

VU Research Portal

Urban commons and commoning in Amsterdam East

Smets, Peer; Azarhoosh, Firoez

published in

Sociologia E Politiche Sociali
2019

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.3280/SP2019-001005](https://doi.org/10.3280/SP2019-001005)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

document license

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Smets, P., & Azarhoosh, F. (2019). Urban commons and commoning in Amsterdam East: The role of liquid communities and the local government. *Sociologia E Politiche Sociali*, 22(1), 91-109.
<https://doi.org/10.3280/SP2019-001005>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

URBAN COMMONS AND COMMONING IN AMSTERDAM EAST THE ROLE OF LIQUID COMMUNITIES AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Peer Smets* and Firoez Azarhoosh**

Abstract. Urban commons offer new opportunities for looking into citizens' participation and the role of communities in co-creation. Often the focus is on public and private sector organizations, and the role of citizen collectives are underestimated or even neglected. But such communities can play a role in co-creation aimed at developing solutions for contemporary problems. To illustrate the creation of urban commons and the process of commoning, we used a case study of the Indische neighbourhood in Amsterdam East. This study shows how older structures are disembedded and how new embeddedness offers possibilities for co-creation of urban commons such as the self-management of a neighbourhood centre. Moreover, this study shows that even though neoliberal solutions are often seen as the only possibility, there are many alternatives (Tama) available.

Keywords: *Urban Commons; Government; Governance; Communities; Indische neighbourhood*

1. Introduction

«The commons are things that no one owns and are shared by everyone» (Bollier 2014, 1). This is how Bollier's seatmate summarized his understanding of the commons following Bollier's explanation of the concept during a plane trip. Bollier mentioned medieval pastures, fisheries, and water as examples but also parks, open-source software, and Wikipedia. The idea that people organize and manage their commons conflicts with the widespread notion that anything of value must be associated with the market or the government. Today, there is more attention towards a do-it-yourself approach for the durable management of common resources, which enables citizens' emancipation and social transformation in society (Bollier 2014). Let us look first at the concept of commons. Bollier considers a common to be «a paradigm that combines a distinct community with a set of social practices, values, and norms that are used to manage a resource» (2014, 15). A formula where all elements are integrated and interdependent is: Common = a resource + a community + a set of social protocols.

* Assistant Professor, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
e-mail: p.g.s.m.smets@vu.nl

** Independent community development worker.
e-mail: r.azarhoosh@gmail.com

Commons are collectively shared resources of many kinds. Participants in a commons aim at harvesting the benefits of working together and creating an economy of scale. Contemporary commons include both urban and city commons. In this case, urban refers to processes that connect spaces and places in the city, while the city reflects specific local spaces (Kip *et al.* 2015). By referring to Lefebvre, the researchers Susser and Tonnelat (2013) see an entire city as a commons, a place where people are living. All have «a right to an equitable usufruct of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity and social justice» (Susser and Tonnelat 2013, 107).

Contemporary scholarly attention on urban commons – for example, collective spaces, housing, green areas, urban farming, solidarity economy – is due to the loss of commonalities and quality of life caused by older and contemporary waves of privatization of assets, marketization, enclosures, spatial controls, policing, and surveillance (Harvey 2012; Kalb 2017; Stavrides 2016). Urban commons are embedded in the urban tissue and are therefore a relational phenomenon. Moreover, they do not necessarily evolve around issues of free ridership¹; instead, «usage and consumption practices are a constitutive part of the urban commons» (Korberger and Borch 2015, 7-8). It is relatively easy for researchers to focus on the pooling and sharing of physical resources such as community gardens, because these concern a restricted group of people (Foster 2011). However, it is more difficult to study other types of commonalities, like open spaces – parks, streets, and transit places – where people with different backgrounds mingle and new relations develop. In such places, we see that a commons is used by more people than just those who participate in its development of commonalities (Harvey 2013; Susser and Tonnelat 2013).

To illustrate how commons operate, we offer the classic example of grazing areas. These communal grounds are shared by farmers for grazing cattle. As Ostrom explained, «a group of principals can organize themselves voluntarily to retain the residual of their own efforts» (1990, 25). However, the farmers have to find ways to avoid overexploitation of the grounds, which would lead to a shortage of fodder for the cattle. In this respect, Hardin (1968) speaks about the tragedy of the commons, or what others call the free rider problem. The basic assumption is that a farmer is a rational person who will graze more and more animals on the area to gain more profit. However, each farmer is locked into a system that leads to having more cattle within a setting where resources are limited. In other words, there will eventually be a shortage of grass resulting in a decline of the grazing ground's fertility, which has an impact on all users. Here, freedom in the commons causes ruin for all involved. Harvey criticizes Hardin's view because it is based on an example of private capital operating on land closures that has taken place in Britain since the late medieval period. He claims that this type of «thinking has often polarized between private property solutions and authoritarian state intervention» and has neglected «the collective organization of small-scale

¹ A free rider is an individual who wants «benefits without corresponding responsibilities» (Bollier 2014, 140).

solidarity economies along common-property lines» (Harvey 2013, 68-70). De Moor reports that there are two regulatory methods for dealing with overexploitation: «by setting numerical limits to the amount of resource units per person, and by implementing a price mechanism that adjusted [and adjusts] prices to the foreseeable pressure on the commons (e.g., payment per head of cattle)» (2015, 41). Both of these options – state and market – are neglected by Hardin, but they are pillars of modern times that are dominated by neoliberal values. Although the state tends to encourage competition in society (e.g. Bollier 2014; De Angelis 2016; Smets and Salman 2008), it also tends to pay insufficient or no attention to the overexploitation of resources.

The emphasis on state and market in Western countries has created models based on values that emphasize individualism and discourage cooperation. This has led to public goods, which are generally owned by a governmental body. In contrast, commons depend not only on a singular titleholder with absolute ownership but on social relations, mutual obligations, and a variety of rights in the commons (Bruun 2015). Such collective interests are often only possible when individuals aim at gaining profit for themselves. However, neoliberalism has made the individual's selfish behaviour even more extreme (e.g. Gilbert 2014; Sennett 2013), resulting in a series of financial and economic crises. Although interventions put in place during the 2008 financial crisis were aimed at making the banking sector more efficient, the financial system as a whole has not changed at all. Banking institutions have tended to continue their business in more or less similar ways as before the crisis (e.g. Lietaer *et al.* 2009). The 2008 crisis led to a re-orientation in thinking regarding the economic sector. This can be seen in the 2009 Nobel Prize for Economics, which was awarded to Ostrom, a specialist in commons studies. De Angelis (2016), another commons expert, sees commons as an alternative to neoliberalism. Commons thinkers – including those opposing the privatization of private life such as anti-capitalists, anti-imperialists, and anti-neoliberals – see many opportunities around the globe (i.e. Tama – there are many alternatives). Tama conflicts with the assumption that there is no alternative (Tama) to neoliberalism (De Angelis 2016). Tama also offers possibilities for social change.

Because citizen participation and stakeholder cooperation are becoming more important, the role of commons experts is changing. Instead of reflecting abstract expertise, these experts are becoming mediators of conflicting interests and facilitators of the design and management of commons. For the management of urban commons, it is important to anticipate issues of social cohesion that may occur once experiences of shared interests and common symbolic forms decline (Löw 2015). Therefore, experts and organizers must learn about the individual capabilities needed for self-organized efforts over time (Bollier 2015). When stakeholder meetings are successful, vital coalitions can develop (Horlings 2010); these could be informal networks in which citizens and other involved actors cooperate in order to reach common goals (Van den Berg, Van Houwelingen and De Hart 2011; Vlind and Smets 2018; Smets 2018). Such self-governing systems look promising, but the stakeholders, working together with the city government

under the umbrella of urban governance², often conduct ad hoc and non-transparent actions. These actions can harm the democratic character of urban governance. Moreover, the operation of governance is not always clear, and power is often ascribed to economic, social-cultural, and political elites, who determine what will be expected from other stakeholders (Swyngedouw, Moulaert and Rodriguez 2002; Swyngedouw 2005). Such a situation may not only harm the democratic character of urban governance but also damage the necessary relationships that are based on trust (Smets and Salman 2008).

As described above, changing from the pillars of state and market into a cooperation in which state and market have to work together with citizens organized in urban commons can result in tensions. To deal with contemporary tensions of social change, Mingione (2018) proposes an interpretative frame based on Polanyi's (1944) double movement, which includes a disembeddedness that destroys habits and social bonds followed by a re-embeddedness through creating new social bonds and institutions. Bruun emphasizes that debates about urban commons have a theoretical gap: they do not consider «a view of the communities and the people who live in and maintain them» (2015, 167). In addition, Harvey (2012) shows that the social theory on the urban commons is rather poorly developed and is characterized by global and general claims to the right of the city. Rarely do urbanites see the metropolitan area as a commons that is part of their daily lives.

To show how commons can be part of daily life, this article looks at the role of different stakeholders in the Indische neighbourhood, a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Amsterdam, where many citizens' initiatives have been funded by the government. These initiatives have contributed, and still contribute, to bonding and democratic leadership. This has led to reshaping interactions between citizens and the government with newly created possibilities and opportunities. Due to recent budget cuts, the government aims to provide less bureaucratic control, but in reality, this goal remains unrealized. The government faces problems with changing its control function into an enabling and facilitating one. In addition, citizens' initiatives, subsidized by the government, have led to citizens' having higher expectations of the government. In particular, the government's acknowledgment of citizens' initiatives has led citizens to expect that more governmental time and attention will be given to address their needs, but professionals and the government alike have insufficient time and means to meet citizens' demands (see also Tonkens and Verhoeven 2011).

The Indische neighbourhood in Amsterdam East has received a lot of attention at national congresses due to its quickly growing social capital, that is, citizen's initiatives and their ability to form networks. We therefore asked, How are urban

² Urban governance «is a process shaped by those systems of political, economic, and social values from which the urban regime derives its legitimacy. However, although these collaborative strategies strengthen the governing capacity of local authorities, they also expose these organizations to the full thrust of political pressures from private business and civil society» (Pierre 1999, 374-375).

commons positioned in relation to communities and the local government in the Indische neighbourhood, where cooperations between communities and (semi) governmental organizations operate under the umbrella of urban governance? To answer this question, we first focus on the verb *commoning*, which leads to the formation and maintenance of commons. *Commoning* often takes place in communities. This theoretical approach will be followed by descriptions of the research methodology and the Indische neighbourhood, where one can find different types of communities. Next we focus on the operation of liquid communities, where members cope with quickly changing acts and non-consolidated habits and routines. These communities will be described in more detail later. Moreover, attention will be paid to their cooperation with stakeholders under the umbrella of the governance of urban commons. These activities will be examined in relation to discussions of urban commons in practice and theory.

2. Commoning and communities

Commons and commoning go together. The concept of commoning became widespread due to Linebaugh's (2008) publication that introduced the term. *Commoning* as a verb is needed «for intellectual leverage on the making of a practical, factual and popularly imagined commons» (Kalb 2017, 68). *Commoning* – similar to Bollier's set of social protocols – can be seen as «one long-term effort to reorient discourse and practice in terms of a public good and the redistribution of shared resources toward a more equal world» (Susser 2017, 1). In this view, urbanites explore opportunities for cooperation by appropriating, creating, or reinventing shared spaces. *Commoning* creates new encounters and negotiations that give shape to the organization of different kinds of sharing and common life (Stavrides 2016). *Commoning* opens the boundaries of communities and spaces, enabling newcomers to join. However, the process of commoning is shaped by social antagonism that often leads to historically contingent and ambiguous results: it can therefore be fenced within the limits of a community that aims at restricting access to common products and advantages to the community members only. «People [...] can and do form *communities*, by virtue of facing common sets of issues in their daily lives. This is particularly true when either the market or the state creates a situation in which those daily lives are under some form of threat» (DeFilippis and Saegert 2008, 4, emphasis in original).

Authors such as Massey (1994), Robertson (1995), DeFilippis and Saegert (2008), and Savage *et al.* (2005) have shown that the local context is very important for neighbourhood residents. Thus, communities may be place-specific or place-dependent. Among such communities, both solid and liquid organization can be found (Bauman 2000), but in this study, the focus will be mainly on liquid communities. A liquid community – a concept first used by Blackshaw (2010) – is characterized by the quickly changing acts of its members, resulting in a non-consolidation of habits and routines. Here, the ties between members are like Velcro: in some situations, it is very easy for people to tear themselves away and

reattach themselves to others, while in other cases, the strength of the bond makes that more difficult (Godwin, as discussed by Blackshaw 2010).

For liquid communities and commoning, Boutellier's (2011) metaphor of jazz improvisation can be used to describe patterns characterized as organized freedom, where freedom and organization go together with the possible accompaniment of conflict. The newly created order is a process in which spontaneous and structured elements are linked, and it is assumed that identities will adjust to the organizational context in which they operate. This metaphor reflects network society, wherein networks can be seen as social relations, with power and authority playing an important role. Network society is characterized by nodes and links but also by interwoven mistakes, strange patterns, and open spaces. And networks can be linked to other networks. According to Garton *et al.* (1997), the idea of such a network or networks is based on Simmel, who described how webs of group affiliations are able to not only facilitate but also constrain social networks. Those authors also show how different types of identities can be combined.

In looking at the different stakeholders in a network, it becomes evident that both state officials and professionals tend to look for and utilize blueprints. Thus, they tend to look for standardized solutions (*technique*) and refrain from incorporating local practices (*metis*); the implication being that professionals tend to employ top-down initiatives and refrain from enabling citizens to develop grassroots solutions. Instead, planners, policy makers, and social workers focus on diagnosing social problems and removing pathologies. There is insufficient attention, if any at all, directed at overcoming stumbling blocks regarding issues of communication, culture, and power, and this lack hinders any consideration of local knowledge, values, and culture (Scott 1998).

Liquid communities and their networks have to work with other stakeholders, such as public and private sector organizations and civil society. However, to enable grassroots participation, deepening democracy is required (Blackshaw 2010; Fung and Wright 2001). Unfortunately, public sector organizations in particular still assume that communities have a solid form; this is reflected in their well-developed organizational structures and Smart (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound) approaches. However, liquid communities do not aim at establishing a fixed organization; instead, they focus on the process of networking, organizing, and doing. This process appears more prominent and available and is desired by the community, as opposed to the enthusiasm for a final product (for a discussion of liquid communities, see e.g. Bauman 2000, 2002). According to the government, people have no automatic right to government assistance when they encounter problems; they must first find non-governmental assistance in society, regardless of whether they need occasional or constant support.

3. Methodology

This article is based on a cooperation between the two authors during 2008-2012. The first author is an academic in the Department of Sociology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and the second author is an independent community development consultant. Both authors regularly discussed the developments occurring in the Indische neighbourhood with members of the community and attended many activities in the neighbourhood as well as meetings among citizens and between citizens and governmental employees. This was a conscious and deliberate effort, derived from research and everyday practice in the field, to deal with the construction of [their] insights (see Berger 2015). The methods used for this qualitative research were observations, participant observations, and many informal talks with neighbourhood residents, community members, and governmental employees. Informal talks took place before and after meetings and gatherings in the neighbourhood. Both authors took field notes and discussed their findings from different perspectives to understand what was happening – that is, they reflected on their experiences in the field – which led to valuable insights. Moreover, scientific literature and policy documents were studied. By using different methods and kinds of data, the authors employed triangulation (Bryman 2012).

4. The Indische neighbourhood

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indische neighbourhood in Amsterdam East was developed to house a large number of port labourers. In the 1960s, the port moved to the western part of Amsterdam, and the neighbourhood became mostly residential (Samen Indische Buurt 2009). By 2011, it was a low-income neighbourhood with 22,806 residents (O+S 2011). The Indische neighbourhood has become ethnically mixed, with 67% of the residents having migrant origins. The largest migrant groups are of Moroccan, Turkish, Chinese, Surinamese, and Antillean origins. Housing in the neighbourhood is mainly small, social rental units, but there is a growing amount of owner-occupied housing (Samen Indische Buurt 2009). The Indische neighbourhood houses many vulnerable people who can usually help themselves, though they may need encouragement to do so. If local residents are unable to help themselves or to ask for help from others in civil society, professional support will be given. However, residents are assumed to be responsible for their own quality of life (Urban District Amsterdam East 2011).

The semi-governmental welfare organization in the Indische neighbourhood went bankrupt twice, forcing local government to privatize all welfare activities, which resulted in the job going to the welfare organization that submitted the lowest bid. Consequently, many welfare activities were abandoned and neighbourhood centres closed down. In 2008, Civic – the new welfare organization – changed supply-led services into demand-led services. Many neighbourhood

centres were closed or changed into production houses based on the assumption that meeting places were not sufficient for encouraging self-help. The idea was that residents should be stimulated to initiate and create activities such as dancing, homework clubs, and language classes. Civic's coaches supported neighbourhood activities by guiding and facilitating residents in putting on such activities. Thus, the formal suppliers of support declined in number, potentially offering more space for grassroots initiatives.

Despite these changes, groups of residents still meet, for example, at clubs for playing cards or the mandolin and at migrant organizations. Moreover, migrants now occupy the old playground and recreation associations formerly used by native-born residents. Although there are very few sports organizations or clubs, the urban district organizes a lot of sports activities. In addition, the number of social networks is growing. This resembles what Mingione (2018) describes as the double movement of disembeddedness, which in turn creates new opportunities for communities to step in and create new kinds of embeddedness. This will be further discussed below.

5. Communities in the Indische neighbourhood

In the twenty-first century, the Netherlands has been facing problems with extremism. In 2002, an environmental fundamentalist murdered Pim Fortuyn, the then leader of a Dutch populist party. In 2004, Theo van Gogh – a filmmaker and television programmer with distinct ideas about Islam – was stabbed and killed by a Moroccan Muslim fundamentalist in Amsterdam East. Both incidents had an impact on Dutch society, polarizing Muslims and non-Muslims, as was evident in the media and politics (Galloway *et al.* 2014; Vliegenthart and Roggeband 2007). In reaction and through fear of escalation within Dutch society, a group of citizens created a network called Community Veranders: The Community of Change-Makers. The goal of this network was to fight polarization, radicalization, and hate in society. This community offered a meeting place in which people could help each other find new solutions to such problems. Community Veranders has since become a national network; it has organized training, knowledge-sharing sessions, and meet-and-greet events for its members.

In 2007, the urban district Amsterdam Zeeburg, today part of the Amsterdam East urban district, established the think tank Social Cohesion, in which local elite residents, including Community Veranders, discussed how they could improve local cohesion in the Indische neighbourhood. This think tank challenged the classical role between the government and citizens, where the government makes policies and citizens and civil organizations implement them. One idea from this think tank was the creation of the Timorplein Community: a network of social and economic entrepreneurs, representatives of societal organizations, and creative residents such as artists, with the common denominator being the desire to create initiatives to improve their neighbourhood. The entrepreneurs from this community

stepped into the gap created by the loss of social welfare professionals who had worked for the now defunct, bankrupted local welfare organizations.

Meetings between Timorplein Community members have led to the development of common ground (see Gilbert 2014) and have also encouraged initiatives outside the community. The Timorplein Community's example has mushroomed, becoming a trademark for the development of other communities or network organizations organized around specific themes or interests in the neighbourhood. In addition, entrepreneurs have begun to work together to strengthen their links with the neighbourhood. An example is the yearly Food Night in which entrepreneurs in the Timorplein Community join hands to promote the main shopping street (Javastraat) in the neighbourhood; ethnic food shops are involved in this event.

In another part of the neighbourhood, the Karrewiel Community developed around a closed neighbourhood centre. Residents and artists succeeded in reopening the centre and running it based on self-management. When the Karrewiel Community searched for board members to manage their building, they found them in the Timorplein Community. Thus, new networks were created out of existing networks, in turn spawning new places of inspiration and action. The Karrewiel Community was the neighbourhood's first example of a community organized around a physical object – the neighbourhood centre – that was then managed and programmed by that community. Though the Karrewiel Community Centre closed down, the network of communities not only created opportunities to find volunteers who were willing to participate in neighbourhood activities also established a breeding ground for ideas for change or the organizing of large-scale activities, such as the local neighbourhood festival *Indische Buurfestival*, and small-scale activities, such as cooking or walking groups and movie evenings.

In 2010, the Makassarplein Community developed around Makassar Square; here, residents and social professionals combined to improve the physical and social living environments in the area. One of their first activities was the implementation of the Oasis Game, a Brazilian intervention model aimed at improving living environments by transforming dreams into action. The Makassarplein Community became a copy of the Timorplein Community, and at that point, many other projects were launched. Due to the vast range of differing projects implemented, however, the community struggled with developing and sustaining itself.

After the closure of the Karrewiel Community Centre, De Meevaart – a larger (18,000 m²) community centre with a theatre and restaurant – opened in 2012. The Meevaart Community, which encompasses all residents interested in the community centre – producers as well as consumers of activities – manages this community centre and tries to determine ways in which the centre should be organized. They make use of the Karrewiel Community's experience of communing, taking into account that more people of different ethnic and class backgrounds are participating. Some former Karrewiel Community members joined with residents living near the Karrewiel Community Centre to form another new community: the Ambomplein Community. Financing for the centre's

maintenance and technology comes partly from a government subsidy and partly from, for example, renting space to non-community members.

By May 2012, many different communities could be found in the neighbourhood, such as the Timorplein Community, Makassarplein Community, Meevaart Community, Amikino Community, Ambonplein Community, and a youth community, along with a growing number of other initiatives. These communities generally act as collectives around different urban commons. However, they cannot operate independently from public institutions, as is discussed in the next section.

6. Coopération between communities and public institutions

The members of a community do not speak with one voice. Every individual member has a vote, creating a multitude of voices. It is assumed that the rules, procedures, and different points of view within a community are more likely to divide members than bind them together. Hence, bonding within a community requires a warm nest, a place of meeting – online as well as offline – for the accumulation and sharing of knowledge. A community therefore completely disassociates itself from extremist points of view though it includes all margins of the community in its operations. It is not the community which conducts activities, but its members (see Fiere *et al.* 2012).

The appearance of communities in the Indische neighbourhood was not well understood by the local government, which expressed prejudices against them and assumed that they would be unwilling to participate in cooperations and co-creation. Moreover, the pioneers were stigmatized in different ways: they were considered an elite few and without links to society; they were simply entrepreneurs who wanted money; they would not represent the neighbourhood; they were not ordinary people; they were looking for power; they were utopists without any sense of reality; they were hype-sensitive cosmopolites who would not be around for long. These labels show that the boundaries of the communities were not clear. The communities, as imagined by government employees and “traditional” groups of residents, were considered to have floating boundaries (see Levine 2017).

Even so, there were many examples of cooperation between the communities and public institutions in the neighbourhood. We focus on one example that gives an impression of the blended social action that can take place in a governance network. In January 2012, the community centre, De Meevaart, began a “social experiment” in which the centre and its users were responsible for decision making and seeking equilibrium between the demand and supply of services in connection with the centre. Priority groups could use the centre free of charge, even though the centre was facing a deficit of approximately €50,000. To cope with that deficit, opening times were restricted. Later, other changes were made, such as increasing volunteer participation, introducing a theatre programme, and furthering development of the centre’s restaurant. In this respect, our focus should not only

include the community centre but also the entire neighbourhood. Social property can enable new forms of citizen participation in conjunction with working, learning, income generation, and self-sustainability. As a community tries to develop alternative uses for temporarily unused space in social property, new links can be made between real estate owners and residents to strengthen the neighbourhood economy.

In the case of the Meevaart Community, a buffer organization was created to operate between the community and the local government. This organization negotiated with the local government and created a space for the community to conduct its daily business. However, the arrangement required a reconsideration of the relationship between the Meevaart Community and the local urban district that was subsidizing the community in order to guarantee priority groups’ access to the centre, because the amount of funding turned out to be insufficient.

For De Meevaart to be a financially healthy enterprise, more volunteers and residents needed to participate in the self-management of the centre. The community aimed at eventually getting rid of the subsidy relationship; instead, it wanted to charge the local district for use of the space by specific target groups and the services provided by them. Under such circumstances, the government could subcontract specific tasks, which would help the Meevaart Community develop a budget strategy where all users are charged the same amount for services and space. Moreover, once the Meevaart Community also became a rental agency with an interest in the occupancy rate, the use of social property could be optimized. Here, the entrepreneurial attitude of the community can be clearly seen.

The Makassarplein, Meevaart, Karrewiel, Timorplein, Assadaaka, and youth communities agreed to cooperate collectively and approached the local government about becoming a real stakeholder in the process. In September 2012, they submitted their own participation policy proposal that fit the local government’s budget cuts. The communities aimed at creating a cheaper but more efficient and effective management of social properties. Moreover, they stated that within the budget constraints, they could involve more citizens, reach more vulnerable citizens, and create more jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities. In addition to public funding, they planned to mobilize non-governmental funding. Furthermore, the communities aimed to move away from project subsidies towards investments in dynamic processes and cooperations between representative and participative democracies in which council members and citizens alike could play a role.

Meanwhile, the district council agreed that government data could be used in the participation process, which forced the local government to pilot open access to area-based data and raw digital data. For this purpose, the local communities formed an alliance with the information and communication technology group Hack the Government (*Hack de Overheid*). In 2010, active residents introduced the idea of budget monitoring³ in the Indische neighbourhood. They searched for

³ Budget monitoring is an instrument that enables citizens, communities, and organizations to obtain insight into government spending. This methodology can stimulate a dialogue

effective ways of improving citizen participation and acquainted themselves with budget monitoring techniques applied in Brazil. In their view, budget monitoring – as an instrument for transparent government spending – is connected to conscientiousness, democracy, and human rights (Cadat 2012).

7. Commons and commoning reconsidered

To understand the role (semi)public organizations and communities play in the Indische neighbourhood, we explore what Bollier sees as the three necessary elements for a common: a resource, a liquid community, and a set of social protocols, all of which interact with each other. The first element, the resource, may include, for example, subsidies, real estate, and profits, such as those made from the Meevaart community centre. For the second element, the liquid community involved uses a relational approach that includes all members in its activities. This approach creates a community of practice. According to Wenger (2000), such a community develops when community members work together to develop a shared understanding of the meaning of their joint enterprise. In this process, the participants are made responsible for the collective endeavour. All community members interact with each other, becoming mutually engaged and developing related norms. A shared repertoire of collective resources includes «language, routines, sensibilities, artefacts, tools, stories, styles, etc.» (Wenger 2000, 229). In such a community of practice, norms and values of the lifeworld dominate. Lastly, the third element is the set of social protocols, which refers to the liquid community and its available resources. Such communities are network organizations formed around a specific theme, interest, or physical asset. The membership of a liquid community is not fixed but regularly changes, implying that the composition of a network can change over time. Active members can involve themselves in a specific theme and withdraw once that theme has been addressed. At a later date, however, they may decide to participate again in specific activities. Each community recognizes a number of people belonging to the core of the network; these people are often seen as the spokespersons. This core moderates the community and enables bonding; it focuses on the themes and interests of the community. However, a spokesperson is personally responsible for his or her proclamations. Such a community is not an action group but is organized around interests or themes without necessarily agreeing on how those should take shape. A theme is discussed within the community, knowledge is exchanged, and from that point onwards, people take action. Some initiatives require more organizational efforts than others, especially if funding is required.

A community's function and development become an important point of discussion for its members. The main concern involves the autonomy and ambition of collective individuals and how they can be brought together in a way that

between stakeholders about prioritization, needs, and approaches to deal with problems (Center for Budget Monitoring and Citizen Participation n.d.).

creates positive spinoffs for the neighbourhood. Therefore, communities often develop methods that assume residents – whether self-supporting or help-dependent – have ambitions that can be linked to available possibilities and potentials and that can become manifest through four different approaches (see also Mehlkopf 2009). First, citizens can be enabled to exercise their right to ambition. By providing access to a place where citizens can meet and develop shared ownership based on similar interests regarding ideas and assets, citizens may be able to integrate their ideas on a community or society level. Second, individual interests can be taken as a starting point for the creation of a collective ambition. One example of a community as the principal actor, facilitated by the government, is the Meevaart Community. Third, an individual's ambition cannot always be transformed into action. Therefore, facilities, possibilities, and competences are required. Citizens who require support, either temporary or long-term, should be able to live in a way that allows their ambition to blossom and bear fruit. If people with psychiatric problems, for example, cannot manage their own potential, citizens and public institutions should collaborate to connect them with any professional support they need, in accordance with the possibilities in the society and neighbourhood. Fourth, once a citizen's potential starts to bear fruit, civil society becomes a supplier of schooling and jobs, creating participation instruments such as opportunities for volunteer work or on-the-job learning, where either a community or a single stakeholder can be the principle actor. Here, the collective nature of communities goes with the improved wellbeing of their participants.

It appears that the communities in our study sought methods to organize themselves in ways that would maintain their liquid nature, but in practice, community members were often dependent on the local government. Whether a community can become a partner of a local authority depends on the theme and interests that brought it together, but to work under the umbrella of urban governance, stakeholders need to be willing to work together with local authorities. The communities we studied had good relationships with local authorities, which were facilitated by a contact person or a participation broker, as was used in Amsterdam East. This person may act as a liaison between the community and the government. However, the use of a contact person does not prevent residents, entrepreneurs, or other organizations from working towards their ambitions in their own ways. Community members are free to develop and maintain their own relations with the local district council.

In a community-government partnership, the community's theme or interest is evaluated by the local government. Here, the relationship between the parties involved can become more intense, especially when the community has organizational power. If a community has labour-intensive initiatives, these can potentially lead to a high financial burden for the community, which in turn can be minimized by a subsidy that supports the strengthening and moderation of such activities. In this case, no hierarchical relationship is created. The activities of residents, (semi)public organizations, and businesspeople are expected to become more cost neutral over time. One source of income could be sponsoring, but this

implies that community members should donate resources such as space and labour. In addition to sponsoring, local entrepreneurs and funds could be approached. Moreover, funders are more likely to participate in a project once other stakeholders are seen to be willing to invest.

For co-creation under the umbrella of urban governance, stakeholders need to be aware of the differences between community and government. Communities have a liquid approach, which is characterized by a process in which the verb organizing is of great importance. Public and semi-public institutions differ in that they use a solid approach in combination with a SMART approach that often leads to blueprint solutions. This approach is characterized by its solid nature and its view of organization as a noun.

In the case of the Meevaart Community, a buffer organization was created to operate between the community and the local government. Such an organization can be helpful because empowered deliberative democracy develops at the grassroots, which causes friction with public institutions that adhere to a representative democracy. Governmental institutions generally do not aim for citizen participation; they operate as solid institutions with their own organizational structures and cultures. The communities we looked at developed budget monitoring skills and aimed to have a serious say in the management of social property in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the facilitating and enabling role of the government was enforced by the existence of the communities, which was partly due to the severe cuts in public spending in the Netherlands as a result of the European credit crisis. Moreover, the blended social action of governance was characterized by the declining influence of politicians and the local social, cultural, and economic elite becoming active in the communities, thereby altering the role of power and influence. The positive results realized by the local communities discussed here contributed to these changes.

As this article shows, the success of communities depends on several factors: Moderators must be equipped to enable and facilitate the development of communities. Mutual respect is required among community members and between community members and community development workers. Thus, tolerance of difference is required. When a community has to work with public institutions, different organizational cultures come together. Government or public service employees who are used to steering development must adapt to taking a facilitating and enabling role. In the Indische neighbourhood, for example, the appointment of the welfare organization, Civic, led to a declining number of social professionals employed in the neighbourhood. Citizens filled this gap themselves, and in this "open" space, the Timorplein Community developed. At a later date, the local government employed a participation broker, who acted as a broker between the different civil society and local government groups. With a broker in the mix, gaps between the communities and the government were able to be partly bridged.

This study has shown that distributed leadership and different kinds of moderation could be found among the communities of the Indische neighbourhood. Moreover, it has shown that commoning is rather context dependent.

8. Conclusion

This case study of urban commons in the Indische neighbourhood shows that commoning is not easy in a world where the state and the market dominate. It appears that in the neighbourhood, communities mushroomed once many welfare professionals disappeared from civil society. Here, we see a dual process of disembeddedness and embeddedness (see Mingione 2018). The embeddedness offered possibilities for communities to become part of commoning networks and for the creation of urban commons such as neighbourhood centres managed with do-it-yourself approaches.

Both inside and outside a community, boundaries often have a fluid nature. In this study, such floating boundaries caused confusion about who belonged to a community and who did not. Employees of the urban district faced problems with these floating boundaries, which conflicted with the municipality's organizational system. Meanwhile, the communities tried to organize themselves in such a way that their liquid natures would be maintained. These differences made a stakeholder approach difficult. For the Meevaart Community, a buffer organization was created to operate between the community and the local government. The buffer organization was seen as a safe space for commoning and negotiating with public institutions about cooperation and co-creation.

Urban governance asks for the cooperation of different parties, in this case, the local government and liquid communities. To bridge the different mindsets of community and (semi)governmental organizations, it is helpful to distinguish their characteristics and how they can be linked or can find common ground. But cooperation between stakeholders is not an easy process. Liquid communities are rooted in everyday life and therefore favour a process approach in which organizing as a verb is central. Thus, commoning opens a community's boundaries and spaces, or in other words, enables others to join or rejoin. In contrast, public institutions tend to opt for a SMART approach, which often leads to blueprint solutions. This solid approach is associated with organization as a noun.

This case study also shows that neoliberalism, which uses a Tina (there is no alternative) approach, does not fit the practise of urban commons, which uses a Tama (there are many alternatives) approach. Recognizing this difference is not only useful for community development insights but also for the stakeholders involved in the process. Communities often need to work with other stakeholders such as public institutions. To find ways of cooperation, individuals must be able to improvise. This is especially necessary when public institutions work with (liquid) communities to find common ground because communities – and community members – react in different ways to policy networks, which are often complex, multifaceted, or even messy. Governance involving a local government that wants to control activities in society tends to obstruct cooperation with communities working on urban commons. Therefore, to enable commoning, communities must claim or create a space for operating in civil society, a space in which *metis* is dominant to *techné* (Scott 1998). In the words of Habermas, this reflects roughly the lifeworld and the system. A safe space is needed for

commoning, which can also be facilitated by a buffer organization that keeps those who want to transplant system elements away from communities. Thus, cooperation between stakeholders under the umbrella of urban governance requires planned interventions that enable communities to employ their activities. This means there is a potential for citizens in a liquid community to obtain influence in the governance process. In fact, some elites may monopolize benefits unless counterpowers work to protect democratic principles in the cooperation.

This article has provided insight into the operation of communities in the Indische neighbourhood and their cooperations with stakeholders. However, the description and analysis of these developments stopped in 2012. Further research is needed to investigate more recent developments of the urban commons and related commoning processes. Moreover, additional case studies are needed to describe the contexts that enable the obstruction of commoning processes.

REFERENCES

- Atkinson, W. 2008. Not all that was solid has melted into air (or liquid): A critique of Bauman on individualization and class in liquid modernity. *The Sociological Review*, 56 (1), pp. 1-17.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.00774.x>.
- Bauman, Z. 2000. *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- 2002. *Community. Seeking safety in an insecure world*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Berger, R. 2015. Now I see it, now I don't. Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research, *Qualitative Research*, 15 (2), pp. 219-234.
- Blackshaw, T. 2010. *Key concepts in community studies*. London: Sage.
- Bollier, D. 2014. *Think like a commoner. A short introduction to the life of the commons*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.
- Boutellier, H. 2011. *De improvisatiemaatschappij. Over de sociale ordening van een onbegrensde wereld*. The Hague: Boom, Lemna.
- Bradshaw, T. 2008. The post-place community: Contributions to the debate about the definition of community. *Community Development*, 39 (1), pp. 5-16.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330809489738>.
- Bruun, M.H. 2015. Communities and the commons: Open access and community ownership of the urban commons. In C. Borch and M. Kornberger eds. 2015. *Urban Commons. Rethinking the city*, pp. 153-170. London: Routledge.
- Bryman, A. 2012. *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cadat, M. 2012. Budget monitoring in de Indische buurt. Alliantie tussen burgerparticipatie en innovatieve ICT. *Sociaal bestek*, June-July, pp. 16-18.
- Castells, M. 2000. *The rise of the network society*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Center for Budget Monitoring and Citizen Participation n.d. *Homepage*. URL: <http://budgetmonitoring.nl/en/> (visited 7-2-2019).

- Checkaway, B. 2011. Community development, social diversity, and the new metropolis. *Community Development Journal*, 46 (S2), pp.ii5-iii14.
- De Angelis, M. 2016. Foreword. In S. Stavrides *Common space: The city as commons*. London: Zed books.
- DeFilipis, J. and Saegert, S. 2008. Communities develop: The question is how? In J. DeFilipis and S. Saegert eds. 2008. *The community development reader*, pp. 1-6. New York: Routledge.
- De Moor, T. 2015. *The dilemma of the commoners: Understanding the use of common-pool resources in long-term perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fiere, R., Mehlkopf, P. and Wüst, S. 2012. *Meevaart of Tegenstroom*. Amsterdam: Stichting Meevaart Ontwikkel Groep.
- Fung, A. and Wright, E. 2001. Deepening democracy: Innovations in empowered participatory governance. *Politics & Society*, 29 (1), pp. 5-41.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329201029001002>.
- Galloway, M., Hoepel, M. and Smets, P. 2014. Post 9/11 state of affairs. Everyday encounters and notions of belonging attributed to Moroccan-Dutch and native-born in Amsterdam. *Global Built Environment Review* special edition, pp. 31-34.
- Garton, L., Haythornthwaite, C. and Wellman, B. 1997. Studying online social networks. *Journal of Community-Mediated Communication*, 3 (1).
 Downloaded from URL: <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue1/garton.html>.
- Gilbert, J. 2014. *Common ground. Democracy and collectivism in an age of individualism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Granovetter, M.S. 1973. The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (6), pp. 1360-1380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329201029001002>.
- Hardin, G. 1968. The tragedy of the commons. *Science* 162 (3859), pp. 1243-1248.
- Harvey, D. 2012. *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the city to the urban revolution*. London: Verso.
- Hess, C. and Ostrom, E. eds. 2007. *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge: MIT press.
- Horlings, I. 2010. *Vital coalitions. Partnership for sustainable regional development*. Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Press.
- Kalb, D. 2017. Afterword: After the commons-commoning! *Focaal, Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 7, pp. 67-73.
<https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2017.790106>.
- Kornberger, M. and Borch, C. 2015. Introduction urban commons. In C. Borch and M. Kornberger eds. 2015. *Urban Commons. Rethinking the city*, pp. 1-21. London: Routledge.
- Levine, J.R. 2017. The paradox of community power: Cultural processes and elite authority in participatory governance. *Social Forces*, 95 (3), pp. 1155-1179. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sow098>.
- Löfgren, A. 2015. Sharing an atmosphere: Spaces in urban commons. In C. Borch and M. Kornberger eds. 2015. *Urban Commons. Rethinking the city*, pp. 68-91. London: Routledge.

- Löw, M. 2015. Managing the urban commons: Public interest and the representation of interconnectedness. In C. Borch and M. Kornberger eds. 2015. *Urban Commons. Rethinking the city*, pp. 109-126. London: Routledge.
- Lietaer B., Ulanowicz, R. and Goerner, S. 2009. Options for managing a systemic bank crisis. *Surveys and Perspectives Integrating Environment and Society* 2 (1).
- Linebaugh, P. 2008. *The Magna Carta Manifesto. Liberties and commons for all*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Massey, D. 1994. *Space, place and gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mehlkopf, P. 2009. Potentie, ambitie en beweging, een andere kijk op de revitaliseren van leefomgevingen en buurten. In F. Azarhoosh and P. Mehlkopf eds. 2009. *Maatschap in de buurt*, pp. 19-32. Amsterdam: IPC.
- Mingione, E. 2018. The double movement and the perspectives of contemporary capitalism. In A. Andreotti, S. Benassi and Y. Kazepov eds. 2018. *Western Capitalism in transition. Global processes, local challenges*, pp. 291-306. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- O+S 2011. *Kerncijfers Amsterdam 2011*. Amsterdam: Municipality of Amsterdam.
- Ostrom, E. 2009. Nobel Prize Lecture: Beyond markets and states: Polycentric governance of complex economic systems. <http://bit.ly/2VnUlp5>.
- Pierre, J. 1999. Models of urban governance: The institutional dimensions of urban politics. *Urban Affairs Review*, 34 (3), pp. 372-396. DOI: 10.1177/10780879922183988
- Robertson, R. 1995. Glocalization: time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In M. Featherstone, S. Lash and R. Robertson ed. 1995. *Global Modernities*, pp. 25-44. London: Sage.
- Samen Indische Buurt 2000. *Voort op de ingeslagen weg. De Indische buurt in opkomst*. Amsterdam: Stadsdeel Zeeburg, de Alliantie Amsterdam, Ymere, Eigen Haard.
- Savage, M., Bagnall, G. and Longhurst, B. 2005. *Globalization and belonging*. London: Sage.
- Scott, J. 1998. *Seeing like a state. Why certain schemes to improve the human conditions have failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sennett, R. 2013. *Together: The rituals, pleasure and politics of cooperation*. London: Penguin.
- Smets, P. 2006. Living apart or together? Multiculturalism at a neighbourhood level. *Community Development Journal*, 41 (3), pp. 293-306. doi:10.1093/cdj/bsi070.
- 2011. Community development in contemporary ethnic pluriform neighbourhoods: A critical look at social mixing. *Community Development Journal*, 46 (S2), pp. ii15-ii32. DOI: 10.1093/cdj/bsr010.
- 2018. Indian community-based housing finance systems: potentials and pitfalls for urban development and housing improvement. *International Journal of Urban Sciences*.
- <https://doi.org/10.1080/12265934.2018.1514274>.
- Smets, P. and Salman, T. 2008. Countering urban segregation: Theoretical and policy innovation from around the globe. *Urban Studies*, 45 (7), pp. 1307-1332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098008090676>
- Stavrides, S. 2016. *Common space: The city as commons*. London: Zed books.
- Susser, I. 2017. Introduction: For or against commonsing? *Focaal, Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 79, pp. 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2017.790101>.
- Susser, I. and Tonnelat, S. 2013. Transformative cities: The three urban commons. *Focaal, Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 66, pp.105-132. doi:10.3167/fcl.2010.660116.
- Swyngedouw, E. 2005. Governance innovation and the citizen: The Janus face of governance-beyond-the-state. *Urban Studies*, 42 (11), pp. 1991-2006. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980500279869>
- Swyngedouw, E., Moulaert, F. and Rodriguez, A. 2002. Neoliberal urbanization in Europe: Large-scale urban development projects and the new urban policy. *Antipode*, 34 (3), pp. 542-577. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00254>.
- Tonkens, E. and Vertoeven, I. 2011. *Bewonersinitiatieven: Proefruin voor partnerschap tussen burgers en overheid Een onderzoek naar bewonersinitiatieven in de Amsterdamse wijkaarpak*. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam/Stichting Actief Burgerschap.
- Tönnies, F. 2001 [1957]. *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, In J.J. Macdonis and N.V. Benokraitis eds. 2001. *Seeing Ourselves: Classic, Contemporary, and Cross-Cultural Readings in Sociology*, pp. 59-61. Upper Saddle River (N.J.): Prentice Hall.
- Van den Berg, E., Van Houweligen, P. and Hart, J. de 2011. *Informele groepen. Verkenningen van eigentijdse bronnen van sociale cohesie*. The Hague: SCP.
- Vliegthart, R. and C. Roggeband 2007. Framing immigration and integration: Relationships between Press and Parliament in the Netherlands. *The International Communication Gazette*, 69 (3), pp. 295-331.
- Vlind, M. and Smets, P. 2018. Senses of belonging and nonbelonging within citizen's summits in Amsterdam. In K. Davis, H. Ghorashi and P. Smets eds. *Contested Belonging: Spaces, Practices, Biographies*, pp. 89-111. Bringley: Emerald.
- Wenger, E. 2000. Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems. *Organization*, 7 (2), pp. 225-246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840072002>.