Re-imagining Public Space

Embeddedness of Community-Driven Temporary Uses in Urban Regeneration

Graduation
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Community initiatives

Communities initiate temporary uses for public space when they experience a lack of social welfare services that they try to provide themselves within deprived urban neighborhoods.

Community initiative in Tweebosbuurt, Rotterdam that strives to empower the community by establishing a local economy (Het Gemaal Op Zuid, n.d.)

The Netherlands

organic/incremental planning:
smaller collectives or individuals originating from civil society join the 'playing field' of larger, professional actors.
(Mens et al., 2021)

Werkspoorkwartier in Utrecht is currently used as a social outlet for initiatives by local entrepeneurs after years of vacancy after the economic crisis (Ontdek Het Werkspoorkwartier, n.d.)

Madrid, Spain

New urban activism (laboratorios ciudadanos): *Reinforce democracy and aim for a more just city. Fueled by the financial crisis and the budget cuts.*

Campo de la Cebada in Madrid regenerated by residents and designers after the demolishion and vacancy of sport centre (Buey, 2019)

Berlin, Germany

Temporary use of space (Zwischennutzung): *Oversupply of commercial and office buildings during crisis lead to vacancy. This vacancy paved the way towards urban experiments by citizens to supply for themselves for as long as the sites stayed vacant.* (Colomb, 2017)

Community-driven temporary use on vacant land in Moritzplatz, Berlin (Nachbarschafts- und Inklusionsgarten Moritzplatz, n.d.)

Urban regeneration

Through these community initiatives, the neighborhood or district becomes less deprived and gains attention from external parties. However, when this deprived area is up for larger scaled urban regeneration, the values of these community initiatives are not taken into account by actors involved within the urban regeneration process with their own values and interests.

Urban regeneration plan for Tweebosbuurt, Rotterdam. Mixed-use & multi-actor project (Wonen in Rotterdam, 2023)

Displacement & gentrification

The community organizations lack the power and resources to involve their temporary use in the urban regeneration process. This leads to lack of representation and displacement of the existing community values within the public space of the new urban regeneration projects.

Onderlingen verbondenheid

Kenmerkend voor de Tweebosbuurt is de gemêleerde samenstelling, maar met één sterke eigenschap namelijk een onderlinge verbondenheid waar andere buurten in Nederland zich graag aan willen meten. Bewoners helpen elkaar in voor- en tegenspoed. Niets is hen te gek en bewonersinitiatieven worden er aan de lopende band opgetuigd.

Demolishion of social houses & displacement of its residents in Tweebosbuurt Rotterdam (Keete, 2023)

Research question

How can community organisations use urban regeneration as a way to embed their temporary use in the public space?

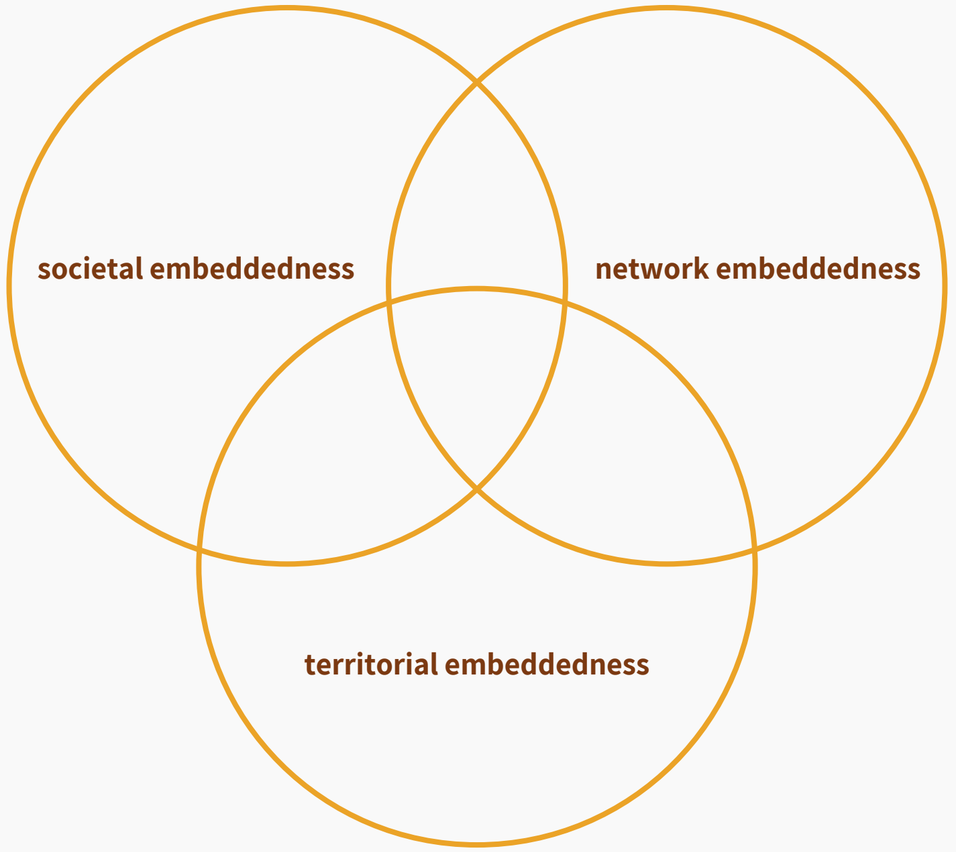
Sub-question 1

How is the embeddedness of a temporary use in the public space defined?

Temporary use YAAM (Young African Art Market) in Berlin (YAAM, n.d.)

SQ1: Embeddedness

Knowledge & capacity sharing in social and cultural context



Formal agreements (also with institutions) based on stability and trust

Value-adding to spatial territory (public space)

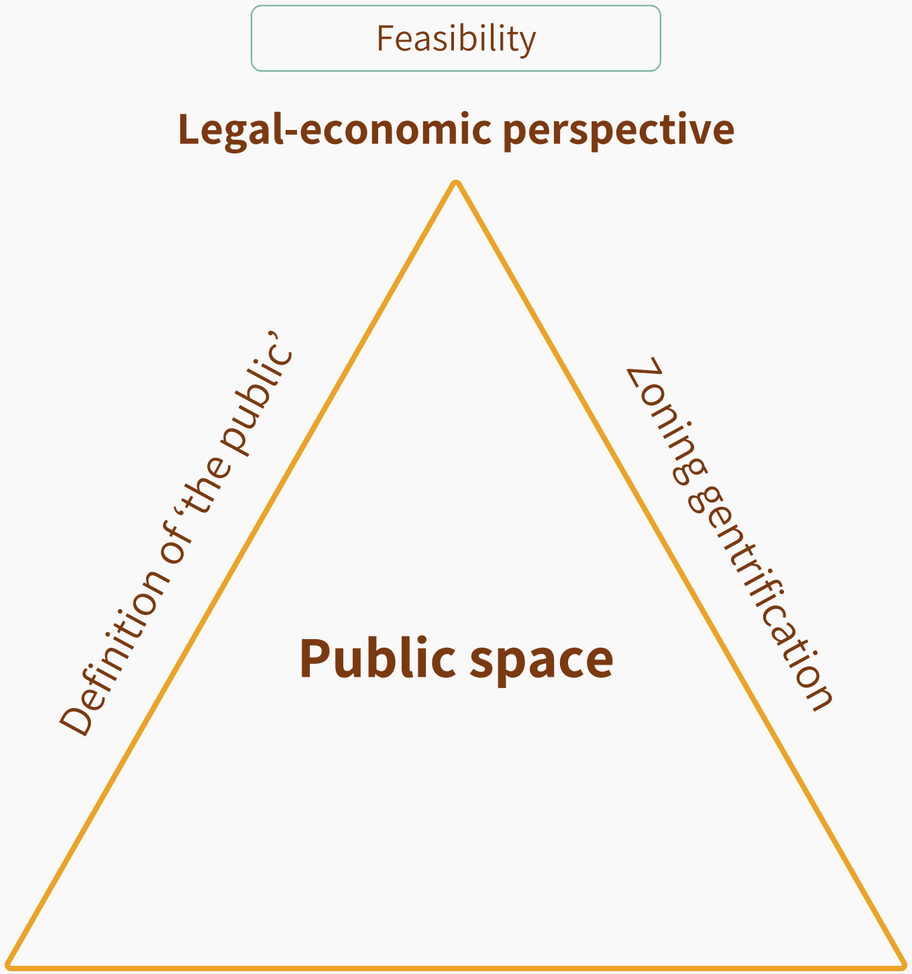
Hess (2004)

Sub-question 2

What added values can be created by community initiated temporary uses in the public space?

Community garden Moritzplatz, Berlin (Nachbarschafts- und Inklusionsgarten Moritzplatz,n.d.)

SQ2: Added value



Amin (2008), Neal (2010), Bodnar (2015), Bragaglia & Caruso (2020)

SQ2: Added value

Political perspective

Representation

- Toleration towards diversity through equal treatment
- Needs of the minority represented democratically
- Limited sense of consumerism and privatisation

Socio-spatial perspective

Collective culture

- Multiplicity
- Symbolic solidarity
- Conviviality
- Technological Maintenance

Legal-economic perspective

Feasibility

- Business model
- Physical suitability
- Ownership
- Zoning legislations

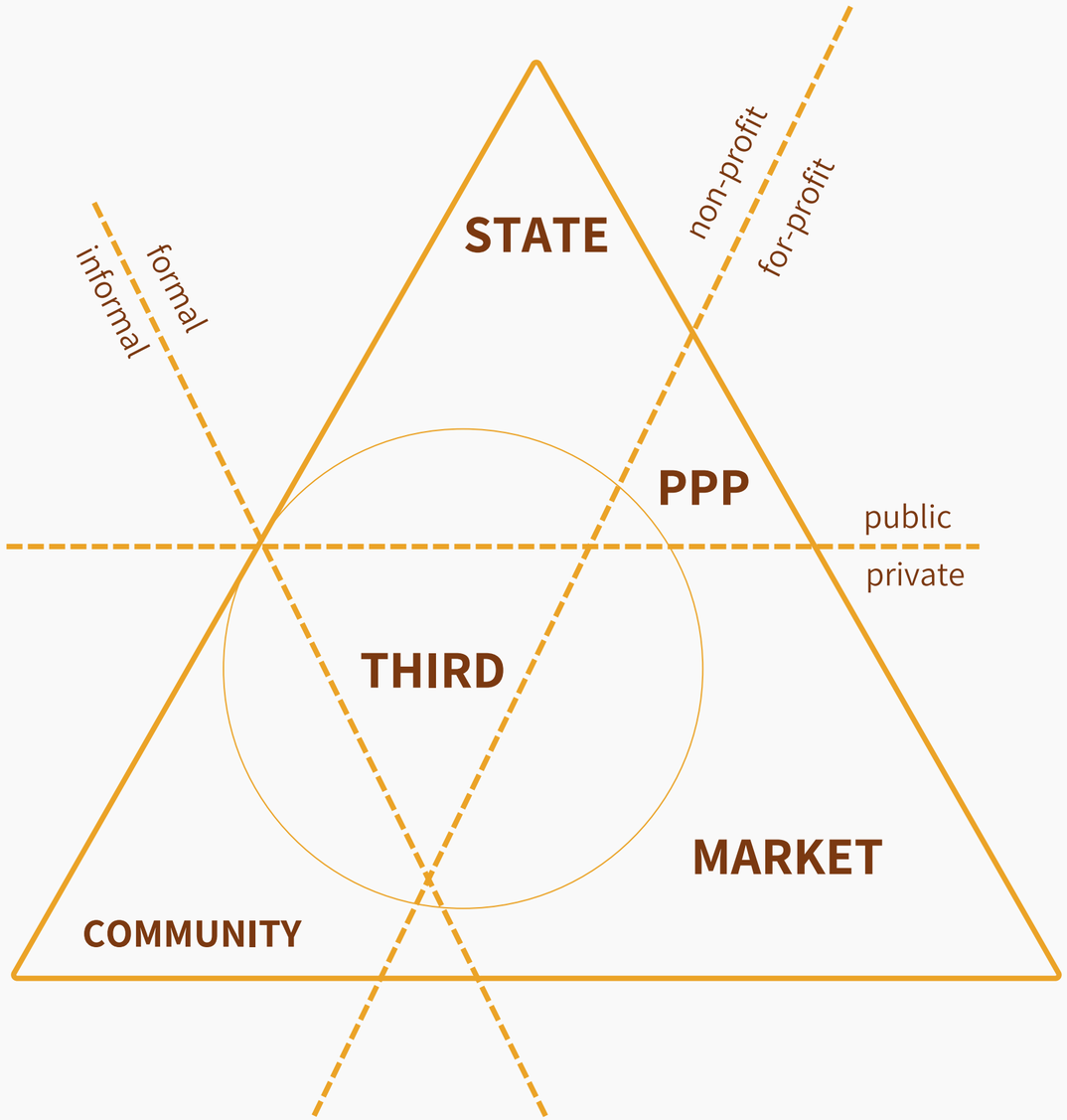
Amin (2008), Neal (2010), Bodnar (2015), Bragaglia & Caruso (2020)

Sub-question 3

What barriers and opportunities do community organisations face during the design and decision making process around the regeneration of public space?

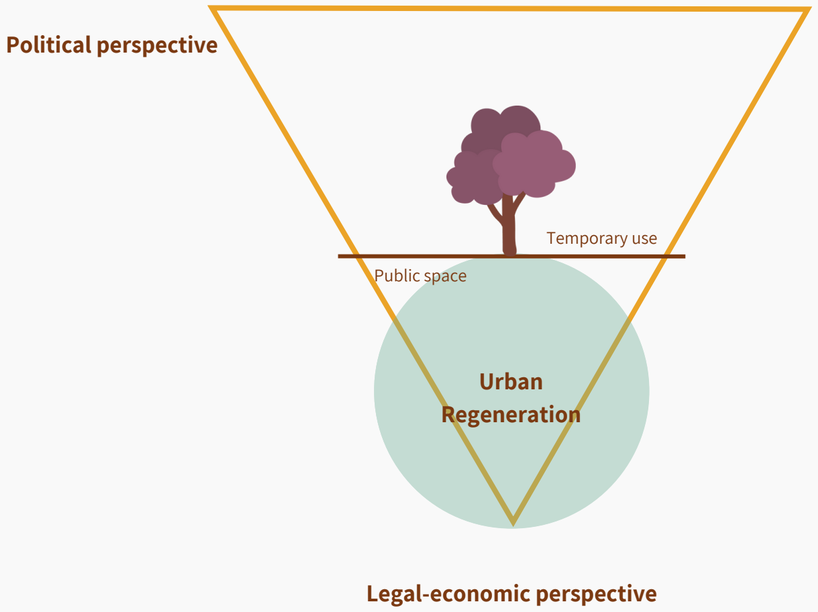
Garden in Moritzplatz can stay another term
(Nachbarschafts- und Inklusionsgarten Moritzplatz,n.d.)

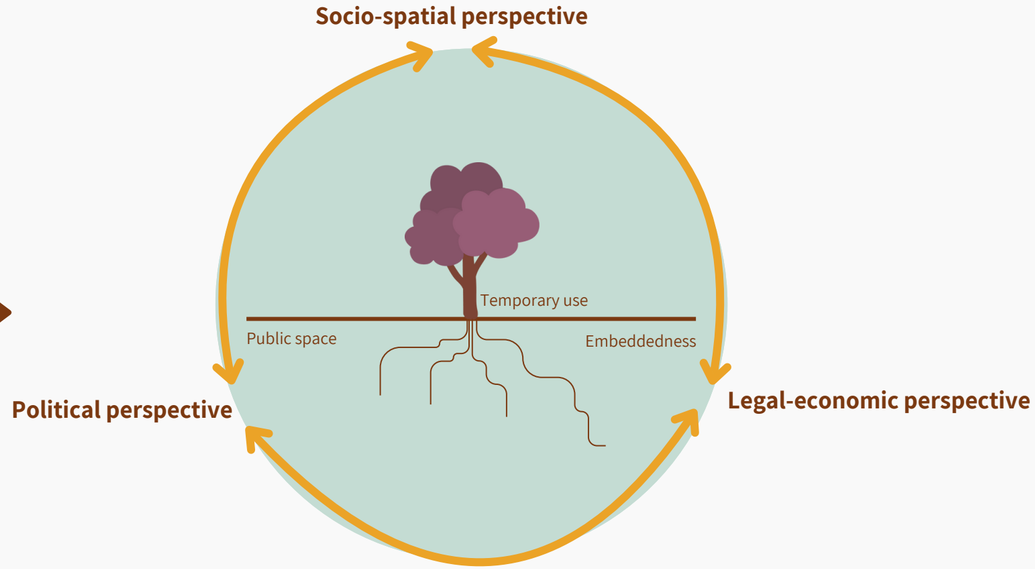
SQ3: Barriers & opportunities



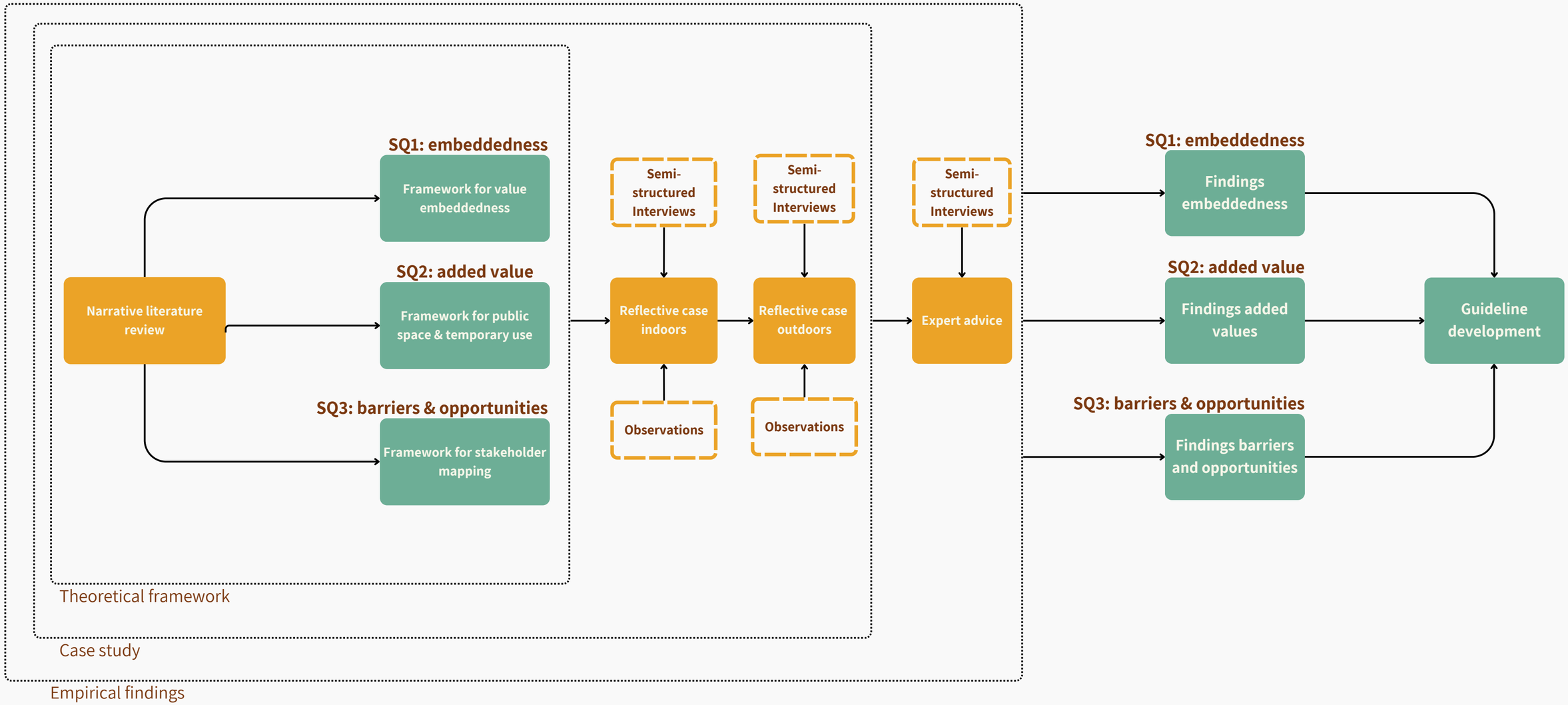
Alevilo (2011), Avelino & Wittmayer (2016)

Conceptual Framework.





How can community organisations use urban regeneration as a way to embed their temporary use in the public space?



Case study.

Bospolder – Tussendijken.

Situation of Bospolder-Tussendijken (own illustration)

Bospolder – Tussendijken.

Built between 1910 and 1930 as a working-class neighbourhood within the city of Rotterdam. 63% social housing

Dakpark was realized in 2014, Hudsons in 2023, the renovation of Taanderstraat in 2020

In total, there are 84 community initiatives, of which 35 are located in public space

Spatial context in Bospolder-Tussendijken (own illustration)

Bospolder – Tussendijken.

Displacement of temporary uses in Bospolder-Tussendijken (own illustration)

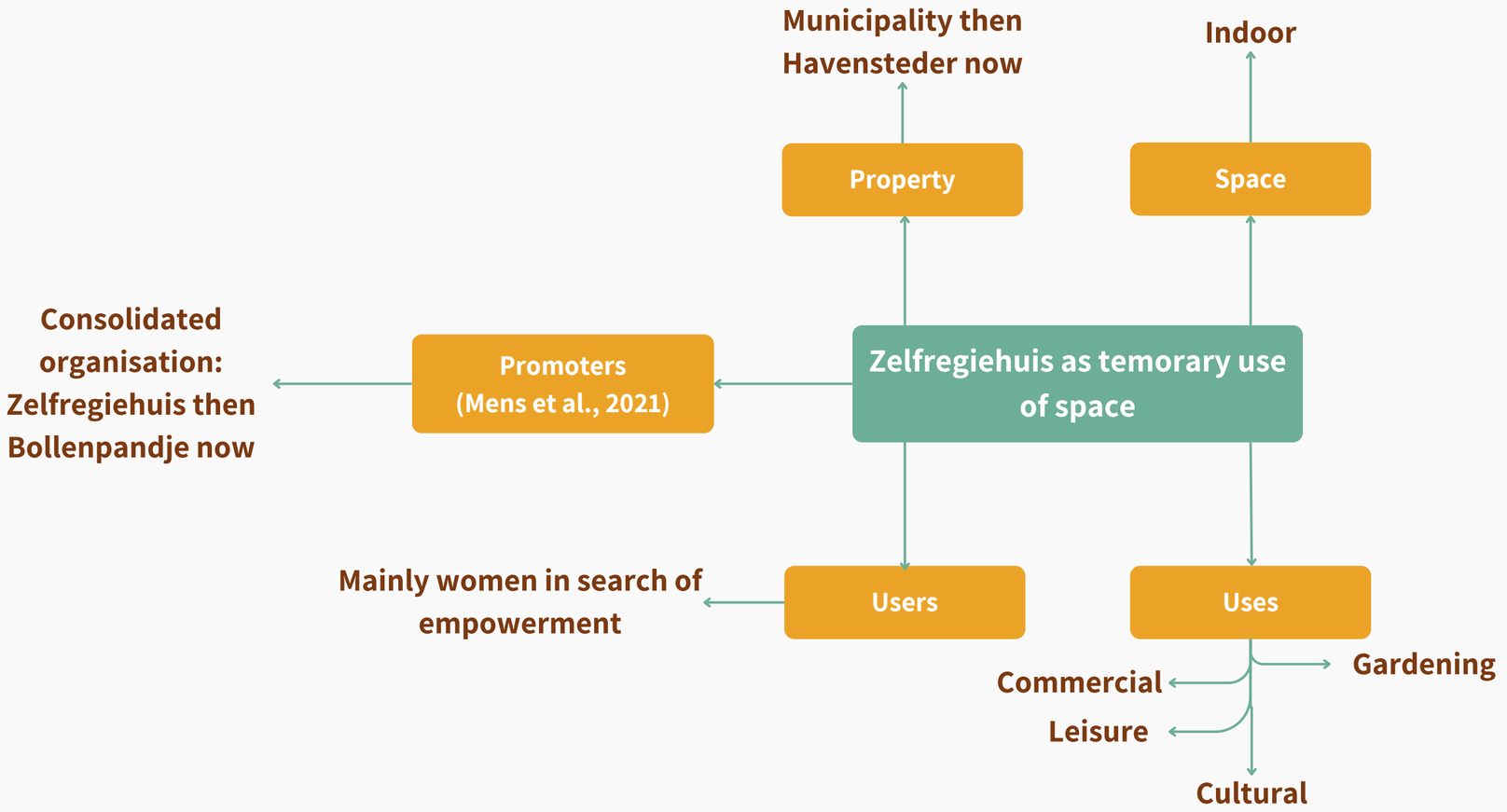
Data collection.

CASE STUDY	PARTICIPANTS	METHODS	PARTICIPANTS	CASE STUDY
Indoor	Municipality department Community initiator Housing association Advisor	**Observations** **Semi-structured interviews**	Community initiator Developers Advisor	**Outdoor**

Bollenpandje.

Bollenpandje (photograph by Kuiters, 2025)

Indoor public space.



Political value.

"Just go outside and make sure everyone sees you. Start a conversation; have a reason to talk. It could be a coffee invite or a small task you're doing together. And most importantly, don't think in terms of target groups or us versus them. That doesn't work."
- Initiator A (2025)

"Everyone is vulnerable. Haversteder is also very vulnerable. [...] Vulnerable is a term that is actually all-encompassing."
- Initiator A (2025)

The cart with which Initiator A goes outside, the plants she shares with the residents (photograph by Kuiters, 2025)

Socio-spatial value.

Users donate and build furnishing for community house as part of the collective culture (photograph by Kuiters, 2025)

"While if the building had been left empty, it would have started to deteriorate. And yes, then this place would still be a very unpleasant area that is completely dark in the evenings, where dealing occurs. You can escape in four different streets from here."

- Initiator A (2025)

Users do cleaning and greening activities in surrounding public space as part of collective culture (photograph by Kuiters, 2025)

Created value: high

Legal-economic value.

Lease characteristics	
Parties	Havensteder Bollenpandje
Lease	= Market price - 30% from Havensteder for meeting agreements - 30% allowance from municipality through Resilient BoTu 2028 + subsidees
Agreements for discount	• opening & closing times • amount of visitors • vulnerable target groups: elderly, youth, children • follow courses on business models
Term	• five years, end term 2028

Current lease agreement with Havensteder

"And that was leaked because an official said, 'Well, that's been known for a long time.' So they let that slip. And that's how we knew that what we suspected was indeed true. They said, 'Well, but WMO Radar is at least used to working with such budgets,' but so is DOK. So that's not an argument, but they had previously been given a term for the assignment here in Delfshaven, and that was simply extended."

– Initiator A (2025)

Created value: middle

Housing association: Havensteder

Values and powers.

Values

- Provide affordable housing for those who cannot afford it in the private sector
- Provide qualitative housing
- Enhance the wellbeing of their residents

Powers

- Ownership & rent discounts
- Developing & renovating
- Maintenance

Embeddedness.

“This is also very important for us as a corporation, so we support it [community houses] *strongly, because you have to do so in such a situation. This is somewhat of a social development. You could say it's actually of the urban generation of the area.* [wellbeing of residents] *Socially and societally, because you have to deal with it next to housing, right? Many people are dealing with poverty in various ways, facing disadvantages in different areas, so behind many doors, things could be much better, so to speak. This is also in our interest, so we want to contribute to that..”*

- Havensteder (2025)

Municipality: Urban Development

Values and powers.

Values

Deploy the public good for the most vulnerable in society

Stimulate urban developments beneficial to society

Powers

Legitimacy (public law)

Ownership of public spaces

Procurement & outsourcing (private law)

Embeddedness.

“The municipality is very much committed to supporting the weaker members of society, so to speak. As we receive an increasingly close role from the government and national government with ever-limited resources, we are also focusing more on that narrower vulnerable group. This means you may not necessarily find representation of the entire population in your local community center. “

- Municipality (2025)

You must really invest in making choices. The question is whether everyone realizes that. That this is actually your real choice, and not just a formal handling by the procurement department that checks if everything is done legally. It is truly a substantive steering instrument, your procurement policy.”

- Municipality (2025)

Sub-conclusion indoor.

	Barriers	Opportunities
Societal	Value misalignment: serve the most vulnerable // through housing	Respond to the needs of the residents in a more effective way
	Lack of systematic communication; different social norms	
Network	Lack of track record; less trustworthy	Alliance with community initiatives and welfare organisations: track record, business plan, long-term vision
	Dependency on initiator; less stable	Appreciation through discounts & subsidees
Territorial	Post-URG rent increase; not financially feasible	Full use of the spatial possibilities
	No long-term vision for the position in the inevitable urban regeneration	

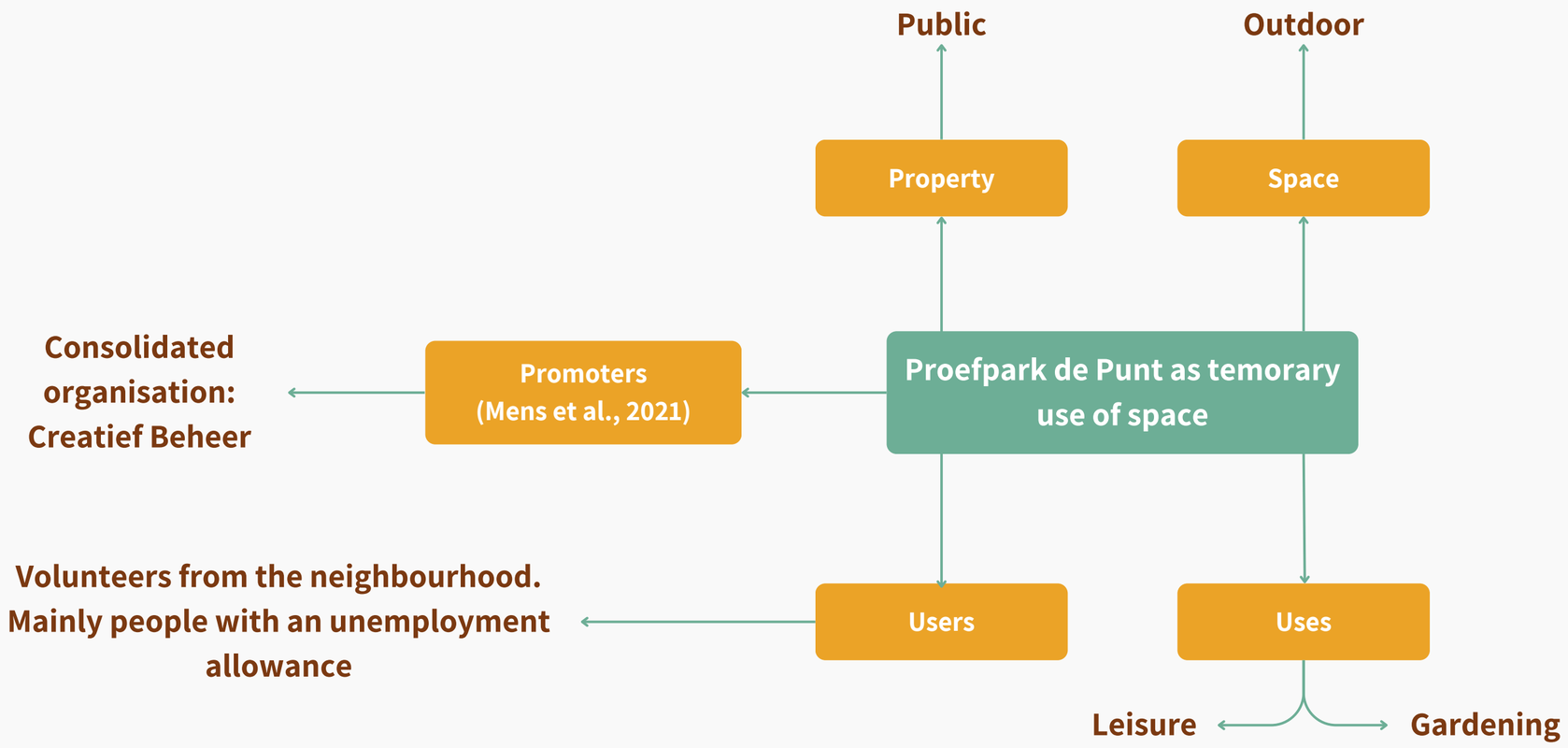
Political and socio-spatial perspective

Legal-economic perspective

Creatief Beheer.

Creatief Beheer in Park 1943 (photograph by Kuiters, 2025)

Outdoor public space.

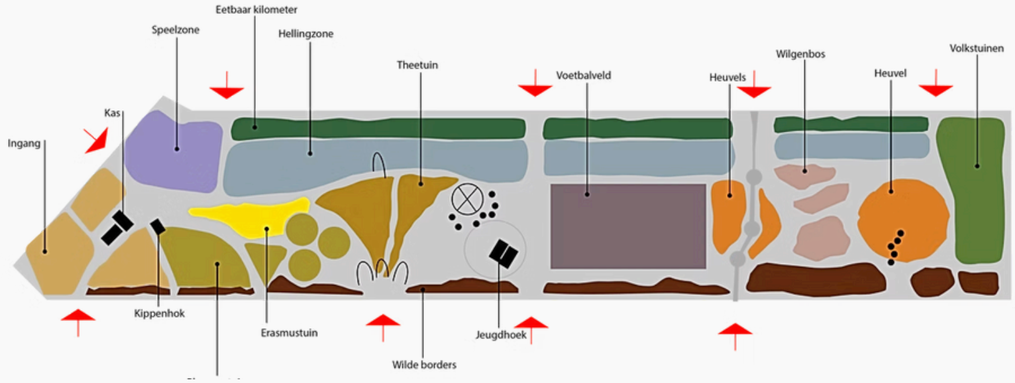


Political value.

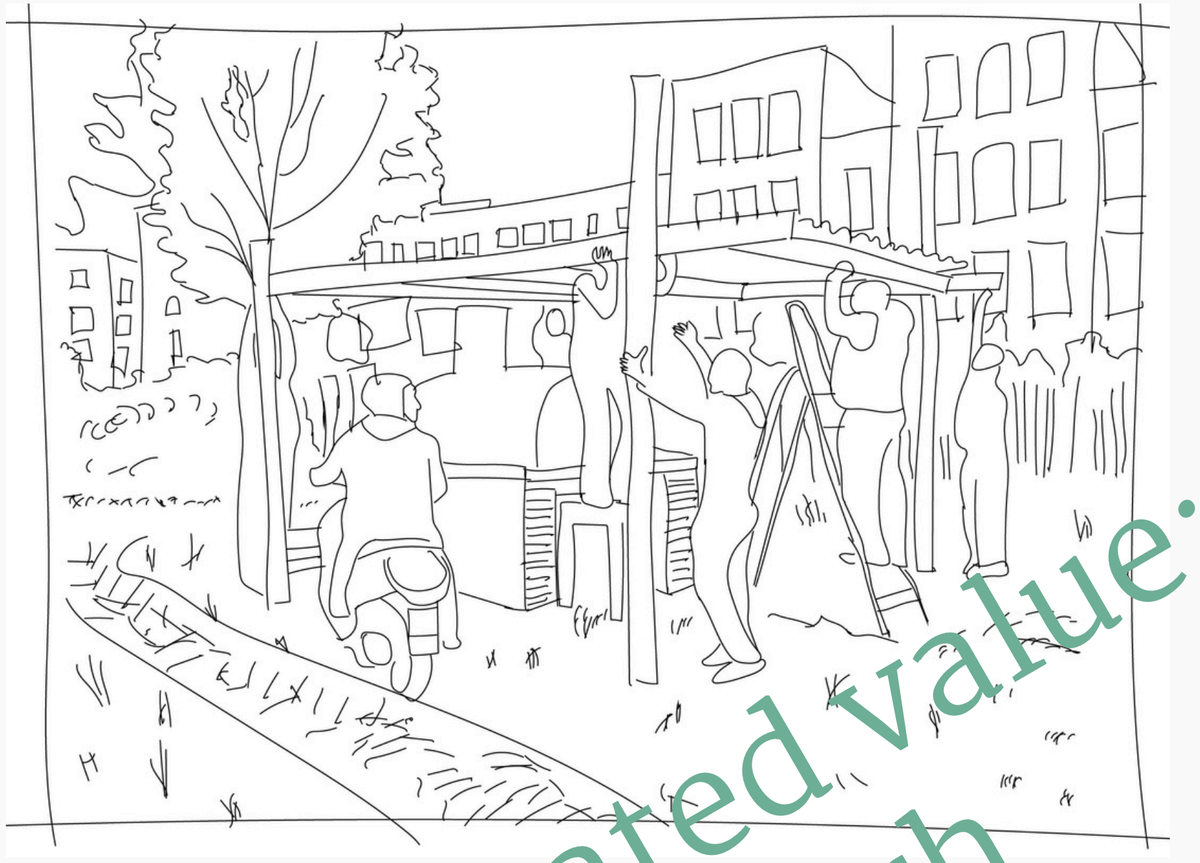
"And all these people have something going on. So I have all these people who can't work and are on benefits. They are often either retired or, well, dealing with issues like divorces, addictions, backgrounds, that sort of thing. People with depression, all sorts of problems, debts, yes, that type. And some of them, you really see them coming in, completely wet and sweaty. I call it slowly drying off. Yes, they just do what they have to do. I usually give them space."
- Initiator B (2025)

Created value: high

Socio-spatial value.



Layout of Proefpark de Punt showing developed through time by volunteers and users



Volunteers and users adjusting the garden as part of collective culture (illustration based on photographs shown by Initiator B)

Created value: high

Legal-economic value.

"That went well because we had arranged it for them, that fund [for the mozaiek at Le Medi]. *At that time, it was a grant program; if you had money, you would get half of it added. Then, I remember* [an involved developer from ERA Contour] *saying at one point, just before Christmas,* '[Initiator B], *can you help me? We're going to do a pitch, and I really want us to maintain the quality of the Hudsons*'. *I said I would connect the project with a gardener in the neighborhood, so I thought,* '*Well, that's nice. A neighborhood gardener was still on the pitch when they received it.*' *So they won that pitch, and I thought,* '*Great, then we'll go ahead with that gardener.*' *But it didn't happen: no gardener came."*

- Initiator B (2025)

Communual art piece for which CreatiefBeheer organised the funding (photographs by Kuiters, 2025)

Developer: ERA Contour

Values and powers.

Values

Attract future buyers that strengthen the neighbourhood

Supply demands of buyers

Creating successful places meant for people

Powers

Development

Property

Participation

Embeddedness.

"Now you see it much more often. But that was really in the early years of urban agriculture. And that was just innovative. The interesting thing was that it was truly innovative. It was, of course, a grassy field, but something was growing there, and it kept getting bigger. They also really managed to connect with the residents. So, we have always seen that as a very valuable place. It brings some liveliness, it brings people together, and it also makes such a place more enjoyable and attractive. So, it's actually a sort of dirty word: placemaking. And i assumed that [Initiator B] *continued at the Dakpark"*

- ERA Contour (2025)

"Well, the conclusion is actually that people really enjoy living there. However, we did notice a few points of attention regarding residents' choices about having an open communal courtyard or a more closed one. Ultimately, it seems that people with the open courtyard were more positive about it, while some from the closed side thought, 'Oh, we should have done that too.' So the question is how do we gather that feedback upfront. When something is new for people, they often still think in terms of, 'Oh yes, but I just want my own little garden or my own piece.' But how do you effectively communicate how it can be? That is indeed a challenge for us as well."

- ERA Contour (2025)

Cross-streets in the Hudsons being used informally by the residents (photographs by Kuiters, 2025)

	Barriers	Opportunities
Societal	Competition between community organisations	Value alignment: use URG to strengthen the qualities of the neighbourhood.
	Informal, passive involvement and agreements	More effective in communicating with residents about innovative ways of living.
		Gained popularity with urban thinkers due to created socio-spatial value
Network	Lack of formal agreements from the start around involvement in urban regeneration and lease after urban regeneration	Right to Challenge and track record
Territorial	Post-URG rent increase	Use volunteers and spatial characteristics to their full potential
	No long-term vision for the position in the inevitable urban regeneration & new residents	

Political and socio-spatial perspective

Legal-economic perspective

Results.

SQ1: Embeddedness

Societal embeddedness, network embeddedness & territorial embeddedness

SQ2: Added value

Added political and socio-spatial value, incapacity to create legal-economic value

SQ3: Barriers and opportunities

O: Created political & socio-spatial value in public space = possible alliances

B: Lack of legal-economic value blocks formal involvement in URG

O: alliance with other community initiatives for societal embeddedness

O: capacity sharing for the creation of legal-economic value for territorial embeddedness

O: Created legal-economic value as proof to gain trust

O: Formal agreements about space & procurement in URG for network embeddedness

For societal embeddedness

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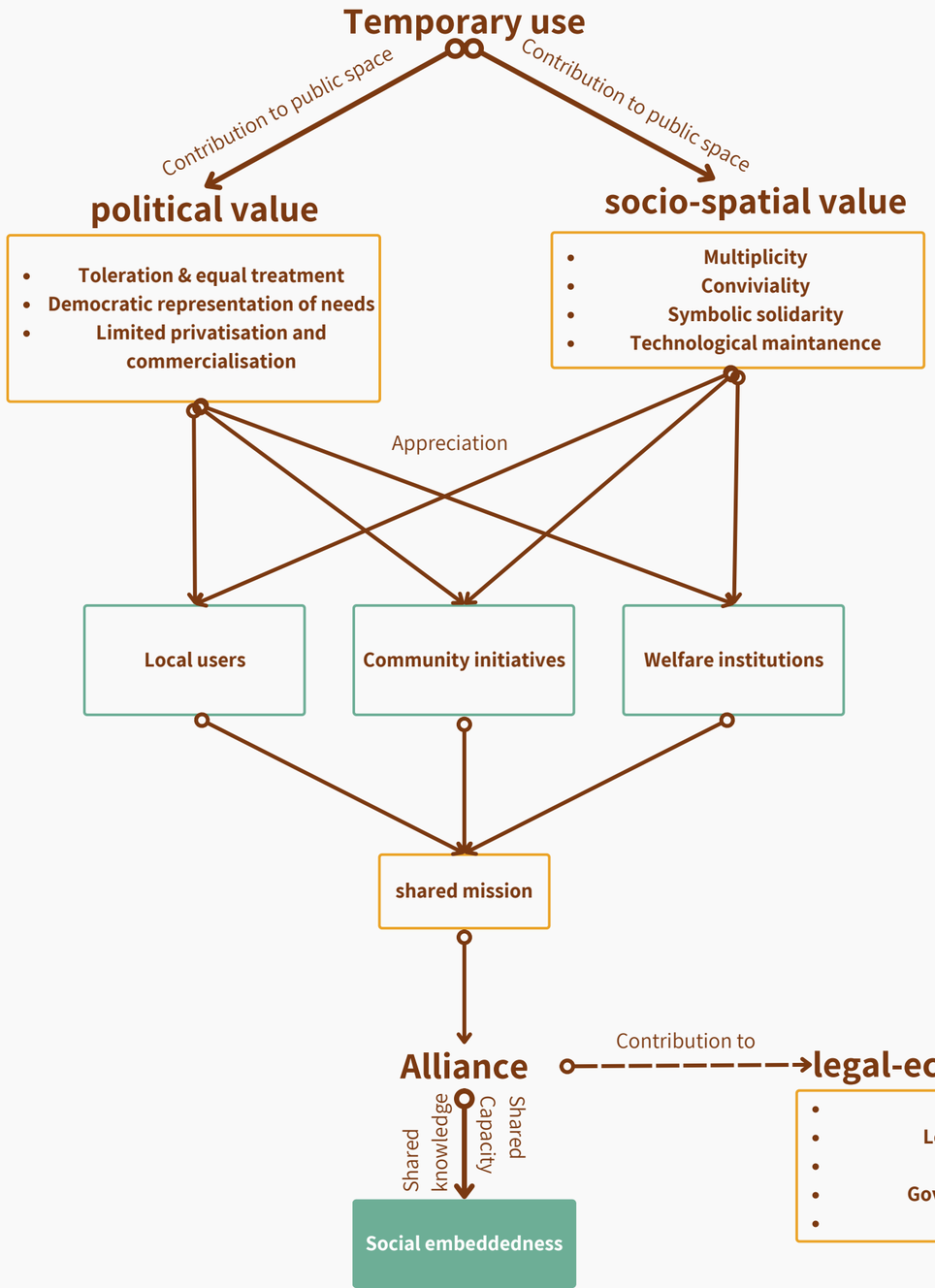
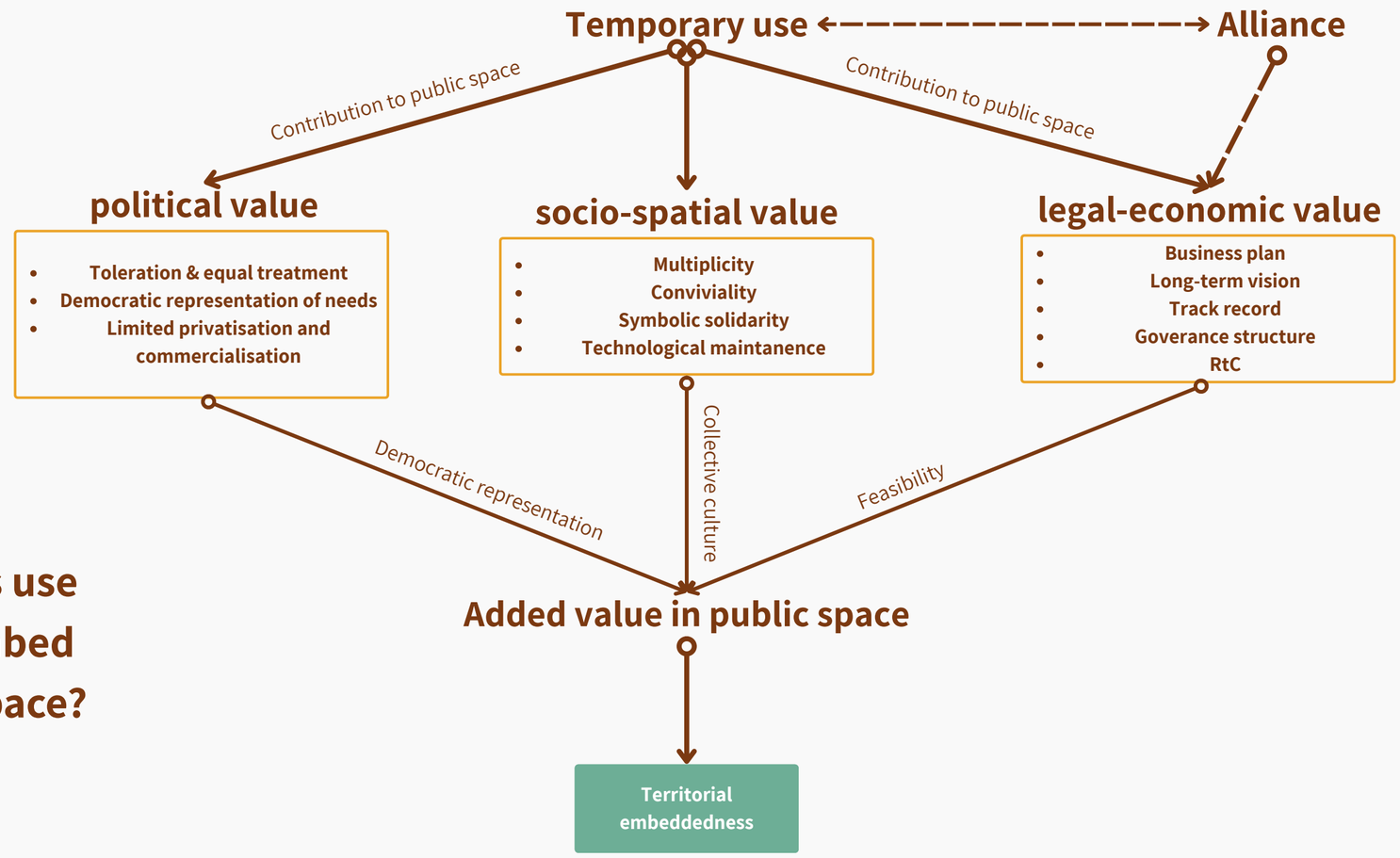


For territorial embeddedness



How can community organisations use urban regeneration as a way to embed their temporary use in the public space?

For network embeddedness with municipality

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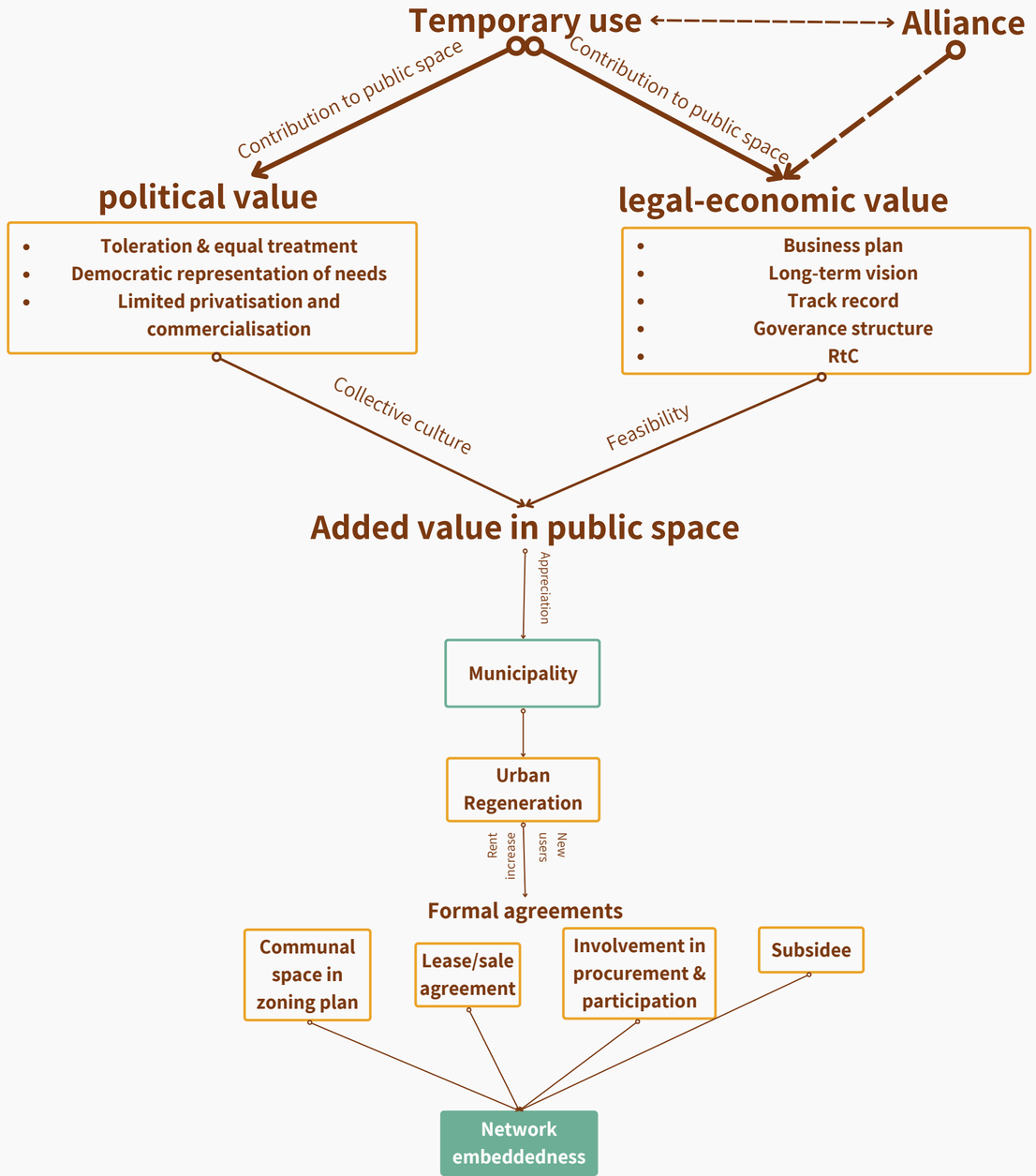
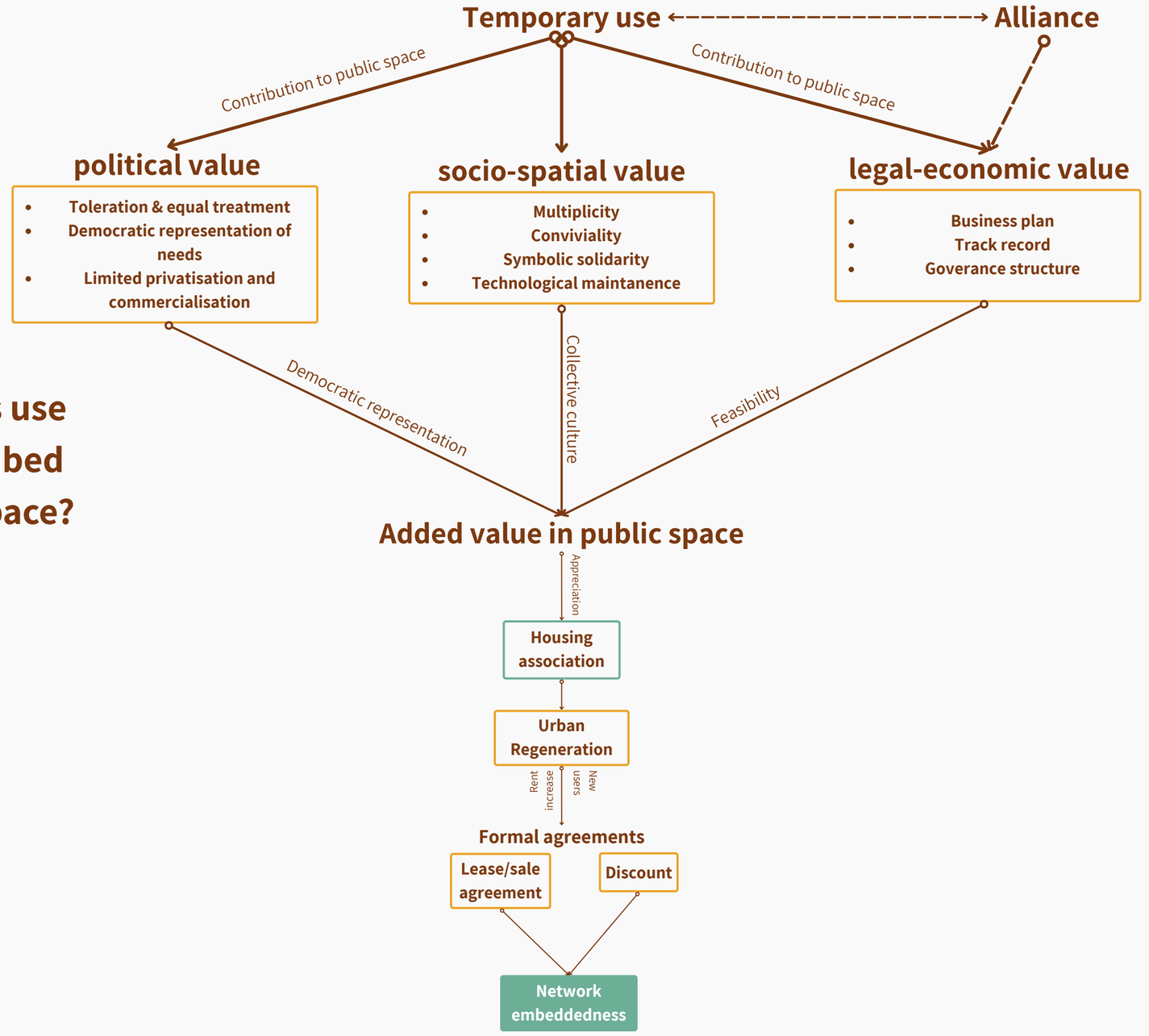


For network embeddedness with housing association

How can community organisations use urban regeneration as a way to embed their temporary use in the public space?



Limitations.

Transferability: specific for current Dutch urban context

Mental barriers: what does the community think?

Long-term impact is unknown: in collaborations and nearby regeneration

Risk: Antidote for displacement or another tool for gentrification?

Recommendations.

Willingness from **other parties** to trust and collaborate with community organisations

Informal approach from **municipalities and developers** towards citizens and communities

Collective thinking by **community organsiations**

Further research.

Long-term impact on welfare system

Develop principles for legal-economic value creation for different types of community initiated public space during URG

Development of design principles for community initiatied public space to create political and socio-spatial value during URG

Concrete collaboration models for community organisations and other stakeholders in URG

Embeddedness in public space for temporary use in other types of regeneration areas

Quantitative approach

Reflection.

Position in this process

Spotted in natural habitat (photographs by Kuiters, 2025)