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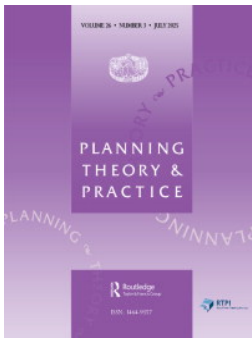
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Social Value Creation Through Bottom-up Urban Development: Mechanisms of Self-Organization

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how bottom-up urban development initiators create social value through self-organization in a market-dominated context. Using a multiple case study and a framework combining collaborative governance and network uncertainty theories, we identify two key efforts: shaping initiatives through community building to establish trust, and aligning goals with state and market actors' spatial-economic interests. State and market support is subsequently gained through goal-interest coupling, grounded in trust and facilitated by temporary use. Incremental self-organization thus involves adapting to market logic rather than opposing it, which contrasts with prevailing paradigms. This adaptation fosters social value but requires compromises from initiators.

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Bottom-up urban development; social value creation; self-organization; goal-interest coupling; temporary use

Introduction: Social Value Creation in a Market-Driven Context

In the context of Dutch organic urban development (Buitelaar et al., 2017; Rauws & de Roo, 2016), local civil society actors have initiated bottom-up development projects to address societal needs unmet by the state or market (Mens et al., 2023). These initiatives generate social value, which has been increasingly marginalized in recent decades by conventional development practices that prioritize economic value. Despite broad appreciation, bottom-up initiators face challenges such as financial, organizational and regulatory obstacles, seemingly due to a lack of resources, network, and knowledge. While some initiatives succeed, others achieve limited results or fail. This article examines the causes of the challenges and initiators' self-organization processes to achieve outcomes, by analysing three Dutch cases. These cases include transforming a former shipbuilding wharf into affordable spaces for artists and cultural activities in Amsterdam, creating a food garden and public park on wasteland in Rotterdam, and developing an experimental green working environment for creative entrepreneurs in Utrecht.

The recent emergence of Dutch bottom-up urban development aligns with the historical shift in Western social movements from radical opposition to cooperation with the Establishment (Mayer, 2000, 2013). The decline of the Dutch squatting scene after the 1980s and rise of moderate activism and civic engagement, including bottom-up urban development, illustrate the shift. This change is supported by the encouragement of active citizenship under neoliberal governance and creative city policies, recognizing that urban subcultures enhance cities' identities and attractiveness. Unused urban spaces, once occupied without formal permission, as exemplified by free havens like Christiania (Copenhagen) and Ruigoord (Amsterdam), are now temporarily repurposed and activated from the bottom-up, with owners' and authorities' consent and collaboration.

Contemporary Dutch bottom-up urban development gained traction within organic urban development approaches (Buitelaar et al., 2017; Rauws & de Roo, 2016) during the 2008 global financial crisis. These organic approaches foster flexibility and spontaneity, providing fertile ground for bottom-up initiatives. Dutch organic development approaches align with incremental planning principles (Brooks, 2002; Taylor, 1998) and contrast with the large, master-planned developments common before the financial crisis, based on rational-comprehensive planning (Brooks, 2002; Taylor, 1998).

Bottom-up urban development is a type of citizens' initiative (Igalla et al., 2019) that creates social value through the spatial redevelopment of brownfields or unused industrial buildings. Rather than focusing on the citizens' perspective, we adopt an entrepreneurial view, noting that initiators are often independent, highly educated professionals, such as artists and architects, whose expertise lies outside urban development. Following Mens et al. (2021), we regard the initiators as social entrepreneurs and use the term "bottom-up" to refer to their activities in urban development.

Conventional, commercial developers operate within established markets, using proven development strategies, revenue models, and risk mitigation (Raco et al., 2019; Tasan-Kok et al., 2019), which bottom-up initiators cannot. Bottom-up initiatives focus on social value, defined here as value that "benefits people whose urgent and reasonable needs are not being met by other means" (Young, 2006, p. 56). The social value created by these initiatives is often combined with environmental value. Social value is based on real-life experiences (Young, 2006) and harder to grasp and quantify than economic value, which is tied to our monetary system. Bottom-up development initiatives target financially less profitable or non-profitable, and unpredictable niche markets; initiatives often start with vague business models and rely on subsidies, implying a mismatch with market institutions.

Given the growing presence of bottom-up urban development, our research examines how initiators address challenges from market institution mismatches, their unfamiliarity with urban development, and their subordinate position, aiming to understand the self-organization processes underlying these initiatives. Despite parallels with existing scholarship on self-organization (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; van Meerkerk et al., 2013), temporary use (Colomb, 2012; Madanipour, 2018; Martin et al., 2020), and specific aspects of the phenomenon (Danenbergh & Haas, 2019; Mens et al., 2021; von Schönfeld & Tan, 2021), a comprehensive study on self-organization in bottom-up urban development is lacking. Hence, this research examines how bottom-up urban development initiators create social value through self-organization in a market-driven context, aiming to enhance mutual understanding, collaboration, and effective support for initiatives to achieve the intended social value.

Theoretical Approach and Analytical Framework

Self-Organization to Navigate Uncertainty

Certainty in conventional development results from conformity with prevailing institutions. Bottom-up initiators, focusing on social value, cannot rely on these institutions. The combination of institutional mismatches and an initial lack of resources, knowledge, network, and organization leads to fundamental *uncertainty*. To navigate uncertainty, initiators engage in a form of self-organization that aligns with self-governance (Rauws, 2016). In such “self-organization as self-governance” (Moroni et al., 2020), group members organize themselves to achieve a collective ambition. They steer and manage their initiatives independently from governments, implying autonomous decision-making and self-management (Moroni et al., 2020; Rauws, 2016). We interpret “self-organization as self-governance” as the actions and strategies required to reduce uncertainty and achieve goals. Since the essential resources are often scattered across market and state actors, this necessitates engaging in collaborative processes.

Collaborations are viable only if all involved have a vested interest in anticipated outcomes. A representative example is placemaking (Keidar et al., 2024), as bottom-up urban development often contributes to placemaking processes. When public or private landowners rely on placemaking to initiate area redevelopment, and bottom-up initiators depend on these landowners for access to land, a situation of mutual dependence arises. This interdependence provides a clear incentive for collaboration. Despite such an incentive, uncertainties within collaborations need to be managed effectively, as “uncertainty poses an impediment to cooperation” (Abbott, 2005, p. 239).

Literature on uncertainty in networks distinguishes *three types of uncertainty: cognitive, strategic, and institutional* (van Bueren et al., 2003). Cognitive uncertainty concerns the availability and interpretation of knowledge and information. Strategic uncertainty arises from uncertainty or disagreement on the path towards outcomes, or the outcomes themselves. Institutional uncertainty occurs when actors from different organizations or backgrounds exhibit diverging behaviours, habits, or languages; it also pertains to formal aspects, such as legal, financial, or regulatory frameworks. All three types of uncertainty manifest in bottom-up development initiatives.

Towards an Analytical Framework

Literature on collaborative processes emphasizes the role of *trust* in reducing uncertainty and fostering effective collaboration (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007). Vangen and Huxham (2003) describe a cyclical “trust-building loop” that nurtures the collaborative process through modest positive outcomes, or *small wins* (Bryson, 1988; Weick, 1984). Small wins increase trust, lower resistance, and create opportunities for subsequent small wins. Small wins can be understood as concrete, intermediate achievements of moderate importance – such as overcoming a regulatory obstacle, gaining support from a local stakeholder, formalizing an initiative, or obtaining early-stage financial support. We assume that the cyclical process of accumulating small wins, which reduces uncertainty and builds trust, is central to “self-organization as self-governance” in bottom-up urban development. This process alters the position and power of those involved, enhancing their ability to achieve outcomes.

We use the collaborative governance model of Ansell and Gash (2008), which incorporates a similar cyclical process, as the foundation for our analytical framework. Although collaborative

governance is not “self-organization as self-governance,” the emphasis on collaboration between diverse actors in the collaborative governance model provides useful components for constructing a derivative framework. Similar to the collaborative governance model, our framework (Figure 1) comprises three basic elements: *starting conditions*, the *collaborative process*, and *outcomes*. Central to the *starting conditions* are the *incentives and constraints on collaboration*. The primary incentive driving collaboration is the anticipated outcome(s). As in the collaborative governance model, the collaborative process is incentivized or constrained by the level of *initial trust* among actors. Trust depends on the familiarity of collaborating actors with one another, their previous collaborative experiences, and the specific nature of the initiative. Another factor influencing incentives and constraints is *initial uncertainty*, divided into cognitive, strategic, and institutional uncertainty. For initiators, uncertainty is an incentive to seek collaboration; for collaboration partners, it can act as a constraint.

Central to Figure 1, and akin to the collaborative governance model, is the collaborative process, which we have renamed the collaborative self-organization process to reflect the alterations and specific application. We preserved the core elements and circular nature of the collaborative process and incorporated the reduction of uncertainty between small wins and trust-building. In our case analyses, we aim to identify the small wins within the self-organization process and understand how they affect uncertainty and trust. Additionally, we aim to identify whether a structural mechanism drives the circular process of small wins reducing uncertainty and building trust, enabling new small wins. Termeer and Dewulf (2019) refer to *propelling mechanisms* as “chains of events that reinforce themselves through feedback loops with an amplifying effect on an initial small change so that it becomes larger and stronger” (Termeer & Dewulf, 2019, p. 305). We adopted the principle of a propelling mechanism and placed it at the centre of the collaborative self-organization process.

We categorized the outcomes in Figure 1 into *social, environmental, and economic value*, assuming that initiatives generate value beyond social value to achieve goals. In a market-driven context, economic value creation is considered essential for the viability of initiatives. Understanding the collaborative self-organization process thus includes uncovering how initiatives contribute to economic value creation. We included environmental value based on observations that initiatives often combine social and environmental goals. Our focus is on



Figure 1. Analytical framework.

understanding the anticipated social, environmental, and economic outcomes, and who benefits from these outcomes, which explains why actors commit to an initiative.

Research Methods, Case Selection and Data Collection

Due to the complex social phenomenon and exploratory, qualitative nature of our research, we used a multiple case study (Yin, 2014) to test and expand the framework and deepen insights. As part of a broader study on bottom-up urban development, we examined twelve cases with varying intensity in three former industrial areas located in the Dutch cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. The selection criteria included the objective of generating social value, and a leading role of initially unorganized, unconventional, and independent individuals, requiring self-organization to achieve goals. This paper highlights three iconic, extensively studied cases, each from a different city, chosen for their representativeness as pioneers and for pragmatic considerations, such as data availability and stakeholder cooperation.

The three cases, shown in Figure 2, experienced varying development paths and outcomes. The NDSM Shipbuilding Warehouse in Amsterdam had a tumultuous development, with only part of the plans realized, but gained international fame as a major artistic hub. Hof van Cartesius in Utrecht had a slow start but accelerated after initial results. De Voedseltuin in Rotterdam experienced gradual development and growing ambitions. All three impacted broader organic area developments, spurring both bottom-up and conventional developments. Their differences allowed for comparisons and identification of self-organization similarities. Although not detailed here, our broader study of twelve initiatives contributed to insights into the self-organization principles.

From 2018 to 2022, we collected project documents, annual reports, municipal policy and legal documents, and information from the initiatives' websites and social media channels. We conducted 40 semi-structured interviews, with about half focusing on the three highlighted cases. Interviewees included case initiators, municipal actors, and other key stakeholders. We asked them to reflect on the development processes, the progression, the roles of actors involved, their personal goals and the collective objectives pursued during the process, and the lessons learned. Additionally, we conducted on-site observations, attended network gatherings, and participated in occasional progress meetings.

We performed within-case analyses (Yin, 2014) utilizing selective coding to interpret our data. For each case, we summarized the starting conditions, inventoried small wins, assessed the influences on uncertainty and stakeholder trust, and evaluated the outcomes. Regarding the latter, we were particularly interested in how the combination of outcomes relates to the initiatives' viability in a market-driven context.

We performed a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014) to identify differences, similarities, and the propelling mechanism driving the self-organization processes. Alongside this deductive approach, we evaluated the framework's adequacy and remained open to identifying other relevant aspects through open coding and pattern recognition. For instance, is the cyclical process in Figure 1 the sole self-organizing mechanism, or are other mechanisms involved? Bryson (1988, p. 11) suggests that a series of small wins can "over time add up to a big win," indicating a breakthrough towards outcomes. We assessed whether such an accumulation of small wins applies to self-organization in bottom-up urban development and, if so, how. Inductive insights were compared with existing theories for validation. Thus, our findings result from both deductive and inductive reasoning.

NDSM Shipbuilding Warehouse in NDSM Wharf East, Amsterdam

A 20,000 m² former shipbuilding warehouse in Amsterdam North, transformed into affordable workspaces for artists, craftspeople, and cultural activities. The initiative included plans for the surrounding NDSM Wharf East area.



Exterior of the warehouse at the NDSM Wharf East area.



The "Art City" inside the warehouse: a steel frame where 80 artists constructed their own studios.

Hof van Cartesius in Werkspoorkwartier, Utrecht

A 5,000 m² green workspace for creative and sustainable entrepreneurs in Utrecht Northwest, featuring affordable work pavilions around communal, climate-adaptive gardens, and hosting cultural events.



Main building (middle) and work pavilion (right) of realization phase one (1,700 m²).



Work pavilions built with discarded materials (circular building) around a semi-public garden.

De Voedseltuin (Food Garden) in M4H, Rotterdam

A 7,000 m² permaculture garden providing produce for the Rotterdam Food Bank, serving as a volunteer site for individuals facing personal challenges, and functioning as a public park and sustainability experiment site.



A Food circle, adopted by a local company for regular donations, to deliver fresh produce to the Food Bank.



Sponge garden (climate adaptation experiment) with a black sculpture by artist Joep van Lieshout at the left.

Figure 2. Case selection.

Case Explorations and Within-Case Analyses

Case NDSM Shipbuilding Warehouse, Amsterdam

The NDSM Shipbuilding Warehouse, located at the NDSM Wharf East area north of the IJ river in Amsterdam, fell into decay after the shipbuilding industry ceased operations. Driven by artist evictions from squatted warehouses on the southern banks of the IJ, a group called “Kinetisch Noord” (Kinetic North) initiated the warehouse’s transformation into an artistic hub. An interviewee described Kinetisch Noord as “people who simply took the initiative for what the government neglected, but what was desperately needed for the city” (authors’ translation). Their activities and involvement at the wharf motivated the owner, the Amsterdam municipality, to launch a competition for a five-year cultural use of the 20,000 m² vacant warehouse and its surroundings. Kinetisch Noord won the competition in 2000 with a plan for artists’ and craftspeople’s workspaces and cultural activities at the wharf, including the self-construction of an “Art city” within the warehouse.

The initiative began under profound uncertainty, with grand ambitions and on a large scale, but with an unknown strategy. Kinetisch Noord lacked a sound organization, expertise in various fields, and financial resources, resulting in cognitive and strategic uncertainty. The scale and the warehouse’s limited five-year temporary use complicated the initiative’s feasibility. The absence of building regulations for creating a “city within a building” led to scepticism among stakeholders. One initiator recalled that several others had expressed concerns at the time, saying: “it cannot be done – building a city in a warehouse” (authors’ translation), thereby highlighting institutional and strategic uncertainty. However, the municipality had a vested interest in repurposing the outdated building and housing artists, following eviction, as a means of reconciliation.

The initial trust between the initiators, municipality, and later tenants was undoubtedly shaped by the history of squatting and evictions. A municipal interviewee recalled that some members of the initiating group and early tenants vehemently opposed the establishment, highlighting the complex starting conditions, which consisted of a combination of incentives and constraints. The self-organization process leading up to the competition submission and the subsequent years included many small wins, such as a successful crowdfunding to finance the submission, the involvement of architects and cost experts, the collection of various recommendation letters, a festive event generating goodwill among officials, and formalization of Kinetisch Noord into a foundation. Moreover, Kinetisch Noord attracted sufficient potential tenants and negotiated an extension of the warehouse’s temporary use from five to ten years.

In 2000, the municipal department Bureau Broedplaatsen (Artists’ Workspaces Bureau) was established to facilitate the development of artists’ workspaces and helped mobilize financial resources. A municipal interviewee noted that the city invested millions in preparing the warehouse’s outer shell (e.g., the roof) for the internal transformation, as the building was municipally owned. Kinetisch Noord also received a national innovation subsidy and additional contributions for specific programs, such as the indoor skatepark.

Despite the initial small wins, the initiative faced increasing small losses, including disappointing feasibility studies, organizational struggles, strategic disagreements with the municipality, prolonged permit procedures, and financial setbacks. A municipal interviewee recalled that these issues eroded trust among stakeholders, leading to disagreements. Interests diverged, making it increasingly difficult in our analysis to distinguish small wins from small losses, as

one party's gain often represented another's loss. Despite the difficulties, transformation of the warehouse began in 2003. Following repeated small losses, however, the municipality intervened by replacing Kinetisch Noord board members with externals and appointing a municipal officer as director.

The "Art City," housing 80 artist studios, opened in 2007, but disagreements and trust issues stalled further realization, leaving part of the warehouse unused. One initiator noted that only half of the objectives were achieved, and that the project was a major headache for the municipality. An end-user mentioned that the project shifted from a bottom-up to a top-down approach, causing severe friction. Nevertheless, the initiative gained broad recognition and achieved permanent status in 2014 through municipal negotiations. However, few further steps were taken to complete the original plans.

The NDSM Shipbuilding Warehouse (NDSM warehouse hereafter) is one of four bottom-up developments we studied in North Amsterdam. As the earliest initiative, it spurred the area's revitalization and inspired other initiatives. The project created social value through affordable workspaces for artists and environmental value through sustainable energy technologies. Since 2007, the municipality added commercial programming, such as a restaurant and dance festivals, highlighting economic feasibility struggles. An initiator attributed these struggles to not completing the original plans; a municipal interviewee cited the original plans being insufficiently feasible, illustrating stakeholders' disputes.

Case Hof Van Cartesius, Utrecht

Hof van Cartesius is located in Utrecht's Werkspoorkwartier area, where we studied three bottom-up initiatives in total. Originally established by the Werkspoor factories for the national railways, the Werkspoorkwartier area transformed into a multifunctional zone in the 1970s and 1980s, but fell into decay during the 2008 financial crisis. In response, the Utrecht municipality issued the "Ontwikkelingsvisie Werkspoorkwartier" policy in 2012 to organically redevelop the area into a creative urban hotspot. In 2014, the municipality called for temporary use plans for a strip of wasteland. The winning plan, Hof van Cartesius, by an architect/urban designer, proposed an experimental green workspace for creative and sustainable entrepreneurs. Work pavilions, clustered around communal, climate-adaptive gardens, were to be built with end-user involvement and circular economy principles using discarded materials. The wasteland was initially designated for temporary use for five years, which was later extended to ten.

Cognitive uncertainty stemmed from the initiator's unfamiliarity with project development and circular construction. The goal was to create an affordable inner-city work environment and set an example for a green, sustainable workplace. However, the lack of finances, a business case, and a development plan led to strategic uncertainty. The aim was to create social and environmental value, with renting out spaces being a secondary objective for feasibility, as noted by the initiator. A representative of a makers' collective soon joined the original initiator to continue the initiative together. This representative noted that they were "pushed into becoming entrepreneurs" (authors' translation) during the self-organization process, which supports the social entrepreneurial view on bottom-up urban development.

A key strategic uncertainty involved access to the municipality-owned land. Despite winning the municipal call for plans, the initiative could only acquire the land at market rates from another municipal department, rendering the project unviable. Institutional uncertainty arose from internal municipal divisions over financial land use conditions. Additionally, uncertainty

about regulations regarding the reuse of materials further contributed to the institutional uncertainty.

The initial trust level was hard to determine due to the lack of prior cooperation. The Utrecht municipality supported the initiative because the initiative aligned with the 2012 policy objectives and had the potential to help revitalize the area. However, cognitive, strategic and institutional uncertainties constrained the collaboration.

Between 2014 and 2017, before construction began, the initiative achieved many small wins. In 2015, a makers' collective joined as an intended end-user, bringing building expertise. The province of Utrecht decided to financially support the initiative and later seconded various experts. In 2016, the initiator's sister joined, contributing expertise in business models and organizational management. That same year, the cooperative Hof van Cartesius was established, uniting the initiators and 20 intended end-users. A successful crowdfunding campaign funded the first climate-adaptive garden and was complemented by a loan from the Economic Board Utrecht and Province of Utrecht. Until 2017, through the initiators' networking activities, various actors gradually committed to and supported the initiative in different ways.

The initiative also faced numerous small losses. Various negotiations with the municipality to obtain the land under advantageous lease terms failed, and the experimental nature of the project led to challenges in securing permits. One of the initiators described that they were "constantly hitting walls at all levels" (authors' translation). Furthermore, various funding requests were rejected, hindering the initiative's progress.

The land use impasse was overcome in 2017, when a local real estate developer intervened by acquiring the land and granting it to the initiative under favourable conditions. The developer's decision had three motives: a vested interest in revitalizing the Werkspoorkwartier area where he owned several buildings, trust in the initiators due to the earlier small wins, and sympathy for the initiative's ambitions. The developer's support, which included financial support, enabled the construction of the first pavilions, shown in [Figure 2](#). The first realization phase garnered numerous awards and media attention for the circular building approach. Moreover, it catalysed the area's revitalization and inspired other initiatives to settle in Werkspoorkwartier.

After phase one, Hof van Cartesius' development accelerated through new collaborations built on the trust established by the earlier successes. In 2020, the Stadmakerfonds (City Maker Fund), a collaboration between a local market actor and the Province of Utrecht, selected Hof van Cartesius' second phase as a pilot project. This enabled Hof van Cartesius not only to realize the second phase, but also to ensure the long-term continuity of the initiative by acquiring ownership of the land. Phase two added 60 entrepreneurs to the initial 30. The original initiator noted that the upscaling was crucial for sustained economic viability through rental income, demonstrating that social and environmental value creation was only possible alongside structural economic value creation.

Case De Voedseltuin, Rotterdam

De Voedseltuin (Food Garden) is a 7,000m² production garden in Rotterdam's Merwe Vierhavens (M4H) area. M4H is undergoing organic redevelopment from an industrial harbour into a mixed-use area, hosting various bottom-up initiatives, including five studied in our broader research. The earliest is De Voedseltuin, conceived in 2010 by the founder of the Rotterdam Food Bank, utilizing wasteland to grow fresh produce for the Food Bank, cultivated by clients

of the Food Bank. De Voedseltuyn soon evolved into a volunteer site for individuals with psychological or addiction issues. Later, it also became a public park and a site for sustainability experiments like the Sponstuyn (Sponge Garden; see [Figure 2](#)), while continuing to function as a production garden. De Voedseltuyn grew from a modest urban farming project into a unifying element in the Vierhavensblok subarea of M4H, inspiring others to settle there.

The starting conditions were manageable, given the initiative's modest ambitions and limited complexity. Cognitive uncertainty arose from limited knowledge of managing a production garden. The municipality granted free, five-year land use following cancellation of building plans during the 2008 financial crisis. Strategic uncertainty thus involved finances and the organizational approach. No significant institutional uncertainty was identified, and the active support of civil servants suggests that there were no constraints on the collaboration due to trust issues.

The first five years saw many small wins. De Voedseltuyn became a foundation in 2010, with volunteer work for individuals facing personal issues as a key pillar, supported by municipal subsidies. In 2011, the first sections of the garden were utilized, and initial harvests collected. That year, two key individuals with expertise in fundraising and strategic management joined the initiative. By 2013, the entire garden was in use, and a scientific study highlighted the health benefits for the volunteers. In 2013 and 2014, De Voedseltuyn won multiple awards, generating positive exposure. Collaborations with various organizations and companies were established over the years. From 2014 onwards, De Voedseltuyn has organized workshops and guided tours, generating new income. Between 2010 and 2015, volunteer numbers grew, exceeding 40 volunteers in 2014. Overall, small wins dominated the self-organization process, despite occasional small losses.

In 2015, De Voedseltuyn had to professionalize to continue using the municipality's land. A professionalization plan was developed, including "Food circles," "adoptable" by local companies for donations (see [Figure 2](#)), a public walking path, and central building. In the same year, the local authorities shifted to an organic redevelopment approach for M4H, emphasizing broad value creation and acknowledging De Voedseltuyn's significance. The established trust and professionalization plan convinced authorities to extend the land use. The professionalization plan was gradually implemented, engaging new actors and achieving consistent small wins. In 2016, successful crowdfunding and additional financial contributions funded a rainwater collection infrastructure, gathering rainwater from neighbouring roofs. In 2017, construction of the central building began. By 2019, 64 volunteers were active, and a neighbouring artist placed statues at De Voedseltuyn (see [Figure 2](#)), enhancing the aesthetics and attractiveness as a public park.

De Voedseltuyn's ambitions and impact expanded over time. By 2019, the initiative was structured around four functional pillars: food production, learning and working, social interaction and recreation, and experimentation and innovation (Stam & Peek, 2019). The director of De Voedseltuyn described the self-organization process as "a search for what we were" (authors' translation), reflecting on who valued the initiative and who was willing to pay for what it stood for. This process resulted in a mixed revenue model with partnerships across the four pillars, securing finances and sustaining economic viability while ensuring social and environmental value creation.

Cross-Case Analysis

Starting Conditions: Differences in Size and Complexity, Commonalities in Temporality

Key differences in starting conditions among the cases include their physical size and complexity, which influenced initial uncertainties and collaboration constraints. De Voedseltuyn had

modest ambitions, while Hof van Cartesius was complex but small and phased. The NDSM warehouse, in contrast, was large and complex, posing significant risks. An interviewee compared the NDSM warehouse to the nearby bottom-up initiative De Ceuvél, which we also studied, describing De Ceuvél as “smaller, more manageable, and easier to control” (authors’ translation), implying less uncertainty. The municipality decided to support the NDSM warehouse despite considerable uncertainties, to maintain the city’s artistic milieu and compensate for earlier artist evictions. This decision led to a dysfunctional collaboration process, with the municipality eventually “taking over” and only partially realizing the plans. Hof van Cartesius and De Voedseltuín thrived and maintained their bottom-up nature, partly due to more manageable starting conditions. All bottom-up initiatives, however, including those in our broader study, faced significant uncertainties and low trust levels.

A common feature in the starting conditions across all cases is the inclusion of temporary use conditions, reducing strategic uncertainty for property owners. Temporary use is widespread in contemporary urban practice (Chang & Gerrits, 2022; Martin et al., 2019), and its prevalence in Dutch bottom-up development reflects this trend. Bragaglia and Caruso (2022) discuss the ambiguity of temporary use, portraying it as both a means to democratize spatial use and unlock potential, and as a neoliberal strategy to outsource public services to private actors at low costs, posing significant risks for private actors. A civil servant noted that temporary use is a “safe way to see if initiatives work out” (authors’ translation), while keeping future options open. For bottom-up initiators, it provides access to property at low lease rates, enhancing feasibility but introducing long-term strategic uncertainty. The uncertainty requires resourcefulness, leading to experiments with temporary structures and material reuse, also driven by environmental considerations.

Self Organization: Creating Legitimacy, Feasibility and Stability Through Community Building

For each case, we determined how each small win reduced cognitive, strategic, or institutional uncertainty. Table 1 illustrates this with a limited selection of small wins that are comprehensible without detailed case knowledge. The cross-case analysis reveals that initiatives take shape as more people become involved. Figure 1 suggests actors are known from the start, but our analyses show many small wins involve or result from engaging new people or gaining their support, demonstrated by small wins 1 to 5, 8 to 14, 16, 18, 19 and 21 in Table 1. Building a supportive community, uniting early pioneers with end-users, volunteers, state, and market actors, forms the *propelling mechanism* of the cyclical self-organization processes. Multiple interviewees emphasized the importance of building a cohesive, supportive community. An NDSM warehouse initiator spoke of creating a “critical mass to ensure financial feasibility” (authors’ translation). Social entrepreneurship theory emphasizes the value of a strong, supportive network to access funding and resources (Austin et al., 2006). *Community building* underpins *feasibility* when end-users guarantee future rental incomes, provide manpower for self-building or retrofitting workplaces, maintain a garden, and contribute necessary knowledge.

Beyond underpinning feasibility, community building contributes to two other critical aspects. It demonstrates an initiative’s *raison d’être* or *legitimacy* by showing societal need and support, relevant for public support and democratic accountability. An NDSM initiator stated that broad community support demonstrates the “right to exist in the city” (authors’ translation). Community

Table 1. Selection of small wins demonstrating relationships with uncertainty and trust.

Selected (series of) small wins		Reduction of	Trust building on:
		• Cognitive (C) • Strategic (S) • Institutional (I) Uncertainty	• Legitimacy (L) • Feasibility (F) • Stability (S)
#	Year and description (SW=Small Win / SSW=Series of Small Wins)		
NDSM Shipbuilding Warehouse			
1	1999, SW: successful crowdfunding campaign to finance the competition submission.	S	L and F
2	1999, SSW: involvement of architects, cost experts, and other advisors.	C and S	F and S
3	1999, SSW: collection of recommendation letters from directors of art academies, festivals and other relevant institutions.	S	L and F
4	2000, SW: grand, festive manifestation at the warehouse generates goodwill among officials and shows the initiative's potential.	S and I	L and F
5	2000, SW: after the manifestation, a group of 70 artists continues to work in the unrenovated building; the community grows.	S	L and S
6	2000, SW: after negotiations, the temporary use period is changed from five to ten years.	S and I	F
7	2002, SW: the initiative receives a national innovation subsidy for the project's experimental nature.	S	F
8	2003, SSW: successful attraction of sufficient potential tenants in a timely manner.	S	L, F and S
Note: After 2003, diverging viewpoints and interests among stakeholders made the distinction between small wins and small losses ambiguous. Therefore, we limited the selection to data up to 2003.			
Hof van Cartesius			
9	2015, SSW: Uitvindersgilde, a group of creative makers, commits to the initiative as intended end-user, adding expertise on sustainable building techniques. A representative of Uitvindersgilde joins the initial initiator.	C and S	L, F and S
10	2016, SW: establishment of corporation (legal entity) Hof van Cartesius, uniting the initiators and 20 intended end-users.	S and I	L, F and S
11	2016/2017, SSW: successful crowdfunding campaign for the climate adaptive garden, complemented with a loan of Economic Board Utrecht / province of Utrecht, and a municipal subsidy.	S	L and F
12	2017, SW: symbolic start of realization phase 1 with a festival, in the presence of the alderman of Economic Affairs, and attracting a large crowd.	S	L and F
13	2017, SSW: support of various companies by donating innovative or circular products, or sharing expertise.	C and S	L and F
14	2018, SSW: more than 3000 visitors at various (e.g., cultural) activities.	S	L and F
De Voedseltuin			
15	2011, SW: subsidy by the municipality for the volunteer work by individuals with personal issues.	S	L and F
16	2011, SSW: two individuals with fund raising and strategic management expertise join.	C and S	F and S
17	2015, SW: the municipality acknowledges the initiative's role and relevance in redeveloping M4H.	S and I	L
18	2016, SW: successful crowdfunding campaign to fund the collection of rainwater from roofs of adjacent buildings.	S	L and F
19	2017, SW: successful campaign for adopting (i.e., sponsoring) food circles by local companies.	S	L and F
20	2017, SSW: the central building is built, including various sustainability experiments (e.g., a bioreactor for heating).	S	L and F
21	2018/2019, SW: the initiative joins Roffabriek, a chain partnering / social entrepreneur platform contributing to sustainable solutions.	C and S	L and F

building enhances *stability* by reducing dependence on single individuals or organizations. However, an extensive community can become unstable if its members do not cooperate or share similar views, as seen at the NDSM warehouse. Community building thus harbours a paradox: it is needed for stability but can also foster instability.

Establishing legitimacy, feasibility, and stability through community building is crucial for building stakeholder trust and ensuring progression. The initiator of Hof van Cartesius described

the process as “having to prove yourself” (authors’ translation). A municipal interviewee stated that latitude is given when there is trust, and that trust must be cultivated. The rightmost column of Table 1 shows how each small win contributed to stakeholders’ perceptions of legitimacy, feasibility, and stability, often in combination, demonstrating how stakeholder trust is built. Stakeholders include potential future stakeholders, such as tenants, authorities, and financiers.

Outcomes: Social and Environmental Value Enabled by Economic Value

Social outcomes of the NDSM warehouse and Hof van Cartesius include affordable workspaces for artists and creative entrepreneurs, and spaces for cultural programming. Hof van Cartesius and De Voedseltuinen contribute urban greenery. De Voedseltuinen provides fresh produce to the Food Bank and offers opportunities for individuals to re-establish a work routine, along with educational programs. The environmental values of all three cases include sustainability experiments and knowledge creation.

The rental incomes at NDSM warehouse and Hof van Cartesius are insufficient for economic feasibility and long-term viability due to the affordability of the rental spaces. De Voedseltuinen does not generate income from the produce, which is donated to the Food Bank. As a result, these initiatives sustain themselves through additional economic activities and by leveraging their economic relevancy for local stakeholders. Placemaking serves as a key spatial-economic relevance, of value to local state and market actors.

The NDSM warehouse and Hof van Cartesius generate additional income through cultural events, workshops, and festivals. De Voedseltuinen’s revenue model relies on four functional pillars, attracting financial contributions from various actors. Strategic investments were made in the NDSM warehouse by the municipality, and in Hof van Cartesius by a local market actor, both motivated by expected long-term spatial-economic benefits. Interviewees stated that the initiatives served as steppingstones for further area development by enhancing functionality, identity, liveliness, social safety, and attractiveness. These placemaking efforts enabled broader, long-term spatial-economic developments, thereby justifying financial commitments from local state and market actors.

At Hof van Cartesius and De Voedseltuinen, the self-organization process involved discovering how to create short-term and leverage long-term economic value by identifying benefitting actors, gaining their trust, and securing their financial commitment. Community building was crucial for identifying such actors and establishing trust. At the NDSM warehouse, the municipality’s early commitment, involving large financial investments, left little room for experimentation, hindering the ability to absorb small losses, learn and adjust. This impeded the incremental self-organization process and the establishment of a cohesive community, leading to the failure of the self-organization process and its replacement by top-down control.

Inductive Insights: Goal-Interest Couplings During Windows of Opportunity

An inductive insight involves the convergence of the initiatives’ goals with local state or market actors’ interests. De Voedseltuinen expanded its goal of providing fresh produce to various activities in response to local stakeholders’ interests, thus gaining support. When local authorities shifted to an organic development approach for M4H in 2015, an opportunity arose to

professionalize De Voedseltuinen with municipal support. At Hof van Cartesius, after years of land use disputes with the municipality, a local developer who owned property in Werkspoorkwartier and anticipated placemaking by Hof van Cartesius, acquired the land in 2017, and granted temporary use on favourable terms to the initiative, with municipal consent due to shared interests in revitalizing the area.

Both cases exemplify “windows of opportunity” opening at certain points in time, parallel to the self-organization process. At these moments, three streams aligned: a problem, a possible solution, and political will (Kingdon, 2011). Seizing these opportunities enhanced the initiative’s ability to deliver outcomes, leading to increased certainty and trust. We identified multiple windows of opportunity in various cases. Hof van Cartesius seized a second window of opportunity in 2020 through collaboration with the new Stadmakerfonds. Initiatives consciously or unconsciously steer towards aligning their “solutions” with stakeholders’ problems by adjusting or expanding goals based on the support the adjustments can garner. This mechanism within the self-organization processes contributes to the initiatives’ economic relevance.

In conventional, hierarchical projects, defining a problem and then finding a solution is a logical sequence. In a network approach, this can be reversed into “solutions, looking for problems,” based on the idea that “problems are coupled to solutions if this is conducive to the support of other actors for this solution” (de Bruijn & ten Heuvelhof, 2008, p. 63). This *goal-interest coupling* pertains to self-organization in bottom-up urban development, meaning that initiative’s goals must be flexible.

Austin et al. (2006) argue that social entrepreneurs must cultivate a rich network and actively seek creative arrangements, substantiating our findings from a social entrepreneurial perspective. In bottom-up urban development, creative arrangements emerge through alignment with local state and market actors’ interests. Besides placemaking interests, some municipalities support bottom-up initiatives due to local creative city policies aimed at stimulating economic growth. Often linked with the creative sector, bottom-up development initiatives can leverage such policies, increasing the economic relevance of initiatives for municipalities. Similarly, Cretella and Buenger (2016) describe how urban agriculture projects such as De Voedseltuinen contribute to Rotterdam’s “sustainable world harbour” city branding.

Visualizing the Self-Organization Mechanisms in Bottom-up Urban Development

Figure 3 illustrates an ideal-typical bottom-up urban development process centred on self-organization, integrating our theoretical insights and empirical findings. Figure 3 retains the basic elements of Figure 1 but assigns values to the starting conditions: high uncertainty and low trust. The collaborative self-organization process features a horizontal time axis and two graphs: a dotted line representing changes in uncertainty and a solid line representing trust. Regular *small wins* incrementally reduce uncertainty and increase trust; this iterative, incremental process is driven by the *propelling mechanism of community building*. The engagement of new actors and alignment with state and market interests lead to goal adaptation as the initiative takes shape. When sufficient trust is achieved and a window of opportunity opens, the initiative’s goals can be coupled to state and/or market actors’ interests, leading to their support (e.g., financial) and a leap forward in achieving outcomes. This goal-interest coupling results in a surge in certainty and trust, in contrast to the earlier incremental changes. Figure 3 illustrates that a minimum level of trust is essential for state and market actors to commit. While the resulting “breakthrough” might be termed a big win (Bryson, 1988), we refrain from

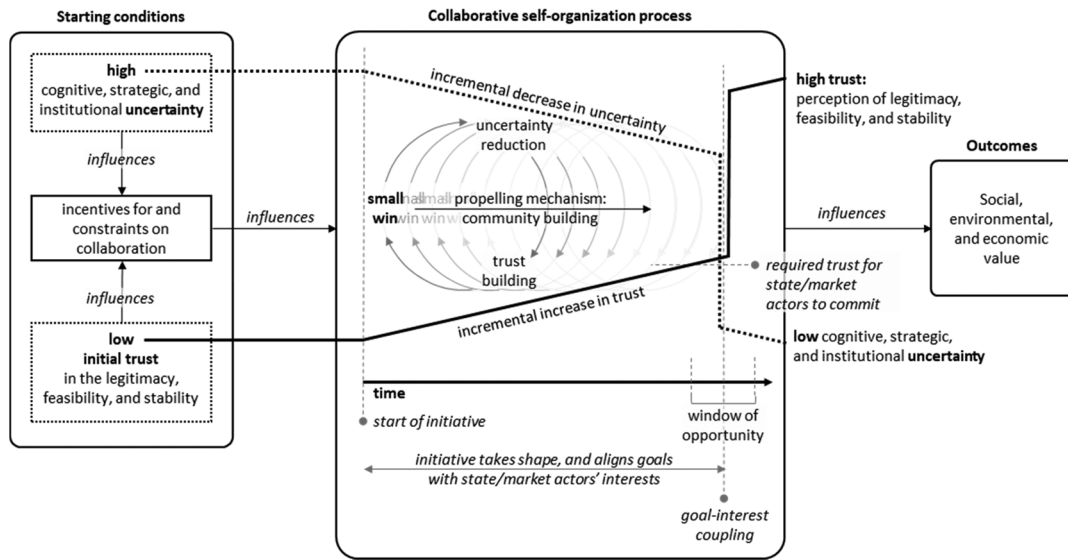


Figure 3. Ideal-typical process of bottom-up urban development.

using that label, as it prompts the question: a big win for whom? From the perspective of the initiators, the breakthrough may represent a compromise, given the conformity to market mechanisms.

Figure 3 shows one window of opportunity and corresponding surge in certainty and trust through seizing the opportunity. However, multiple windows can emerge, influenced by who is involved, when they are involved, and contextual influences. Moreover, the timing of windows of opportunity can vary; they can open early, later, or not at all.

Figure 4 shows the principles and dynamics of the collaborative self-organization processes of our case selection. The NDSM warehouse (on the left in Figure 4) and De Voedseltuyn (right) each had one window of opportunity, while Hof van Cartesius (middle) had two. The NDSM warehouse's early window of opportunity represents the municipal investments despite high uncertainties and low trust. This early investment suggests that the municipality ignored the principle of committing only when an initiative has proven itself capable and trustworthy through incrementally reducing uncertainty. The municipality took a large risk due to the nascent self-organization and unfavourable starting conditions, resulting in an unsuccessful self-organization process; large risks and a dysfunctional process turned the bottom-up initiative into a top-down affair, prematurely ending the self-organization process. In contrast, De Voedseltuyn started small and experienced incremental self-organization and growth. Despite higher initial uncertainty, Hof van Cartesius similarly experienced an incremental and successful process.

Discussion: Mutual Dependence, Temporary Use, and Their Implications

Deteriorated former industrial areas pose significant redevelopment challenges for local authorities and property owners due to the lack of investment potential and appeal to commercial developers. However, bottom-up initiators see opportunities to realize their social ambitions in these areas. Their activities can initiate placemaking, addressing the area's commercial

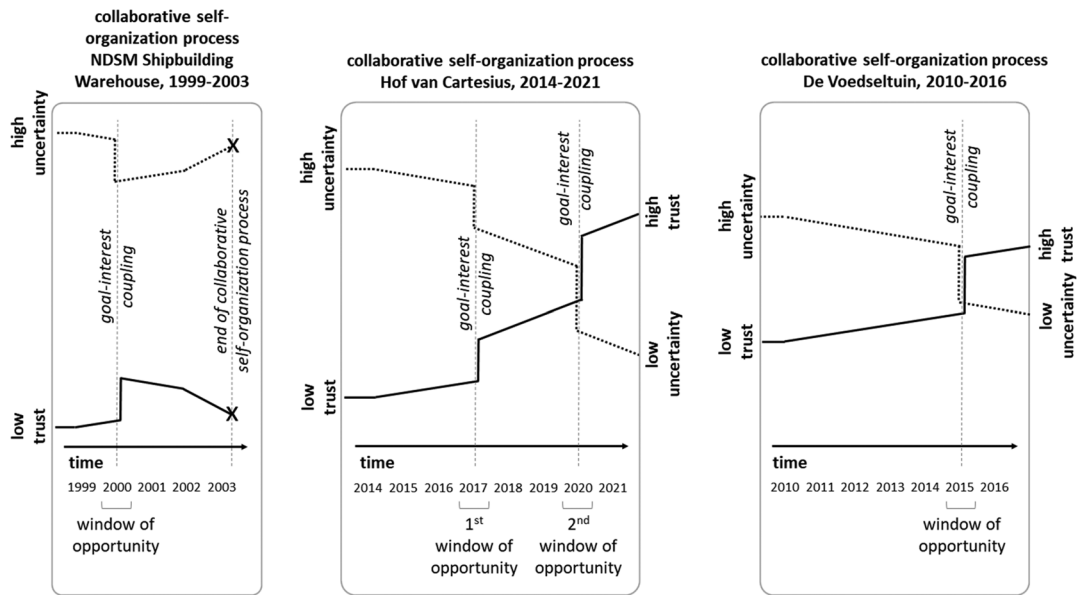


Figure 4. Basic principles of the collaborative self-organization processes of the three cases.

unattractiveness; an outcome established actors cannot achieve due to time constraints in a competitive market. Former industrial areas attract the creative sector in particular, explaining the predominance of bottom-up activity by and for this sector. As bottom-up urban development increasingly facilitates commercial, for-profit projects through placemaking, this bottom-up mode of development has become part of conventional, neoliberal practices rather than an alternative. Similar to Germany's institutionalization of temporary use (Honeck, 2017), bottom-up urban development, including temporary use, has become institutionalized within Dutch organic urban development. Municipal calls for bottom-up plans illustrate the "outsourcing" of initial development phases to bottom-up initiators.

State and market actors need bottom-up initiators to enact change, while bottom-up initiators need state and market actors for resources, knowledge, and networks. A municipal interviewee confirmed: "Bottom-up initiatives and the municipality simply need each other" (authors' translation). This mutual dependence resembles that of start-ups and large established companies in open innovation (Spender et al., 2017; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2017). The reliance on, and entanglement with, the state and market diminishes the bottom-up nature of initiatives, especially when prompted by municipal calls. Nevertheless, we consider our cases bottom-up, as civic initiators initially led all initiatives. Case NDSM warehouse, however, lost its bottom-up nature, illustrating risks for initiators and showing that initiatives may not unfold as intended. Bottom-up urban development is only partially controllable; small wins often depend on serendipity, and windows of opportunity can only be anticipated to a limited extent. External, contextual factors matter, meaning that initiators have limited control over the outcomes.

Although the support from state and market actors is market-driven in principle, the distinction made in this article between actors guided by market logic and those driven by social ambitions is overemphasized and less clear in practice. Motivations are often diffuse. Developers and municipalities also pursue social and environmental objectives, while some bottom-up initiators simply seek a suitable workplace or alternatives to acquire work. The commitment of

a local real estate developer at Hof van Cartesius, partly driven by sympathy for the initiative's social and environmental ambitions, illustrates the blurring of motivations.

Temporary use in bottom-up urban development raises questions about the efforts and risks taken by initiators versus the rewards. Coupling goals to state or market interests is an effective short-term strategy but implies a precarious long-term position for initiatives. What happens when state and market actors achieve their goals, rendering an initiative “redundant”? Bragaglia and Rossignolo (2021) discuss whether temporary urbanism policies are a panacea or Trojan horse, with the latter metaphor suggesting that temporary use perpetuates neoliberal policies. They conclude that temporary use is neither, but rather inherently contradictory. Initiators expressed concerns that their own efforts could ultimately disadvantage them, as rising land values, temporary terms, and market forces might displace or terminate their initiatives, thereby jeopardizing the social values they have established. All three cases strived for permanence, highlighting the ambiguity of temporary use. The NDSM warehouse and Hof van Cartesius achieved permanence, while the temporary use period at De Voedseltuyn continues to be extended.

Conclusion: Social Value Creation Through Incremental Adaptation to Market Logic

We aimed to uncover how initiators of contemporary bottom-up urban development create social value through self-organization in a market-oriented context. This process involves two main efforts. The first is to shape an initiative's legitimacy, feasibility, and stability through community building, thereby creating trust. The process involves accumulating small wins – concrete, intermediate achievements through which a cohesive and supportive community takes shape. The second is to align and couple the initiative's goals with the spatial-economic interests of state and market actors, building on that trust. The initial mismatch with market institutions is addressed by conforming to market logic: adopting a mixed revenue model and gaining support by becoming economically relevant to others, enables social, environmental, and economic value creation. Social value creation in a market-driven context is thus supported through both short- and long-term economic value creation.

Our study offers insights into the Dutch context, but the principles apply to international, neoliberal contexts, as decision-making processes of state and market parties are intrinsically bound to market logic. Exploratory analyses of other Western European initiatives revealed similar patterns, confirming transferability. We similarly expect that leveraging economic value to enable social value creation applies to other forms of citizens' initiatives in neoliberal settings.

The transition from an under-resourced position to being capable of realizing social and environmental outcomes through self-organization is incremental; it does not happen overnight. Rather, it unfolds through the gradual accumulation of small wins – each representing a modest but meaningful step in shaping legitimacy, feasibility, and stability.

The entanglement of bottom-up, self-organized entities with state and market organizations involves compromises. Initiators must weigh the time, energy, trade-offs, and risks against the possible benefits of successful self-organization. Success is more likely when initiatives start small, allowing room to experiment, learn, build a community, establish trust, and absorb setbacks – while enabling state and market actors to commit with acceptable risks. In conventional, for-profit development practices, risks are often foreseeable, with a clear understanding of who will bear them, given known markets and institutions. Despite the initial lack of certainty in

bottom-up initiatives, state and market actors may still invest in bottom-up initiatives and accept risks, motivated by the spatial-economic interests they seek to advance, provided that initiators demonstrate trustworthiness and competence. Temporary use conditions mitigate risks for property owners but often leave bottom-up initiatives in precarious positions.

The lack of a long-term perspective for initiatives and uncertainty about sustaining social values is concerning, especially as bottom-up urban development has become common practice. The institutionalization of bottom-up development practices calls for public policies that facilitate equal relationships, appreciate bottom-up efforts, and secure social values, but such policies are controversial as they do not align with the neoliberal agenda. Furthermore, state interventions require prudence due to the incremental and unpredictable nature of self-organization; bottom-up initiatives need time and flexibility to thrive.

The scientific relevance of our study lies in the insights into social value creation through self-organization in bottom-up urban development, highlighting that social value creation is enabled by simultaneous economic value creation. Our analytical framework, combining collaborative governance and network uncertainty theories, was applied in a multiple case analysis. This led to an ideal-typical visualization of bottom-up urban development processes, demonstrating generic self-organization principles in neoliberal contexts. The transferability beyond the Dutch context is plausible but requires further international case analyses to broaden the case base and strengthen the empirical evidence.

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