

# A paradoxical transition of citizen participation in housing developments

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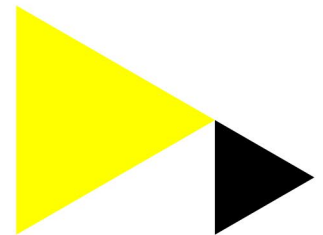
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# >> A paradoxical transition of citizen participation in housing developments

Levelt, Melika  
Tan, Wendy

## SUMMARY

>> Current planning policies place great expectations on citizen participation to resolve complex societal and spatial challenges such as urban renewal and housing development. This essay explores what transitions in citizen participation have taken place on this issue in the Netherlands and to what extent citizen participation in its current form can address the complex socio-spatial challenge of providing affordable housing in cities.

The essay introduces a paradox of the transition in participation in housing development in the Netherlands as part of broader transformations in Dutch spatial planning and development: in spite of increased institutionalization of participation, the actual citizens seem to have been served less and less. There is potential for the inclusion of citizen participation in the planning processes to encourage acceptance where resource distribution creates conflicts (i.e. affordable housing markets and lack of supply) for more effective cooperation during implementation. However, giving citizens more say in small parcels of spatial development does not disguise and overrule the structural forces in policy and real estate market trends that have grown in the last decades and push out lower and middle income groups from the city.

This essay reviews state-of-the-art literature on the evolution of citizen participation, co-creation, and decision-making structures and processes in spatial planning and housing, and discusses participation trajectories in urban developments with housing functions in Amsterdam (Havenstratterrein, Marineterrein) and Groningen (Suikerunie, Ebbinge), and Almere (Oosterwold) to showcase the paradoxical transition.

**Key words:** spatial planning, co-creation, citizen participation, housing, The Netherlands

### *Summary in Dutch*

Participatie krijgt een steeds prominentere rol in het oplossen van complexe maatschappelijke en ruimtelijke uitdagingen, zoals stedelijke vernieuwing en de ontwikkeling van woningen. Dit essay verkent welke veranderingen zich hebben voorgedaan in de rol die burgers spelen in woningontwikkeling in Nederland en in hoeverre participatie in de huidige vorm helpt om voldoende betaalbare woonruimte te ontwikkelen in de stad.

Het essay schetst een paradoxale transitie op het gebied van participatie in de woningbouw in Nederland. De transitie is onderdeel is van grotere veranderingen in ruimtelijke ordening en ruimtelijke ontwikkeling in Nederland. Ondanks toenemende aandacht voor en institutionalisering van participatie in plan- en ontwikkelingsprocessen, lijkt het erop dat de burger die het meest de hulp van de overheid nodig heeft om passende woonruimte te vinden, steeds meer het nakijken heeft gekregen. Burgers een grotere rol geven in de planprocessen en planuitvoering kan helpen de acceptatie van plannen waarin schaarse middelen worden verdeeld, te vergroten. Tot nu toe echter blijft de inspraak van burgers beperkt tot kleine, specifieke gebieden. Deze uitzonderingen bieden onvoldoende tegenwicht aan de structurele krachten in beleid, grond- en vastgoedmarkten die midden- en lagere inkomens de afgelopen jaren steeds verder de stad uit hebben gedreven.

Dit essay schetst op basis van literatuurstudie de grote lijnen in de ontwikkeling van woningontwikkeling en participatie sinds de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Op basis daarvan beschouwt het essay de ontwikkeling van participatie, co-creatie en besluitvorming in gebiedsontwikkeling in Amsterdam (Havenstratterrein, Marineterrein), Groningen (Suikerunie, Ebbinge) en Almere (Oosterwold) om de paradoxale transitie die plaatsvindt in participatie in gebiedsontwikkeling en woningbouw te illustreren.

***Sleutelwoorden: ruimtelijke ordening, co-creatie, burgerparticipatie, inspraak, woningbouw, Nederland***

## 1 INTRODUCTION

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>> The affordability and accessibility of housing, especially in cities, for middle and lower income groups has become a key area of societal and political concern over the last decades (Nijskens e.a. 2019; Boelhouwer, 2020; Huisman, 2020). It is seen as a consequence of larger economic and political trends that have severely and negatively impacted democracy (Sassen, 2014; Guilluy 2019). As market forces drive high-end housing developments to provide safe investment harbors for international capital flows, housing in the larger cities in the Netherlands has grown out of the reach of large groups of society. Across the country, starters on the housing market particularly those from families with lower and middle social economic status, find it increasingly difficult to start their housing trajectories (Milikowski, 2018; Nijskens e.a. 2019). Similarly, older adults looking to downsize are also restricted by the affordability of their next housing option. There are spatial consequences as well. Finding an affordable place to live in the four major cities is an insurmountable challenge for those with lower to middle incomes and those who are without fixed contracts, stable incomes and parental support (Jonkman, 2015/2019; Arundel & Hochstenbach, 2020; Nijskens et al., 2019). Key service workers, police officers, teachers and nurses experience difficulty to find housing which reduces the provision of skilled essential labor force in these major cities (AD, 2021). Just as artists, entrepreneurs and younger adults who were studying or just started working were pushed to the periphery two decades ago, this is now a widespread issue (Novy and Colomb, 2013).

The global financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent economic crisis provided a window of opportunity for the less wealthy to find a place in these cities through bottom-up initiatives and DIY-urbanism. In the aftermath of the crisis, citizen participation in urban developments remained a high priority on the agenda of national and local governments. On hindsight, the authors critically question to what extent has citizen participation in these projects during the crisis fundamentally improved urban transformation to provide a sufficient supply of affordable housing? In addition, did the increase of citizen participation make the process more inclusive? Last but not least, how should we position these developments in light of the larger historical context of post-war housing development and the changing governance structures for spatial planning in the Netherlands?

The production of housing has taken a considerable leap from addressing overcrowding and deteriorating public health standards in the early 1900s, towards a full-fledged system with a strong social component via social housing corporations and affordable housing quotas enforced by municipalities. The privatization of the housing market has seen changes beyond the wave of post-war rebuild and the urban expansions in the early 2000s. New actors and expertise entered the scene and developers have experimented with new



forms and typologies of housing in various mixes of social and private housing quality and price points (van Kempen and Primus, 2002). Parallel to this, citizen participation has also been observed to go through multiple iterations in the past five decades. Each policy period embraced a different term or activated a different facet of involving citizens from co-production to consent and back to co-creation. Generally, there is a tendency in the Netherlands to at least in spirit, improve how citizens are involved in decision-making processes that affect their environment (Tan et al., 2019).

We will argue that on the surface, new forms for collaboration with citizens have emerged. However as long as systemic errors in the housing market remain, increased segregation and inequalities can be expected from the current path of urban transformation and housing development. To understand the paradoxical transition of simultaneous increased inclusion and exclusion of citizens in spatial development for housing, this essay will discuss how citizen participation has manifested itself in relation to housing development throughout three phases in history: 1945-1970s; 1980s-2008; 2008-present. The first two phases are based on a literature review and serve as a historical background for the third phase for which the paradox of participation is illustrated with cases from Amsterdam, Almere and Groningen. We start with a short introduction into the provision of housing and participation.

## 2 WHOSE CITY IS IT ANYWAYS?

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>> Cities are centers of attraction for housing, work and leisure for a diverse population. Demands for space in the city are always multiple and often conflicting. Governments mitigate these demands by zoning and planning. Where, how and which functions get allocated or distributed results from a political process that is fundamentally asking for whom the city is meant for. This is not only a question about which activities may or may not take place – the zoning, but also about which socio-economic groups (people and business) are able to remain in the city or should gain (better) access to the city as a place to live, work and visit.

Enshrined in Dutch Constitution is the promotion of sufficient housing (Article 22, paragraph 2). It is seen as a primary necessity of live which concerns not only a sufficient number of dwellings but also of sufficient quality. This does not mean the provision of housing is a governmental task. Housing development and distribution in the Netherlands is susceptible to market forces, demographic trends, and planning processes at the national, provincial and local level (Jonkman, 2019; Levelt & Metze, 2014). The government however, in the Netherlands, generally is not the developer of housing. At national level, the constitution asks the local government to provide a certain quality of environment. Regional government can make agreements about housing

demand and supply allocation. Local governments who zone and plan, can assert influence in the process via the infill of the sites and the land prices. Developers and housing corporations play a key role in defining the type, tenure and pricing of housing developments. Individuals can also play a role as private commissioners. The roles of each of these players and institutions in the provision of housing have changed over time. If we want to understand the question of who has access to the city and the role citizen participation plays, we have to look at how the planning system has changed and the changing roles of Dutch government, housing corporations, semi-governmental actors and the market in spatial planning and the provision of housing. Changes in the system took place to overcome some failures of the system and thus have enabled some and disabled others to play a role or have a position in the provision of housing.

Citizen participation can allow individuals to gain some influence on the outcomes of the process of housing development beyond the voting of their democratic representative. As the definition and understanding of citizen participation is fluid and not clearly defined in Dutch planning law (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koningsrijksrelaties, 2021), it is important to specify what we mean by citizen participation and what our lens for assessment will be. Is participation only used as an input for a planning process outside of the view of citizens or have citizens a true say on what will happen to their neighborhoods and a choice on how their neighborhood will evolve? Are citizens only subject to housing development and improvement or do they actively participate as developer or investor? It is of relevance to understand at what phase in policy and plan making participation takes place, what form it takes and its degree of influence in each phase. For example, when typical citizen consultation moments mandated by law takes place usually at the end of a plan process, it could already be at a point where scenarios and alternatives have been thought off and presented instead of engaging in discussion about what the actual issue at hand is. Participation then serves to legitimize the output, not the input and throughput of the planning process (see Schmidt 2010 and Hoppe e.a., 2016 for discussion on input, throughput and output of policy(making)). This might lead to mismatched expectations or disappointments for participants. Furthermore, it matters *who* is allowed to participate in the different phases of plan making and who is left-out.

### 3 1945–1970: TECHNOCRATIC PLANNING INVOKING A STRONG CIVIL MOVEMENT

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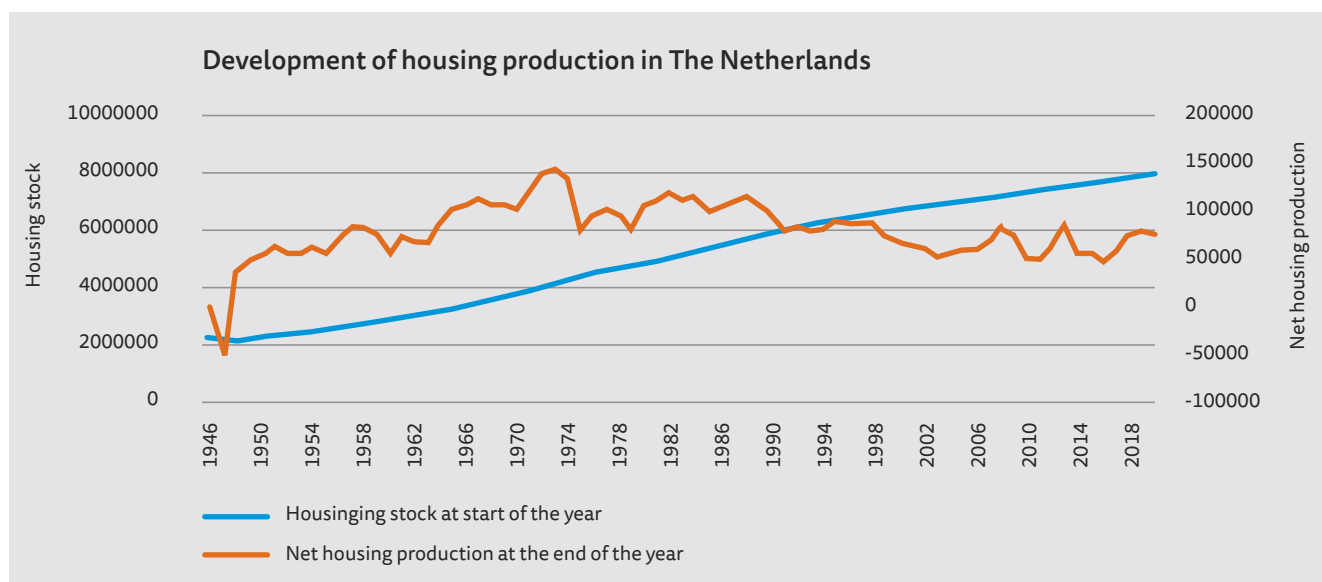
>> The Netherlands has a long tradition of steering by the national and provincial governments on the where and how much of housing developments. This stemmed from the Housing Law of 1901 where the production of housing was crucial for maintaining control on population growth and public health



(van der Kammen en De Klerk, 1996). During the post-war period, this was ramped up and official city and housing development was the domain of professional urban planners and architects from both governmental and project developers (Verlaan, 2017). Based on data and predictions of population growth and an expected increase in office work, welfare, car-ownership and leisure time, they concluded that inner cities were at risk of decline. People would like to move out of cities and be able to take a car to work and leisure (shopping centers) in cities (Verlaan, 2017). Planning for housing was a matter of processing and making sense of data and facts. Cities had to be redeveloped in a functional way in order to accommodate increased car use and demand for shopping centers and office space. Selection and specialization of inner-city (tertiary) functions would lead to maximalization of land productivity and strengthen the urban economy (van der Kammen en De Klerk, 1996). Old neighborhoods were demolished for new developments. Plans such as Hoogcatharijne in Utrecht or the Wibautstraat and the neighborhood around Waterlooplein in Amsterdam were made in a rationalistic way and in close cooperation between the aldermen, civic servants and project developers. New extensions in existing cities were created such as the Westelijke Tuinsteden in Amsterdam and Ommoord in Rotterdam. Municipal housing companies and housing associations worked together in the development of these areas, backed by national funding for public housing (van der Wouden, 2015)

**FIGURE 1**  
The development of  
the housing stock and  
housing production in  
the Netherlands.  
Source: based on CBS (2021)

Despite the new Law on Spatial Planning (WRO 1965) that gave citizens the right to object to zoning plans, participation was primarily seen as a way to gather data and make people accept plans (Verlaan, 2017). Despite the lack of participation, this did result in a very large production of (affordable) housing (see Figure 1). The government took the responsibility to cater for enough housing stock very seriously.



However, this technocratic approach saw strong resistance in the 1960s as a civic movement developed in the cities from a growing student population. This resistance put new knowledge into the planning debate: not so much factual data on housing shortages and car use but data on vacant buildings and, more importantly, regulative knowledge on what made a city livable. In the 1970s, housing shortages remained while many units were deliberately kept vacant by real estate dealers as objects for speculation. Squatters took hold of many of these houses in the city and later received the rights to buy them (Milikowsky, 2018). Public resistance to the demolition of old neighborhoods showed a different perspective on the future city – embracing street life, diversity, small scale and a mix of housing, leisure, and work. Although this resistance could not stop every planned demolition, a new civic movement was effective in putting a stop to the demolishing of some of the old buildings and streets as policy makers and planners began to accept arguments from the citizens. Thus, new projects were developed to improve the city but kept room for affordable housing (Christof & Majoor, 2021). Examples of these are the renewal of the Jordaan and the Waterlooplein neighborhood in Amsterdam. Civic resistance in the 1960s and 1970s operated within a very centralized and technocratic planning doctrine but had a real effect on city development. It gave new input to and had effects on the outputs of the planning for housing in cities. Squatters were legally enabled to buy appropriated vacant properties which can be seen as a very strong influence on future developments. However, although the initiative for policy action came from the citizens and permanently changed the city's development, the planning process itself remained accessible only to professional planners.

#### 4 1980–2008: THE AGE OF VINEX, MARKET FORCES AND CITIZENS AS CONSUMERS

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>> The civic resistance against technocratic planning in the 1970s and economic stagnation led to further changes in Dutch planning. Although national planning doctrine remained strong in the Fourth National Spatial Plan of 1988, negotiations with the lower tiers of spatial planning (provincial, larger cities) ensured that the national plan reflected their wishes for internationalization, economic development, and the compact city (Van der Kammen & De Klerk, 1996). From the end of the 1980s until the financial crisis of 2008, three changes occurred that reshaped housing developments.

The first change is perhaps the most tangible in the form of large new city extensions or VINEX-extensions, planned top-down by the central government named after the policy extension of 1991 on the Fourth Spatial Planning Memorandum (*Vierde Nota Extra*). VINEX-extensions were seen as the answer to large-scale demand for affordable housing. Building for these large suburban

locations for housing at the fringe of larger cities started halfway the 1990s. Completed in the late 2000s, they took a long time to develop, but once developed these locations expanded the housing stock considerably (Jókövi e.a., 2006) (see also Fig. 1).

The second change saw the increased importance of the market and withdrawal of government in the provision of housing. Whereas during the post-war period the provision of housing was mainly seen as a matter of public care, this changed during the 1980s where neo-liberal deregulation occurred (Van der Wouden, 2015). This is similar to other sectors such as energy, postal services and public transport, where public efforts were passed over to (semi) market players who were supposed to operate more efficiently, more service oriented and at lower costs. In 1995 housing associations and corporations who were tasked to develop affordable rental housing became legally and financially independent of government as part of a neo-liberal strategy. Although they still received subsidies via ‘*below market rate leasehold and land costs*’ (Jonkman, 2019, p. 36) they now had to finance affordable housing through a revolving fund-model (Jonkman, 2019). Also, market parties, mainly large project developers, gained importance. They strategically bought land that matched VINEX plans. At the same time, municipalities, lacking the substantial financial support of the national government of the previous period, became active buyers of land that they prepared for building and sold off with a profit. This money was necessary to develop more expensive inner-city locations (Tennekes e.a. 2015). Furthermore, in the 2000s, housing associations were forced to focus their activities only on low-income groups. Middle income groups were seen as not requiring help to find affordable housing and were shuffled to the private market sector. They were subsequently priced out of social rental housing. Considering affordability, the newly built housing projects from the VINEX era were attractive to this segment allowing them to choose the aesthetics or form of their house. However, the locational choices were made at local, regional and national policies and usually took residents away from the center of cities towards the fringes.

The third change is substantially less tangible but signaled an institutional shift. As a reaction to this new phase, stakeholder and coalition building between stakeholders became more important in the making of spatial policy. This started in the 1990s and the extent of it depended on the municipality in which the developments took place. At the institutional level ‘*inspraak*’ (to have a say in policy which is a nuanced term for a light form of participation in Dutch) became part of formal procedures (WRO, 1985, article 6a) for zoning and structure plans. However, ‘*inspraak*’ was also seen as an obstruction to making quick decisions even though it was meant to improve decision making and to give a channel for civil protests (Coenen et al., 2001). In spirit the process tried to incorporate the different political and personal views of individual stakeholders.

However, formally the citizens often came onboard too late in the process and did not have a real say. Thus, they are not representative of true participation. The VINEX plans strongly steered where new housing development took place enabled through direct steering of national legal instruments while the development costs and (financial) risks were left to coalitions of municipalities and large project developers. The Tracé Law (Tracéwet) and NIMBY-law are examples of these direct legal instruments that enabled the national government to enforce the development of roads and other building projects of national importance against local opposition (Tennekes e.a., 2015).

Thus, although participation in a very light form (*inspraak*) became a right, it did not change the housing landscape much (Coenen e.a., 2001). More substantial change came in the form of market forces changing the tenure of housing stocks and the national housing developments changing where housing stock could be found. Market forces gained importance in other coalition building for city development. Cities needed commercial partners to attract international talent and become international business networks hubs. Only small pockets of space in the larger cities were reserved for the creative elite.

The regeneration and renewal of urban centers became a worldwide phenomenon in the late 1990s. Brown-field development areas became attractive as cities welcomed international business and tourists without engaging in sprawl. In the Netherlands local governments, housing corporations and market parties looked for inner-city redevelopment opportunities such as around the Northern shores of the IJ in Amsterdam and in the old harbor areas or the Ebbinge quarter in Groningen. Although more costly and more difficult to develop than greenfield sites, these areas fit the ideals of a compact and vivid city that attracts a *creative class* and catalyses an economic boom (Florida, 2002). Project developers and local governments cooperated to develop brownfield sites with most of them planned for demolition and being replaced by high-rise office buildings (Christof & Majoor, 2021). The reuse of industrial-era or historical buildings became common to retain pockets of spaces for the creative class. Places like Pakhuis de Zwijger in Amsterdam and Het Paleis in Groningen were developed in cooperation with creatives as places for cultural activities. This was made possible as part of a creative incubator policy. Contrary to the squatters in the 1980s, the creatives that sometimes took hold of empty buildings before an area was developed, now got *temporary* lease contracts but not the right to buy. These locations then became a victim of their own success as the creatives they attracted made them livable but also more and more unaffordable for these same creatives.

Parallel to the development of the creative class as catalyst of economic development and city renewal, a strong coalition of municipality and housing corporations developed a “*bureaucratic routine*” for the renewal of existing

housing blocks through a process of “displacement through participation” (Huisman, 2014/2020, p. 138-139). Huisman describes how a phase of disinvestment by the housing corporation of ten years or so, is followed by presentation of plans for “demolition or total overhaul of the block” to the tenants “as the only viable option” given the “poor technical state of the houses” (Huisman, 2014/2020, p. 140)). In this process “all parties have come to understand participation as tenants obtaining some influence of how they will be displaced, not whether. When tenants on the other hand do not accept this framed reality, they find out that participation does not grant them any power.” (Huisman, 2014/2020, p. 140). Participation then is only on tastes and likes at the end of a process when input and throughput phases are already passed and output and outcome are already decided upon. The fundamental and very likely irreconcilable political question on access to the city and whose city it is anyways, remains untouched. This way, as Huisman puts it, citizen participation is better seen as a “specific form of governmentality (Blakely 2010), steering the population to think and behave in specific ways.” (Huisman 2014/2020, p. 144). The idea to attract or exclude certain groups from neighborhoods in order to improve the local situation is not unique to Amsterdam. In 2002, The Act on Extraordinary Measures for Urban Problems was developed to enable cities to reduce the influx of poor newcomers in certain neighborhoods in order to improve liveability (Van Gent e.a., 2017). In 2016 the act had been used in the cities of Rotterdam, Nijmegen and Capelle aan de IJssel to exclude certain groups (idem, 2017).

## 5 2008-PRESENT: CO-PRODUCTION AND EXCLUSION – THREE CASE STUDIES

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>> With the economic crisis of 2008 a new area of housing development and participation started. The crisis put a stop to many spatial redevelopment projects in the cities, as costs rise and investors dropped out. This section represents a case study of city development in co-production with citizens during that time period and afterwards.

The first case is the Ciboga-area in the Ebbing quarter in Groningen (see Figure 2 & 3). This former industrial site was allocated for a large housing development by the city, a developer, and a bank, but the development had to stop due to lack of funds. The area was initially known for crime and deterioration but was ‘rescued’ by an alternative plan from local entrepreneurs. They eventually got institutional commitment from the municipality to develop it as a temporary creative spot for artists and the creative class. The area became a cultural hot-spot due to its central location. The rebound of the housing market in 2014 saw the continuation of the construction of permanent buildings (mostly housing) and the removal of most of the temporary creative uses. Ebbing became a one-sided plan for housing including high-end student housing in the form of



**FIGURE 2**  
**The Ebbingekwartier**  
**(Groningen) in 2018 while it**  
**was awaiting construction.**  
*photo: R-LINK SURF project*

a hotel, mid to high range housing units and some space for the local university (von Schönfeld et al., 2019). In essence, the new stakeholders (entrepreneurs and creatives) were allowed to program the area temporarily but were not involved in how the restart of development would be. Inspired by the success of the Ebbinge quarter, the city of Groningen proceeded to incorporate the same strategy for the Suikerunie brown-field location as the next housing expansion location in the city. Again, temporary use of the location was granted to creative entrepreneurs, and it seems likely their input will not affect new development outputs and outcomes (De Nijs et al., 2020).



**FIGURE 3**  
**Temporary users of the**  
**Ebbingekwartier in 2017:**  
**sea containers housed creative**  
**entrepreneurs.**  
*photo: R-LINK SURF project*





Similar changes took place in Amsterdam in the Havenstraatterrein (figure 4). There residents saw their neighborhoods change due to market pressure for housing. In 1989, the city of Amsterdam bought this area from the national railways and rented out the land to creatives under temporary lease contracts. It developed into an area with small industries, artisanal firms, auto garages, and traders at the fringe of the very popular and wealthy neighborhood in the older southern quarter of Amsterdam. In 2010, increasing pressure for housing space turned developmental focus to the area and a strategy was determined. The ambition is to keep the 'unpolished character of the area' and its historical buildings. This did not include retaining the local community of entrepreneurs who were forced to move out to places outside of Amsterdam to be able to continue their activities. They were only informed of the plans after the plans were decided and even though some consultation took place, most perceived it as being confronted with and not having a real stake in the process. The tenants managed to take the plan to court to retain the historic tram line in 2018. However, current expectations are that by 2026 the area will see 500 new dwellings, a school, and some places for new businesses and not for existing ones.

At the Marineterrein in Amsterdam (figure 5) things went differently. This inner city land came free for redevelopment after the Dutch army decided to leave the area step by step. Because of the central location and the increasing housing shortage in Amsterdam, a strong pressure to develop quickly was present. But it was decided not to quickly make a master plan but to develop this area step

**FIGURE 4**

**The Havenstraat area in 2017.**  
An area with small trades and industries and a cycle route from popular Amsterdam South to the Amsterdamse Bos (one of the largest city parks of Europe at the border of Amsterdam and Amstelveen)  
*photo's: Melika Levelt*



by step to be able to connect the development to its surroundings and the needs of the broader city. Land was temporary rented out by the specially installed Bureau Marineterrein that was responsible for programming and development of the area. It is yet to be seen how the area will develop but already it is clear that it is difficult to keep the surrounding area involved in its development. Because of the very long run time in which development of a plan for the area takes place, it becomes unclear for stakeholders where in the process they are and what is done with their ideas they put into the plan-making for the development of the area (van Karnebeek and Janssen-Jansen, 2017). Thus, although input is collected and the process is more open, the throughput, the process of plan making, stays with the professional planners and the role of the temporary renters, who now function as place makers, once the area gets its more final or permanent development, is yet to be seen but likely to end.

**FIGURE 5**

**The Marineterrein in Amsterdam, a 27 ha military domain close to the Central Station that partly is left by the military and will be redeveloped with an incremental or adaptive strategy into a new neighborhood.**

*Photo: R-LINK project*



Another version of this step-by-step development does exist. In Almere, the area of Oosterwold (figure 6) was given over to DIY-urbanism whereby citizens can buy plots at lower than market rates but would have to plan, design and build in collaboration with each other. There is unfortunately growing criticism about the threat to public health due to lack of coordination in determining basic infrastructures (sewage treatment, waste management and transport) (van Karnebeek et al., 2021). In addition, an initial observation of the area sees that certain population groups with high social capital and technological know-how are attracted to the area and can thrive. These forms of bottom-up processes demands so much of participants that it remains accessible only for

those with high financial, cultural, or creative capital (Nio, 2021) This does not bode well for diversity and inclusion. In practical terms, being able to design a plot and build on your own, requires capacity or time, or failing that, at least the funds to engage experts (van Karnenbeek and Tan, 2019). There is therefore self-selection of potential residents. Thus, bottom-up led housing development by future residents do not necessarily counter the current trend of increased social inequalities created through the unaffordable housing market nor do they democratize housing developments.

**FIGURE 6**  
Future inhabitants of Almere Oosterwold not only develop their own houses but have also been responsible for the development of their own wastewater treatment and the development of roads. .  
*Photo's: R-LINK project)*





Place-making through the creative class seems to have become the norm in many – often inner-city and industrial – redevelopment sites from Groningen to Deventer, Utrecht and Amsterdam (see for examples Van der Westen e.a. 2017). However, it is questionable if the temporary role and the influence creatives have on the formation of ideas for spatial development have fundamentally changed their actual positions on the market for housing and working space. Despite their contribution to the spatial and social quality of urban redevelopment sites, creatives eventually must leave as they are priced out. Two criticisms to the participation process can be identified here. It seems that as participation becomes formalized the position of creatives within the city worsened as many industrial creative spots become used for redevelopment and they too are left with no place to go in an expensive city. In addition, the creative class was not a very diverse population to start with. Also for all others with lower, middle or uncertain incomes, finding a place to live in the city becomes increasingly difficult as the market deregulates, and globalization brings in foreign capital to compete with on the housing market.

## 6 CONCLUSION: THE PARADOX OF PARTICIPATION

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>> The paradox of citizen participation in housing developments in the Netherlands is that the more institutionalized the citizen participation process seems to be, the less the actual citizens are being served.

Jane Jacobs has emphasized the importance of the users of cities in city development (1961) – they make or break the city. Large, technocratic and top-down planned transformations in the cities of the 1950s and 1960s broke many of these desirable processes and did not result in the livable cities that planners had expected. The large suburban extensions following this line of thought did result in a lot of affordable housing, but it also displaced communities and future residents of the cities. Demonstrations and civic actions have changed the technocratic view on city development and have improved it as a place to live for all. Bottom-up actions by creatives made areas vibrant but at times too interesting for investment. The creative class were first seen as a counterbalance to market forces but have been subsumed and incorporated in official planning strategies, but not on their own terms. Temporary uses as a part of place making by creatives before actual land development is present in almost every Dutch city. On the surface, these creatives can be seen as very influential in city development, as co-creators who decide what happens at a location. They help to incrementally form ideas on the activities that might be given a permanent position in a plan. They are visually and culturally present, contributing to city development with more than mere data and facts. They have changed the role of citizens beyond only participating in the input before plan making to be involved in throughput activities seen in the incremental development of

the plan itself. However, the market forces are so strong that at the end of the day, only certain exceptions remain as temporary uses give way to mid to high priced housing. This effectively prices out those who made and can make a development interesting as part of the gentrification process. Moreover, those with lower and middle incomes with no creative background certainly did not gain any more influence over the last decades.

In this essay we have described the history of participation in the Netherlands in different periods. The start of a new period as described does not necessarily mean that the characteristics of participation in the planning process for housing in a prior period disappeared completely. The development of participation can better be understood as new ways of doing and thinking, or parties or coalitions that enter the planning process which together result in a new tone in citizen participation in the planning for housing. Changes also should be understood as part of larger societal and economic changes. As people have become more highly educated, people have become more critical about expert knowledge. With the entrance of social media, the relation between citizens and government had become even more tenuous. The old ways of doing things in the planning and development of housing no longer serves this cultural epoch.

Over the last fifty years, three important transitions in citizen participation in planning for housing development in the Netherlands can be identified. First, a transition has taken place since the technocratic, top-down planning of the post-war period where participation, in the form of *inspraak* (to have a say), has become a right in planning law. Planning officials must motivate how they have consulted stakeholders and what they have done with the result of the consultation. This does not imply technocratic elements have totally disappeared in the planning for housing. On the contrary, during the big crisis of 2008, the national and provincial governments – based on models for the prognosis of housing supply needs – strongly steered the supplies of land for housing development that municipalities have in stock (Levelt & Metze, 2014). Second, a bottom-up transition has taken place from protest and squatting and eventual instrumentalization into plan development. Counter cultures have thus become part of the planning process they once opposed. Of course, this only holds true for the creative class with enough cultural and professional capital to be able to be an equal partner in planning processes and is mostly temporary. Once fully developed, most projects become too expensive even for them. It is only in the case of Almere Oosterwold, that we see a small exception for individuals to develop there their own house and land as landowners. Third, an institutional transition has taken place in spatial planning and development of housing as part of larger reforms in society in which government and semi-governmental institutions have reduced prominence in the provision of public services. As a result, citizens with middle incomes have become

more dependent on the private sector for housing provision. Although for some this has been a good thing as they have been able to buy a house, for many others and especially for those with middle and lower incomes, it has become more difficult to find affordable and secure housing. Thus, for the less financially, culturally, or socially adept populations, the planning for housing and development of the city has become a deception. Gentrification and liberalization of the housing market have pushed them even more than before out of the city. They have hardly any say in the larger picture of housing development in their cities. They can only turn to protest (NOS, 2021a; 2021b), and hopefully this may trigger change on the city's housing development and rules for access to it.

The authors remain critical as to how much citizen participation has removed barriers to housing developments and access to housing in the last five decades. The transition from centralized, large-scale and non-participation in the process of planning for housing to incorporation of certain citizens in the process is a good direction. However, actual substantial say in decision and plan making of larger groups with less financial, social and creative capital still has a long way to go. For this to change, larger institutional changes seem to be necessary on how we plan and develop space for housing.



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