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## Het bewoonbare land

Beekers, W.P.

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## SUMMARY

# THE LIVABLE LAND

## HISTORY OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE NETHERLANDS

### LOGICS OF SOCIAL HOUSING

In this dissertation I describe the history of the private social housing organizations in the Netherlands. They are often regarded as part of the civil society. However, I will argue that a uniform civil society does not exist. Social housing organizations have always been multiform and changeable. I will describe that dynamic using the notion of ‘logics’: discourses that provide answers to the question of how these organizations should be organized, financed and governed.

I distinguish five logics that might be of influence: *state-bound* (the organization is connected to the state, which provides financial means, creates a regulatory framework and supervises), *commercial* (the organization is geared towards the commercial market, the principle of supply and demand and private money), *informal* (the organization supplements the activities of individuals in their familial, friendship or neighborhood networks), *associative* (the organization is run by citizens, who unite outside their informal networks and take part as volunteers in a collective action) and a *professional* logic (the organization is run by educated and salaried professionals who aim for optimal services).

### THREE FORMS OF SOCIAL HOUSING ORGANIZATIONS

As a general outline, I distinguish three periods in the history of the social housing organizations, in which certain logics were dominant. Firstly, I describe the second half of the nineteenth century, the period of the 'philanthropic capitalists' (chapters 1-2).

The housing associations were embedded within a broad civilization offensive and this coloured their identity. Associative and commercial logics were dominant. Volunteers carried out the work and governed the associations. They invested capital in exchange for marginal payments of dividend. However, they did not want to operate as a charity, but instead work along commercial lines. In this way they stimulated workers to help advance themselves, attract potential shareholders and act as role models in the housing market.

Secondly, I describe the period of the 'housing corporations', from the end of the nineteenth century (chapters 3-6). Workers demanded improvements to their living conditions, for example in the area of housing. The elite responded. Directors of social housing organizations wanted to increase their output by introducing state-bound and professional logics.

The Housing Act of 1901 provided the means for state funding for social housing organizations, which as a result grew in number and size. But this state intervention also caused a gap between the social housing organizations and society. Citizens no longer bore the costs of social housing themselves. The state demanded control over the building, the management, the finances, the rent and the distribution of houses.

Professionalization also occurred. Various organizations employed schooled and salaried (initially only female) overseers. National associations of social housing organizations were founded and soon funded by the national government. These national associations stimulated professionalization and the scaling-up of local institutions.

Thirdly, I describe the period of 'social enterprises' from the 1960s on (chapters 7-9). Politicians and directors questioned state dominance and wanted more autonomy for the social housing organizations. This was made possible as the quantitative housing shortage was alleviated. Between 1975 and 1995 the government decreased its funding and gave the social housing organizations substantial administrative freedoms within performance frameworks.

Politicians and directors considered strengthening the position of social housing organizations through various means: by way of the informal cir-

cuit (the cooperative model), through the association model and by further professionalization. In practice directors and politicians orientated themselves strongly towards professional and commercial logics. They approached residents primarily as service customers. According to them, social housing organizations had to become 'social enterprises'. Through mergers large organizations arose with paid directors and commissioners at the top.

## **THE PROFESSIONALIZATION PROJECT**

One theme runs throughout the history of the social housing organizations. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards they developed from associations of active citizens into autonomous institutions run by professionals.

This is an addition to the historiography of social organizations. That has too often been described according to the trichotomy of state, market and society. Moreover, scholars usually date a change in identity of these organizations to the 1960s.

The continual professionalization of the social housing organizations was based on their strive for a maximum of returns. That emphasis was applied by all the parties involved: in the first place the organizations themselves. They emerged as expressions of a social movement. However, after a phase of mobilization, it became clear that its associative character was not an aim in itself and that operating efficiently was paramount. In doing so, they repeated a common development of institutionalization.

Secondly, professionalization was the result of political choices. The Dutch government carried out a corporative socio-economic policy: when it intervened in society, it tried to do so through supporting social institutions. However, this government support came with control and a strong orientation towards the state (also described as 'welfare state isomorphism'). The corporative policy had an unforeseen effect in that it weakened the bonds that the organizations had with society.

Thirdly, professionalization was the result of the changing attitude of citizens. Social housing organizations arose during a time of collective action, whereby citizens became aware of their potential influence. There was a dominant discourse of community spirit and duty. Owing to the construction of a welfare state and increased prosperity, it became less attractive for citizens to exert themselves in social work. Active citizens became welfare consumers.

These processes of welfare state isomorphism, institutionalization and individualization left their mark on the history of social housing organizations. This probably also applies equally to other social organizations, within the Netherlands and abroad. For in the search of the Dutch housing organisations for an optimal return, foreign examples were always a source of inspiration.

Nowadays many politicians, directors and scholars refer to social housing organizations as civil society. However, they fail to recognize that a community of active citizens is different to a professional institution of educated and salaried professionals. Those longing for a renewed involvement by citizens must be prepared to think about new forms of organization.