The following quotes can show this:

“In The Hague, children with the same potential do not always receive the same school advice. We tackle this so-called under-advice by supporting schools and by training parents/carers and teachers in recognising factors that lead to under-advising.” Samen voor de stad Coalitieakkoord 2019-2022, Den Haag, 2018.

“We already have a so-called BOVO system in The Hague. This means that the registration for secondary education for all children is simultaneous, so that it is not the case that children with parents that have a higher education have better chances at enrolling in the good schools than children with parents with a lower education. So that it all happens at the same time and they [the children] are all distributed among the schools according to preference without taking into account their parents or the neighbourhood they come from. So that means that in the registration procedures all children have an equal chance. And we want to link this also to the educational advice that we make with the schools in The Hague (...), so that it becomes less of a personal advice, but more of a somewhat more independent one.” Respondant A, municipality of The Hague.

However, this does not mean that The Hague does not find the values and goals of Almere important, and vice versa. The data indicates that the municipalities prioritise certain measures over others.

The next theme that was most frequently coded for is one concerning ‘information’. Both municipalities extensively make use of evidence during the policymaking process. Before policymakers make a decision, they typically engage in an active search for information and thereby also develop knowledge of all available information. Research and reports are often referenced in the decision-making processes as fundamental parts of the process as they show the current situation and how you can improve the current situation. Moreover, research suggests which approaches work and what were the ingredients of that approach. And if you know what these ingredients are, then you can establish whether or not these would also work in your environment. Furthermore, research sometimes also shows that certain things do not work, are ineffective and therefore just are not a good idea to start with. Research is then a kind of benchmark that indicates which elements are promising, which are actually poor and what has been proven effective before. This applies to both municipalities. The importance of information during decision-making processes is implied in the following quotes from Almere and The Hague respectively:

“In collaboration with other school boards and the municipality, ASG has asked the Kohnstamm Institute to conduct research into which external factors and social developments in Flevoland and specifically in Almere influence the quality of education. ASG has also developed a system

to closely monitor the quality of schools.” De raad in het publieke domein, “Publiek verantwoorden”, Gespreksverslag, 2019.

“We do make a lot of use of those studies and we now have a strategy department that also monitors all those different studies for us. We also conduct our own research with the Hague University of Applied Sciences or with Leiden University, with Oberon. And they do provide input for our policies, and we try to see them in context as much as possible. For example, something like The State of Education, which comes out every year, yes that is a very important source for us and we always translate it to The Hague and then go and look, what is needed here? (...) how can we adjust our policy accordingly?” Respondent C, municipality of The Hague.

Finally, the theme ‘deliberation’ was the least frequent category throughout the documents and interviews of both municipalities. This includes the codes ‘Costs-benefit analysis of policy alternatives’ and ‘Resource allocation very important’. The data showed that the allocation of resources contributes significantly in the decision-making processes about which policy measure are implemented. This also often ties into the cost-benefit analysis code, as the availability of resources is also taken into account in these cost-benefit analyses. Both municipalities indicate that the costs and benefits of a policy measure are weighted when its implementation is considered. This includes the budget (subsidies), resource availability, efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, it can be implied that there is an association between the cost-benefit analysis and resource allocation. The municipality has a lot of subsidies and they assess whether or not these are appropriately used. Such as, do the subsidies really contribute to what they want, do they contribute to equity of opportunities? Through assessing these subsidies you can see how much everything costs and the results of these subsidies. Then the municipality can consider whether or not they should continue with that or can they spend this money better? This is suggested by the following quotes from Almere and The Hague respectively:

“I think money is always important, especially in a municipality. There is not an infinite amount of money, so you always have to make budget choices. And not everything is possible, right? (...) so yes, if you really push in one place to invest in, you have to cut back somewhere else and that can be difficult. (...) So of course that weighs in on how much something costs, because you know if you spend a lot in one place, another place will always suffer. (...) And, that is also a kind of balancing act, of course you make a municipal budget for that, and you divide the money for that over the different portfolios. And within those portfolios, we also look at okay, what do we spend on what? And of course it is the power of decision making to look at, how do we use money as effectively as possible?” Respondent B, municipality of Almere.

“(...) But time, money and commitment are scarce, this was noted during the work conference. Choices have to be made together with the field of schools and childcare: what can best be used

for what, what contributes most to increasing equity of opportunity? The following guiding principles were mentioned during the working conference: a. We realise that serious interventions require serious investments (in money, time and effort) b. We prioritise what should and should not be done; preferably based on reliable research about what works (evidence based) c. We would rather do some things well than many things poorly, because quality counts. d. We ensure that children with a large disadvantage benefit the most.” Aan de voorzitter van de commissie Samenleving, “Startfoto Gelijke Onderwijskansen Den Haag”, 2020.

4.2.3. Conclusion

Looking at the results of the analyses, it becomes evident that the data does support the first hypothesis. Both municipalities have indeed actively sought out information and thereby developed knowledge about the available evidence (second assumption). Both municipalities extensively made use of research and evidence during their policymaking process. This was both research done by the municipalities themselves or overarching evidence available to everyone, such as from the Educational Inspectorate. This means that the different outcomes are thus due to other factors. This is in line with the analysis of the data as it seems that the municipalities focus on different values and goals leading them to have varying preference orderings – Almere focusses on parental involvement and mentoring and coaching whereas The Hague focusses on smooth transitions and under-advising and the professionalisation of teachers (first assumption). Additionally, each municipality has implied costs and benefits of policy measures play a role in the decision-making process and that the budget differs per municipality (third assumption). The cost-benefit analysis sometimes involved their respective values and goals as well. Based on their values and goals some policy measure appeared to more in line with their thought and thus found more effective in realising their goals.

4.3. The second hypothesis: analysis of the documents and interviews in Almere and The Hague

Hypothesis 2. The theory predicts that municipalities have not actively sought out information and are thus not aware of all available evidence. Different outcomes are thus due to the different manner in which certain information is obtained. For instance, the way information is processed through the different institutional channels of the municipalities differ, leading to a selective focus of attention of the decisionmakers. This varying focus of attention can then generate bias and a selective use of information. Or there is a difference between the values and prejudices of decisionmakers in the municipalities. This can lead to decisionmakers judging the appropriateness of information and ultimately what the municipality can and should do differently.

4.3.1. Codebook

Framing theory is central to the second hypothesis. Before the analysis of the use and interpretation of evidence in both Almere and The Hague concerning the second hypothesis, the codebook for the framing theory will be discussed to provide a more in-depth explanation of the themes and concepts that are coded for in the collected data and documents. Similar to the rational choice theory, framing theory is also categorised into three themes: goal, information, and deliberation. And just like the rational choice theory, this is because the policymaking and decision-making processes are compared through these three themes. Subsequently, the interviews also included three sets of questions that were goal-oriented, information-oriented or deliberative-orientated. Finally, codes were linked to the three themes based on the theories. There are six codes assigned to the framing theory as well, these are: Differences / similarities in values between municipality (goal); Differences / similarities in goals between municipality (goal); Selective search for information (information); Incomplete knowledge of available evidence (information); Presence of values and prejudices in analysis of policy alternatives (deliberation); Recourse allocation less important (deliberation). This time, there is coded for both differences and similarities in values and goals between the municipalities. Furthermore, there is coded for a selective search for information by decisionmakers. Subsequently, there is coded for an incomplete knowledge of decisionmakers about all available evidence. Next, there is coded for the presence of values and prejudices of decisionmakers in the analysis of the policy alternatives to perceive whether the information was judged in terms of appropriateness. Finally, the last one codes whether resource allocation is found less important for the decision-making process. (See also table 1 for a quick overview).

4.3.2. Results

Following the categorisation of the three themes, the data shows that the theme 'goal' was the most used theme that was coded for in both municipalities. This includes the codes 'Differences / similarities in values between municipalities' and 'Differences / similarities in goals between municipalities'. The data implies that there are some similarities between the two municipalities. Both municipalities generally believed that other topics, such as, the teacher shortage, educational housing and educational segregation, that are often discussed when talking about education in the Netherlands do not overshadow the topic of inequity in education. On the contrary, these topics all influence and reinforce inequity of education. Because if you have a teacher shortage, educational segregation or a school with lesser resources, your quality of education is impacted, and this in turn also influences the inequity of opportunities in education. Furthermore, both municipalities believe that familiarity is something that considered in the decision-making processes, when an option is familiar people are more likely to choose that option as they are comfortable with it. When implementing new policy measures it appears that there is a precarious balance between conservation and innovation as people like to have things that are familiar, they do not like to start all over again. Additionally, another recently shared goal is the effects

of the COVID-19 situation and the measures to tackle the issue. This can be indicated by the following quotes:

“ (...)You might recognise that from, oh I bought that pair of shoes and you know, I just want that same pair again because they were nice. But you can no longer find it, because it is now a new collection. You can draw that same parallel [to policymaking]. People like to have familiar ingrained paths, so that they know what they’re in for, whether it’s reliable or it fits, literally and figuratively.” Respondent B, municipality of Almere.

“ (...) corona is of course currently playing a huge role in education. You notice that a lot of schools have really struggled with how to deal with corona and education at home. And I also hear that there are major differences in how schools, and even within school boards, but how that is handled. So yes, how to reduce the backlogs incurred by corona.” Respondent D, municipality of The Hague.

The next most coded theme involves the category ‘deliberation’. This is more specifically related to the code ‘Presence of values and prejudices in analysis of policy alternatives’. This indicates that information is sometimes judged on suitability and whether or not to include this kind of information in the decision-making processes. The code ‘Resource allocation is less important’ was barely coded for and is thus not significant in the analysis. Following these themes and codes, the final theme of ‘information’ and the codes ‘Selective search for information’ and ‘Incomplete knowledge of available evidence’ were either not significant or were not coded for at all during the analysis.

4.3.3. Conclusion

Looking at the results of the analyses, it becomes apparent that the data does not support the second hypothesis. The theory of the second hypothesis predicts that the municipalities have not actively sought out information and are thus not aware of all available evidence. This is however not the case for the two municipalities. The data does show some similarities between the two municipalities concerning the focus on teacher shortage, familiarity and the effects of corona. These goals are indirectly connected to equity in education, but they are not measures that tackle the issue of inequity in education directly. Nevertheless, the amount of times the remaining codes are accounted for throughout the documents and interviews of both municipalities is either very small or non-existent and thus not significant for the analysis.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion

After both analyses of the use and interpretation of evidence in the two municipalities, some key findings can be highlighted. The analyses show that there is a significant higher number of codes that coded for the rational choice theory than the number of codes that coded for the framing theory. The most

prominent codes can be found in the differences in values and goals between the municipalities. It is indicated that while the municipalities at times have the same values and goals, they do have some differences about how they value the policy alternatives. For example, this means that one municipality likely prioritises alternative 1 over alternative 2, whereas the other municipality finds alternative 3 more important than the other two.

Looking at the analyses, it appears that the municipality of Almere highlights the relationship between the school, parents, and children with a focus on environment of the child and they encourage children to open up about their situation. They actively encourage the use of parental involvement as a factor that reinforces the opportunities of children. Moreover, mentoring and coaching is often used to guide children in both their in-and-out of school life. By creating a stimulating and positive environment where parents, peers, schools, and the neighbourhood actively provide opportunities and extracurricular activities for children to express themselves, to develop their interests and, ultimately, to be included, Almere is tackling inequity in education by focusing on the struggles that children with an educational disadvantage typically deal with as well.

On the contrary, it appears that the municipality of The Hague prioritises the professionalisation of teachers, the transitions between the different types of schools, and thereby also the under-advising of children. While the municipality of The Hague also finds parental involvement and mentoring and coaching important to improve equity in education, they find other alternatives more significant in tackling the issue. Under-advising appeared to be a prominent issue in The Hague, and it are often children with parents with a lower education that experience this. The Hague is tackling this issue by training teachers to become more aware of their role, their expectations and their (un)conscious (pre)judgments in relation to students and parents, this can in turn lead to smoother transitions between the different types of school.

Another significant finding includes the active search of information and the knowledge of all available evidence. This is the most significant distinction between the two theories and can thus lead to the support of one specific theory. The analyses both indicated that there seems to be an intricate relationship between these two aspects. When policymakers actively sought out information, it was highly likely that they were aware of all available evidence. Furthermore, the analyses showed that research, and with it evidence, is an important factor in the policymaking process. Evidence guides policymakers and is often used a starting point for policies. Both policymakers for Almere and The Hague make use of evidence to establish the issue at hand and most importantly to determine which policy alternatives works and whether they are efficient or not.

5.2. Conclusion

This research aimed to understand how the same evidence can be interpreted and acted upon differently in local policymaking processes, the research question was as follows: *“Why does one municipality in*

the Netherlands (Almere) act on the available evidence in developing their local educational policies while another (The Hague) does not?” To answer this question, theories of rational choice and framing were applied in order to distinguish how the local policymaking processes of the different municipalities can lead to either the inclusion or exclusion of ‘parental involvement’ and ‘mentoring and coaching’ in their local educational policies. Moreover, to answer the research question of the thesis, sub-questions were formulated and an answer to these questions can be provided as well. The answers to the first two sub-questions can be found in chapter 2 and 4.1 respectively (the ‘Theoretical framework’ and ‘Available evidence’). So how did the municipality of Almere interpret and act upon the evidence? Almere used the evidence as a guideline for their educational policy as parental involvement and mentoring and coaching were closely intertwined with the initiatives they implemented. The most prominent aspect was the interpretation of parental involvement as it became a key characteristic of their initiatives that helped strengthen the relationship between the school, the parents and the child. Mentoring and coaching was developed as a feature that emerged after the use of parental involvement. After the conversations were held, the school, the parents and the child had a better insight into the situation of the child and after this mentoring and coaching was offered to guide the child further. And how did the municipality of The Hague interpret and act upon the evidence? The Hague was aware of the evidence and was familiar with it, however, they appeared to have different values and goals from Almere. This led to a different interpretation of the evidence in the sense that they did not act upon it. On the contrary, they acted upon other policy measures that were more in line with their values and goals, such as, professionalisation of teachers, the transitions between the different types of schools, and thereby also the under-advising of children. Finally, to what extent can rational choice theory or framing theory explain the differences between these two municipalities and their use of evidence? The results indicate that both municipalities actively sought out information and know about the available evidence during the decision-making processes. This is a clear aspect that accounts for the distinction between the two theories and thereby supports the rational choice theory and not the framing theory. Furthermore, the analyses show that the municipalities prioritise different policy alternatives, this is due to difference in values or goals or due to varying preference orderings. Additionally, resource allocation and efficiency and effectiveness were often taken into account before the implementation of a policy measure, leading to the inclusion of a cost-benefit analysis in the decision-making processes. Traces of framing theory were found during the analysis of both municipalities, however, these were either significantly less than rational choice theory or they were not significant in the analysis.

All in all, to provide an answer to the research question of the thesis, based on a qualitative analysis of the use and interpretation of evidence in the municipality of Almere and The Hague, it can be concluded that rational choice theory offers a better explanation for the differences than framing theory. Almere and The Hague have different values and goals and their cost-benefit analysis took into account their varying budgets. Almere focuses on strengthening the relationship between the school, parents, and

children with a focus on environment of the child in order to facilitate them with reaching their full potential. Whereas The Hague is more school-oriented by focusing on smoothening the transitions between the different types of schools and tackling the issue of under-advicing. Furthermore, their budgets and cost-benefit analysis also different, also partly because of the difference in values and goals. This offers an explanation as to why one municipality in the Netherlands (Almere) acts on the available evidence in developing their local educational policies while another (The Hague) does not.

Through this research municipalities are able to understand better how they can include evidence in their policymaking processes in order to produce appropriate policies for their particular municipality. This gives way to new opportunities in the policymaking field with the contextual use of evidence. Furthermore, by applying a contextual perspective on the local level and by including a comparative case study, new insights can be materialised leading to a new path for research on EBP.

Some limitations of the study includes the limited time frame of the bachelor thesis. Because of the limited time frame, some interviewees were not available due to their busy schedule. This sometimes led to interviews with people who were a bit further away from the decision-making process. Recommendations for further research thus include the use of interviews with people who can provide a closer look into the policymaking process, both on the technical and political side. Another limitation involves the provided documents by the interviewees, which could have influenced the validity and reliability of the research. These documents could have generated some (unintentional) bias during the research and thus have to be carefully considered. Additionally, further research could include different municipalities and/or policy fields to perceive whether the study and results are generalisable to other municipalities and/or policy fields in the Netherlands.

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Appendix

Content analysis: List of documents

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