

Who are they?

What do they want?

And why do they want it?



An explorative case study to the diverging  
and converging ideas on housing of attendees  
of the 2021 housing protest in Amsterdam

Marie Geeraedts



# Who are they? What do they want? And why do they want it?

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# Abstract

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The Dutch population is facing a housing crisis. This crisis has slowly been affecting housing options in the whole country, but it predominantly shows problems in the densely populated urban regions. In September 2021, approximately 15000 gathered in Amsterdam at a large housing protest: the Woonprotest. This research is an explorative case study to comprehend the pluriformity of ideologies and protest motives that came together at the Woonprotest. By means of a literature review, a photo analysis and qualitative interviews, the differences in housing ideologies and protest motives of the protesters are determined. Based on a literature review, the run-up to the housing crisis is reconstructed. A photo analysis determines the different types of protest attendees. By analysing the interviews, it appears that protesters clearly have three different ideologies when it comes to housing: communism, anarchism, and solving the crisis within the current system. However, the respondents' opinions on actual policy changes are very similar, even when it comes to radical ideas. Considering the protest motives, the respondents have equivalent purposes to protest. Protesters want to express their discontent with the housing shortage and they want something to change after the protest. The results of this research helps the movement to get a grip on its supporters. Further research is needed to understand the implications of having strong differences in ideologies within the housing movement.

**Keywords:** Housing crisis, Social movement, Protest motive, Ideology

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# 1 Introduction

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In future history books, “The Crisis Years” would be an appropriate title for the chapter covering the 2020’s. Today in 2023, the Dutch population has found itself in the middle of multiple major crises. To name a few: the decade started off with a pandemic; the environmental crisis has only become more urgent and branched to many sub-crises, e.g. the nitrogen crisis; people are unable to pay their energy bills due to the energy crisis; municipalities are refusing to accommodate refugees. Together with all of this, a large part of the Dutch population has become aware that we have found ourselves in a housing crisis. And it is this specific crisis that forms the basis of this thesis.

The housing crisis has slowly been affecting housing options in the whole country, but it predominantly shows problems in the densely populated regions (Boelhouwer, 2019). Especially metropolitan areas, for example Amsterdam, have great housing issues, involving: waiting times of 10+ years for social housing due to a shortage, the rents in the private sector are increasingly high and the housing prices per m2 are among the highest in Europe (Van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2019). Particularly for young residents, who generally have less financial means, housing options have narrowed (McKee, 2012). Although these

housing problems are only recently a much-debated topic, they are not new. Marginalised groups have been facing difficulties in finding housing for many years (Silver & Danielowski, 2019). However, currently it is not only a problem of the less privileged anymore, finding affordable housing is now nearly impossible for middle-income earners (Nijskens & Lohuis, 2019).

This growing number of aggrieved residents caused growing recognition of the problems and its reasons by dutch dwellers. The realisation that these causes lie within implicit policy choices of the past 35 years lead to the development of a genuine social movement. In September 2021, a series of large protests started in Amsterdam. The organisation wrote a manifesto in which they propose (or demand) policy changes. Protest marches followed in other cities as Rotterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht, Groningen, Nijmegen, Arnhem, Tilburg and Eindhoven. These protests all shared the same message for the government: make radical changes in the vision on housing (Het Woonmanifest - van woningmarkt naar woonrecht!, 2022). In this thesis, I will dive into the diversity of ideas on housing and the reasons to protest that came together during the housing protest in



Amsterdam, branded as the Woonprotest.

This research contributes to the existing literature on both social movements and housing. Social scientists have been doing research into e.g. the reasons for the occurrence of social movements and the effects they have on political developments (the Social Movement Theory). This body of literature also includes research on singular protests, being part of social movements. The vast body of literature covers knowledge on the impact of these protests. According to Hutter & Vliegthart (2016), protests appear to be an effective tool to have influence on politics. They analysed the relation between protests and the parliamentary agenda. They concluded that protests mainly affect the agenda of opposition parties. But the effects are not only limited to the opposition, Mualam & Max (2020) found a strong link between a series of Israeli housing protests in 2011 and subsequent government reforms. Besides such research on political impact, there have been studies around the motivations to participate in politics by protesting. Quaranta (2015), for example, established which factors influence the participation of Western European citizens in political protests. Quaranta makes the distinction between people's individual resources (socio-economic status), their dissatisfaction (personal/political), the mobilisation (membership of social organisations, political parties) and their values and orientations (ideologies). Wahlström et al. (2019) wrote a report on the composition, mobilisation and motives of the participants in Fridays For Futures climate protests in a quantitative study. Finding the latter type of research too case specific, Walgrave et al. (2013) created a theoretical typology that covers the motivations of people to participate in protests. Their study was

based on thousands of participants of different demonstrations with varying issues. So while much has been written on types of motivation little is still known about the similarities and differences in substantive ideas of protesters. This research contributes to the literature on activism by focussing on the ideological and motivational hetero/homogeneity present during one protest - the Woonprotest in Amsterdam of 2021. Therefore, the following research question will be the lead of this study.

*What do the attendees of the Woonprotest stand for and are their housing ideologies and protest motives diverging or converging?*

This question revolves around the fist of a series of protests. The Woonprotest took place in September 2021 and was followed by twelve other protest marches in different cities in the Netherlands (Woonstrijd in 2022! Overzicht Aankomende Landelijke En Lokale Woonacties, 2022). The attendance of the protest in Amsterdam was high and was claimed to be the largest housing protest since the squatting riots in the 80's (Verdaas, 2021). The organising action groups of the two biggest marches (in Amsterdam and Rotterdam) have now joined their efforts by formulating a manifesto as a housing movement. This consists of demands addressed to the governing coalition with the overarching claim that housing is a human right (Het Woonmanifest - van woningmarkt naar woonrecht!, 2022). Since the protests of 2021 the movement has been silent and, apart from small occasional anti-eviction protests, no actions have occurred. The current cabinet has presented and launched some policy changes since the Woonprotest. The national movement has informed their followers on

Instagram that they are not satisfied yet with the new plans by the minister of housing (Woonopstand, 2020).

This study is an explorative research to comprehend the pluriformity of the Woonprotest and with that part of the housing movement. What do they want and why do they want it? In the next chapter, I will outline the two theories that together form the theoretical framework of this research. Afterwards the qualitative approach of this research is justified and the methods are described. In the fourth chapter, the results are presented and analysed. Lastly, the research questions are answered and the outcomes will be discussed in relation to literature on the theory and other activism.

# 2 Theory

The aim of this research is to unravel the knot of concerns and interests that came together during the Woonprotest and to answer the research question:

*How are attendees of the Woonprotest divided in their political preferences; when it comes to their housing ideologies; and in their motives to join the protest?*

To be able to find an answer to this question, clarity is needed on the concept of *ideology* and *motive* in the context of political protest. Therefore, to get a grip on *ideology*, the framework by Pestoff (1992) is applied. His theory is based on the four models of society determined by theorists Streek & Schmitter (1985). These models are arranged

by Viktor Pestoff in a triangle, to display their interrelatedness. For the second concept, *motive*, I will first give a brief introduction on Social Movement Theory. Afterwards, I will show and elaborate on the typology on protest motives of Walgrave et al. (2013), which falls under this extensive Social Movement Theory.

## 2.1 Organisation of welfare services

The term ideology is defined by social policy scientist Abramovitz (2010) as “a relatively coherent and comprehensive system of ideas (beliefs, traditions, principles, and myths) about human nature, institutional arrangements, and social processes held by individuals and groups in society”. In this thesis, which revolves around a protest against housing policy, the concept of ideology is focused on beliefs about how a social welfare service should be organised. Pestoff (1992) composed a theory which sheds light on the ideological beliefs of protesters. It builds on sociological theories on social order models which distinguish the community, market, state and associations (Streek & Schmitter, 1985). Pestoff (1992) shows the interrelations of these four social institutions in the following

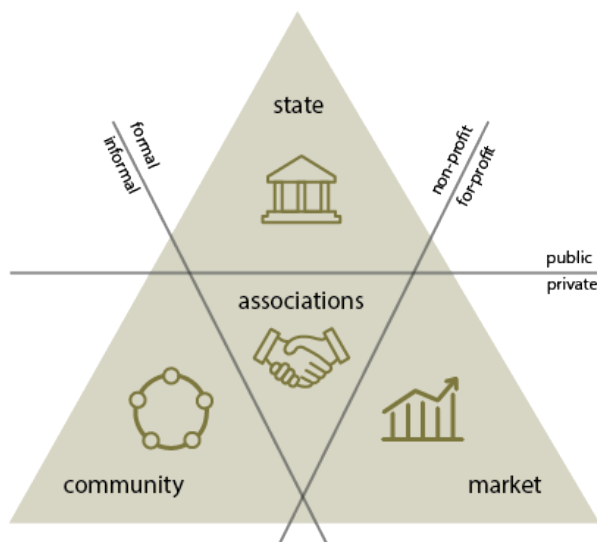


Figure 1 Triangle of Pestoff (1992)

triangle (figure 1). These distinctions form the basis of the discussion on the optimal provision of social welfare services such as housing. The four institutions are categorised by their location in a triangle that is divided by three dichotomic lines: formal/informal, profit/non-profit, public/private (Pestoff, 1992). This triangle is incorporated in the theoretical framework of this research on the premise that it includes the most prevailing ideas on how housing should be organised.

One of the institutions by which housing services can be organised is the state. This ideology promotes a top-down regulated society. The state is a formal, non-profit and public institution that regulates social welfare services through policies. Responsibilities for social security are taken out of the hands of the community by public agencies (Pestoff, 1992). The state-led approach of social security would facilitate equality (Hamlin, 2008). In this organisation structure the state has “a monopoly of legitimate coercion” to work towards bureaucratic stability as the main objective (Streek & Schmitter, 1985).

The second alternative to organise a society is by making it market-oriented. Part of this approach is the privatisation of social welfare services. The transition to this welfare pluralism gives space for social services to come from different sectors - statutory, voluntary, commercial and informal (Johnson, 1989). This would bring opportunities for innovations and flexibility. The competition of different entrepreneurs could result in offering the best fitting services for consumers (Streek & Schmitter, 1985). However, these formal, private, for-profit firms have a conflicting interest in economic resources. This economic focus can eventually lead to limitations of flexibility and innovations (Szultin, 1989).

The third option to organise the fulfilment of human needs is through the existence of co-operatives. These cooperatives - also ‘households’ or ‘community’ in Pestoff’s (1992) theory - are normally informal, non-profit and private organisations. The community, consumers of social welfare, is empowered to be part of the organisation of these services. The abilities of the community and its self-management are central in this post-communist type of society. Havel (1978) believes that not only the political, but also the financial part of societies needs to be organised informally. According to him, workers feel increasingly responsible for the work they deliver, when they take part in financial decision making. Working collectively on social welfare services would mean collective responsibility for the production of these services.

Lastly, when such a community organises itself more formally it will transform into the fourth type of institution. These non-profit, private, formal institutions include for example voluntary associations and foundations. Together with the aforementioned communities, these associations form the civil society (Pestoff, 1992). This is the collection of organisations that represent societal groups, opinions and interests. One of their unique functions is the large network they have, which facilitates for example contact with vulnerable groups.

## 2.2 Why do people protest?

In literature, there is a lot of theory on social movements. The sociological trend of Social Movement Theory emerged around the 1960’s with the classical thought that people would participate politically when experiencing psychological pressures. These pressures can

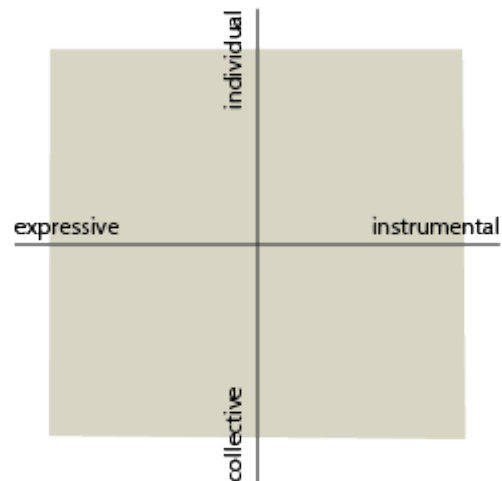
be caused by, for example, unemployment, urbanisation and wars. When a certain tension reaches a high point, people start engaging in politics by e.g. protests (Melucci, 1980; McAdam, 1999). These movements were first seen as unorganised, spontaneous occurrences. Their unpredictableness and emotional subjects made classical social movement theorists think of the movements as nonrational (Morris, 2000). In this sociological theory, a distinction has been made between Social Movement Theory (SMT) and New Social Movement Theory (NSM). In SMT, the issues that are being addressed are based on 'materialistic' demands, such as economic inequalities and the movements were believed to be drawn together in the working class. Around 1960, social movements emerged that did not fit these characteristics. When theorists could not match the contemporary movements to the former leading Marxist social movement theory, SMT branched off to NSM. Movements that are explained by NSM are characterised by having demands on issues about "quality of life rather than economic redistribution" (Pichardo, 1997). These modern movements are focussed on identity and human rights.

## 2.3 Protest motives

SMT and NSM are different because of the issues movements can revolve around. However, the typology of Walgrave et al. (2013) is applicable to both as it zooms in on the motives of protesters within a specific movement. Walgrave et al. divide the possible motives of protesters in two axes of which are easily measurable for a case study like the Woonprotest.

The two dimensions of motives can be presented in the two axes in figure 2. It is important to keep in mind that the dimensions

fill a spectrum. A motive is never completely instrumental or expressive, individual or collective (Walgrave et al., 2013). It is often somewhere in between.



**Figure 2** Typology of protest motives (Walgrave et al., 2013)

### 2.3.1 Instrumental - Expressive

This dimension is about the goal of protesting being intrinsic or extrinsic. People who demonstrate with instrumental motives are present at a protest with a clear aim. They have a goal that they hope to achieve with the protest. The benefit of the action will become clear at a later time, for example, protesting against cutting down trees. Activists have an obvious aim and are only successful when it is reached. The goal of a protest with instrumental motives is therefore extrinsic (Walgrave et al., 2013).

When protesting with expressive motives, the protest is the goal itself. The main motive is about expressing feelings for certain topics. How the world responds to the protest is for protesters with this motive not important. For example, the demonstrations where people gathered to show support to Ukraine after the Russian invasion - protesters were aware that the war is not going to end because of the protest, but still they want to express

how they feel about it. The goal of protests with expressive motives is therefore intrinsic (Walgrave et al., 2013).

### 2.3.2 Individual - Collective

Aside from whether someone's motives are expressive or instrumental, there is another dimension in which motives can be categorised. Whether it is due to expressive or instrumental motivation, protesters can act out of individual or collective motives. In the case of individual purposes, someone can stand up for their personal issues, to make their own life better or to express their own feelings about something (Walgrave et al., 2013). For example, an unvaccinated protester joins a protest against showing a QR-code to enter cafes, cinemas, etc in pandemic times. This person is possibly protesting for individual purposes.

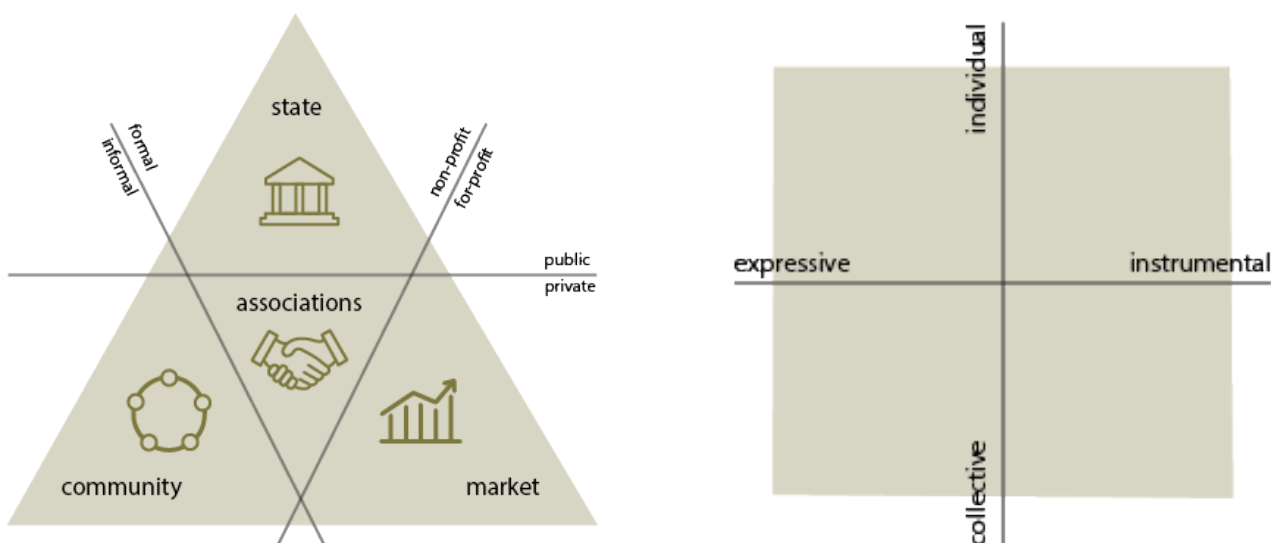
When people are protesting with collective motives, the goal is not necessarily personal, but for a group they belong to, or people with the same circumstances. This could entail improving something for or expressing feelings on behalf of a group (Walgrave et al., 2013). For example, during the Black Lives Matter protests - people, both black and white, gather not only for individual goals, but for the whole BIPOC community.

## 2.4 Theoretical Framework

This research is in the service of finding an answer to the question: *What do the attendees of the Woonprotest stand for and are their housing ideologies and protest motives diverging or converging?*

The two concepts *ideologies* and *motives* obtain their meaning in this academic context by the theories of Pestoff (1992) and Walgrave et al. (2013). The four institutions that constitute Pestoff's triangle are interpreted as different models for the provision of housing in the Netherlands. The results of this research will be analysed from the perspective of this triangle combined with the two axes of protest motives by Walgrave et al. (2013). These two theories constitute the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The *ideologies* of the attendees of the Woonprotest will be determined in light of the different social order models that are illustrated in the triangle. In the same way, the protest motives of the attendees will be researched by means of the two axes of Walgrave et al. (2013), bringing the concept *motive* down to these two clear dimensions (figure 3).



**Figure 3** Theoretical framework for this thesis



# 3 Methodology

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As previously formulated, this research revolves around finding an answer to the following research question:

*What do the attendees of the Woonprotest stand for and are their housing ideologies and protest motives diverging or converging?*

The main research question is broken down into the following sub-questions to give structure to the research.

1. How did the housing crisis evolve in the Netherlands?
2. Which political societal actors were represented during the Woonprotest in Amsterdam?
3. Which are the ideologies on housing politics the attendees represent and how do they differ and coincide?
4. What are the protest motives of these attendees and how do they differ and coincide?

This research is a case study. The goal is to see what is behind the main message of a protest and unravel the different ideas of the protest's political attendees. The case study for this research is the housing protest of September 2021 in Amsterdam, which will be referred to

as 'the Woonprotest' in this thesis. This case is relevant for this research as it was the first of a series of housing protests in the Netherlands and therefore set the tone for the following housing protests. The Woonprotest in Amsterdam was also the largest of these protests, with the municipality of Amsterdam estimating the attendance to be 15.000 people (NOS, 2021). The answer to the research question will be found through qualitative methods. Qualitative research is characterised by valuing research subjects in their 'unicity' (Heyink & Tymstra, 1993). The aim of this analysis is to collect a broad overview of the motives and political ideologies of protesters. The interest of the study lies not in the quantification of certain opinions, but in establishing the wide variety of it. Therefore, this thesis research involves multiple qualitative methods to find answers to my research questions.

## 3.1 Data Collection

This research is performed by use of primary and secondary sources. The research started with a brief literature review on the housing crisis and how it has come so far. This review gave an answer to the first sub-question. This was an important start to be able to understand what the protest is exactly

protesting. For the desk research to the crisis I used the scholar search engine Google Scholar. For this literature review, keywords were used such as: 'housing crisis', 'housing stock', 'housing agenda', 'housing protest', 'housing shortage', 'urban housing market'. Literature was included in the review when it described a cause for or implication of the housing crisis in the Netherlands, or a global trend.

The second phase of the research involved a photo analysis. This analysis answered sub-question 2: *Which political societal actors were represented during the Woonprotest in Amsterdam?*

A photo analysis of pictures taken during the protest, gave an overview of the attendees. Primary data was collected for this phase by finding as many photos of the protest as possible on the internet. The most results were obtained by searching on instagram with the query #woonprotest. This resulted in all the photos people uploaded on instagram with the woonprotest tag. Approximately 650 of these photos were of the Woonprotest in Amsterdam.

The third step of data gathering was done through interviews. The interviewees were selected on the basis of the previous photo analysis. The initial goal was to interview at least one member of all present organisations. These were contacted through instagram, the contact details of national or local political organisations, or through my personal network. These contacting methods did not work out for every organisation. Some outreaches were not responded to. Therefore, members of GroenLinks, ROOD, de Vrije Bond or NCPN were not interviewed. However, I did make sure that at least sympathisers of these parties (i.e. mother parties, allies etc.) of these organisations were included. Eventually eight people were interviewed. They were asked questions about

their motives to protest and political ideologies in order to answer sub-questions 3 and 4. The conversations were semi-structured. This ensured that the questions that needed to be asked were asked, but there was flexibility to follow the interviewee to topics they found important (Rose, 1994). The interviewees were also asked to respond to some of the answers other interviewees gave. In Appendix 7.1 the guiding questions can be found. The interviews lasted on average 45 minutes and were either online, due to long distances, or face-to-face. Appendix 7.2 shows an overview of the interviewees. In all interviews, the first question was: "Can I record this interview?" They all gave permission.

## 3.2 Data Analysis

The photos of the Woonprotest were analysed to determine which political or activist groups were present. All the pictures were studied one by one and political groups were identified on the basis of flags, sweaters, shirts, face masks, and signs with logos of organisations. Also other aspects of the protest were noted to create a more complete image of the Woonprotest (e.g. speeches on stage, signs of attendees). The number of people that a certain group contained was not recorded - in this qualitative research, the quantity of opinions is not of interest. The results of the analysis were put in an overview which can be found in Appendix 7.3.

The analysis of the interviews started with transcribing the recordings of the conversations verbatim. To be able to structurally analyse the large amount of information, the interviews were coded by use of the software ATLAS.ti. The first time going through the transcriptions was by open coding. Key words, sentences or paragraphs were highlighted and labelled with a fitting code name. Secondly, by axial coding,



the codes that were created during open coding were clustered and renamed if needed into code groups. The coding of the interviews was mainly performed to thoroughly get familiar with the content of the large amount of data. The structural coding ensured that the interviews were entirely read, understood and compared. This gave confidence to draw conclusions without relying heavily on statements drawn from coding.

### 3.3 Limitations

Even though the research was performed as carefully as possible, there are still some limitations that should be taken into account when reflecting on the results. They revolve mostly around the interviews that were conducted. First of all, the number of interviewees is not dizzying. The research is a qualitative one, so the content of the interviews is more important than the number of people that were included in the research. However, having interviewed more people would of course have led to a more detailed conclusion of the study. Secondly, it is remarkable that except for one person, all interviewees are male. In the search to find people to include in the research, this was not the intention. With the importance of diverse interviewees in mind, the outreaches on instagram were done to people of all genders. Many, however, did not respond - especially women didn't. When organisations were contacted to ask for someone who attended the protest, only men were proposed. Although a more varied group was preferred, the saying *don't look a gift horse in the mouth* is also true for the search for interviewees in master theses. Finally, in the interviews, many questions were on the protest that took place on the 12th of September 2021. The moment these respondents were interviewed, it was already 10 months later. The experiences could

have been distorted over this long period of time. Part of the interview was conducted with pictures of the protest to reduce the impact of this limitation, but it can still not be ignored.

### 3.4 Positionality

The topic of this research, the housing crisis and its protest, is an important political issue. Having chosen this research field, already proves my personal interest in this matter which inevitably led to me having priorly formed my own opinion. This opinion is already shaped by, for example, with which expectations I grew up in a family with social-democratic parents. And of course, among many other factors, also my personality is involved. This includes for example my curiosity towards people's opinions and especially of those who think very differently than me.

During the setup of the research, my approach to this subject is influenced by the position I have towards the housing crisis and the Woonprotest that I non-objectively attended, being unaware that it would be the case study of my thesis. In the meetings with my supervisors, the research moved in certain directions that were naturally influenced by their background, opinions and interests. While doing the literature review and interviews, I was aware of my bias of having a (to some extent even radical) leftist ideology. My position in relation to the housing crisis impacts my interpretation of the literature and on how I approached the interviewees and my formulation of questions. During the interviews, I was actively forcing myself to be equally open to all the interviewees and to be equally critical and comprehensive towards the answers the interviewees gave me. Objectivity in political research should not be seen as a goal itself, but the inevitable subjectivity should be acknowledged and the results handled accordingly.

# 4 Results

In order to present the results in a clear structure, first the outcomes of the literature are offered in a chronology. Afterwards, the results of the visual analysis and qualitative interviews will be presented following the structure of the title of this thesis: Who are they? What do they want? Why do they want it?

## 4.1 A brief history of housing policy and protests

In this section I will provide a brief history of Dutch housing problems and the few housing protests. This is based on a review on the existing literature on housing and its policy in the Netherlands. The section is chronologically structured, from the housing act of 1901 until the new policy launches of housing minister Hugo de Jonge in 2022. Each step in the build-up of the current crisis and the formation of its implied ideologies are compared to the theory on social welfare organisation. I will use the framework of Pestoff (1992) (figure 4). In the history of housing policy, the vision of politics shifted across the triangle. They sketch the context of the research by finding an answer to the following questions: What are the

fundamentals of the Dutch housing system? What happened since the housing protest in 1980 and why did 15.000 people feel the urge to protest again 41 years later?



Figure 4 Framework by Pestoff (1992)

### 4.1.1 Changing political visions

Around the start of the 20th century, people were living under appalling conditions. The industrialisation activated a large flight to urban areas. Industrial cities had lots of employment possibilities, but the housing situation was not ready for the fast increase of inhabitants. This resulted in impaired health and wellbeing of urban inhabitants. Around this time, the first housing associations were founded which focussed on affordable and qualitative houses without commercial interest. In 1901, the housing act was accepted after a political lobby for qualitative housing. Within this law, the non-profit, private associations received financial benefits from the state if they would serve the purpose of

developing qualitative and affordable housing in return. This agreement was in the middle of the three types of demands from society: the confessionalists, having the ideology of the emphasis on civil society; the liberals, not wanting a controlling state; the social-democrats, not wanting a controlling market (Elsinga & Jonkman, 2021). In the triangle established by Pestoff, these associations form the middle of the figure - in between the state, the market and the community (figure 5).



**Figure 5** Controlling associations

During the reconstruction after the second world war, the housing system moved from the centre of the welfare organisation triangle towards the top (figure 6). Although the associations still had a strong position in executing the solution for the housing shortage, the state became more controlling by setting policies. In response to this shortage, the national squatter movement grew massively and was estimated to comprise 20.000 people in 1980 (Priemus, 2011). In the run-up to 1980, a series of large violent evictions of squatted houses were executed, mainly in amsterdam. On the 30th of april 1980, queen Beatrix was crowned and the tension between squatters and police came to a climax.

This day was not only characterised by her investiture, but also the squatter movement came together in Amsterdam for National Squatter Day. Their protest was summarised in the slogan: “Geen woning, geen kroning” (No housing, no coronation). The protest against the housing shortage ended in violent riots (Priemus, 2011). These were the last demonstrations on housing until the Woonprotest of September 2021 (Verdaas, 2021).



**Figure 6** Shift towards state control

At the time of the housing crisis in the 1980’s and the large protests and riots, the associations were the executors of state policy and the crisis was tackled by building social housing (Elsinga & Jonkman, 2021; Huisman & Kelk, 2008). In the late 1980’s, this political mindset changed, the established social democracy slowly made way for neoliberal ideologies (Uitermark, 2009). As shown in table 1, the social housing sector shrunk in between 1985 and 1993 (Elsinga & Wassenberg, 2014). The rather conservative and right-wing political parties saw the housing problem as a qualitative issue rather than quantitative. They claimed that the problem did not entail a shortage, but instead people’s housing preferences could not be met (Heerma, 1989).

	1947	1956	1967	1975	1985	1993	2005	2010
Owner-occupied	28	30	33	39	43	48	53	59
Private rent	61	46	31	20	14	11	10	9
Social rent	11	24	36	41	43	41	37	34

**Table 1** Percentages tenure type by year built (Elsinga & Wassenberg, 2014)

1989 marked a “turning point” in the Dutch housing policy (Boelhouwer, 2003). The then State Secretary for Public Housing, Enneüs Heerma, published the “Memorandum on Housing for the 1990s”. In this memorandum, policies were presented that focussed on the liberation of the housing system. The memorandum included the cut of subsidies for constructing houses, making housing associations more market dependent, financial promotion of homeownership, deregulation of the rental sector and the sale of social housing (Van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2019; Uitermark, 2009; Heerma, 1989). These political events around the 1980’s are characteristics of the vision shift from the top of Pestoff’s triangle (the state) towards the bottom right corner, representing the market (Figure 7). This is in line with the general course social democracy followed in the Netherlands. In 1995, the social democratic Prime Minister announced to his party that it was time to take another path, the Third Way (Kok, 1995). This globally spread neo-liberal ideology contains a combination of both an ‘active social investment state’ and ‘a positive view of the abilities of the market’ (Green-Pedersen et al., 2001).



**Figure 7** Shift towards market control

This ideological transition and the additional policy changes had consequences in the housing sector. The previous table 1 shows this increase of homeownership alongside the decrease of social renting in numbers. These liberal policy changes did not only have

an impact on the housing market, but also increased social inequalities (Oudenampsen & Mellink, 2021; Boelhouwer, 2019). The global shift towards financialisation of housing, changed policy in the interest of homeowners. These changes in housing policy turned houses into safe investment opportunities (Aalbers et al., 2021). Simultaneously, the privatisation of housing associations resulted in a substantially shrunken social housing stock, especially in Amsterdam (Hochstenbach & Ronald, 2020). This all together led to a stronger need for, and thus room for growth of, the private rental market and its rental prices. This, in its turn, made the buy-to-let business in the private rental sector even more lucrative. Altogether, it is a perfect combination to induce a large housing shortage.

In 1995, the government suggested ending the subsidies to housing associations, in order to make them financially independent. The discussion that arose from this proposal went on between the liberals and the social democrats that argued respectively for smaller social housing stock, and a more active role of the government. After the political stamp of State Secretary Heerma, the decisions in housing policy continued in the liberal direction of the European Commission, further reducing social housing capacity (Elsinga & Lind, 2013).

The financial crisis of 2008 had a great impact on housing in the Netherlands. It put urban construction projects into financial difficulties. These projects were delayed or cancelled (Van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2019). Van Gent & Hochstenbach also see the financial crisis as an opportunity for the neo-liberal ideology to get an even stronger foothold in the housing policy. One example they mention is the so-called landlord levy - a measure that obliges institutions who rent out

more than 50 houses to pay a certain tax. The money was needed to reduce the state debt. However, this levy hit especially the housing associations. With this response to the crisis, the housing system is still located in the market-corner of the triangle of Pestoff (figure 8).

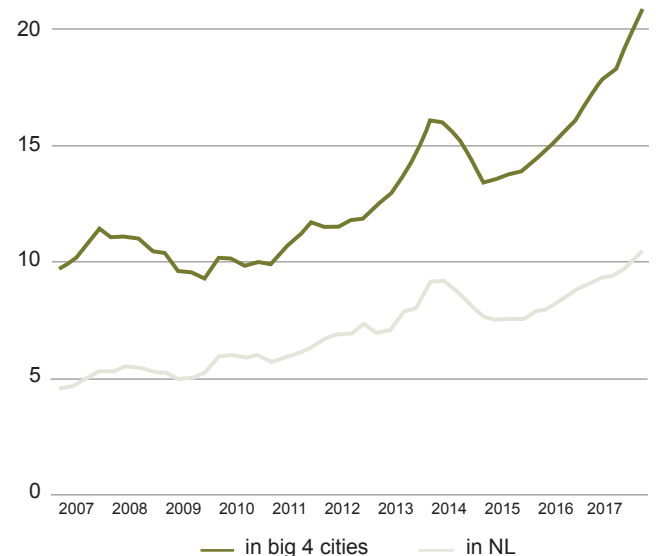


**Figure 8** Still market control

The SER - the social and economic council of the Netherlands - published in 2010 an ambitious advising report for the dutch government about a reform of the housing market. The advice includes reformatations in the buying sector, rental sector and housing associations. For example, reducing the financial risks when buying a house by discouraging purchases with borrowed money or putting restrictions on the free rental sector (SER, 2010). The council aims for a well-functioning market in which proper housing is available for everyone. They advise striving for neutrality between renting and buying, mortgage debts should be discouraged, they argue, and to ensure the stakes of tenants, constraints should be imposed on the free market. However, the solution is still sought in the market corner of Pestoff's triangle.

Even though reports like this argue for a thorough reform of the housing market, the political support for this was little. In 2010, the ministry of housing was lifted in the belief that housing problems would soon be solved

by the liberated market mechanisms. This political direction can be explained by the population's high number of homeowners and their electoral preference. Homeowners tend to vote for more liberal parties. The value of property increases their feeling of economic independence which makes them feel like they don't need a welfare state. Therefore they vote for parties who cut budgets for social spendings (Ansell, 2014). In 2012, a new government was formed. The main goal of the liberal minister responsible for housing of this government, Stef Blok, was to reduce the social housing sector even further. He was responsible for the introduction of the above-mentioned landlord levy in 2013, leaving housing associations with a sombre financial perspective, deterring investments in enhancement of their housing stock (Hoekstra & Boelhouwer, 2014). This shrunken sector became only available for the lowest income groups. An opportunity appeared for institutional investors and private landlords to provide housing for the middle-class, promoted by the cabinet. Figure 9 shows the large increase in percentage of house purchases with the intention to rent out the acquired property. (Hochstenbach, 2022).



**Figure 9** Percentages buy-to-let (Hochstenbach, 2022)



With the direction in which the housing policy was steered, ABF research (2020) estimated a housing shortage of more than 300.000 houses in 2022. Exploring possible ways out of this crisis, reports and papers have been published with suggestions to release the pressure on the housing market. To fill the gap between those with a comfortable housing situation and the ones who still have to obtain a position in the market, policy reforms are needed (Boelhouwer, 2019). For example, regionalisation of policy is suggested, because the market is characterised by local differences. Also the construction of new houses should occur in the already existing urban areas or by using vacant buildings in those cities. Lastly, policy makers are encouraged to make more use of the unique social housing sector - give it more financial means by e.g. eliminating the landlord levy (Boelhouwer, 2019). Lennartz et al. (2019) have set up a policy paper proposing measures to reduce extreme house prices and high rents. They have one main solution for the housing crisis in the Netherlands: policy should be focussed on “massively increase the housing supply in urban areas”. They argue that the crisis is caused by uneven supply/demand which can be solved by building more houses. Kajsa Ollongren (2019), the former Dutch minister of Interior and Kingdom relations, wrote a short article on the dutch housing agenda. She sees the increase of the housing supply as a necessity in the long term housing policy. Not many houses have been built in years of the financial crisis, therefore it is even more urgent to rapidly construct houses (Ollongren, 2019).

The most recent developments in housing happened right after the large protest that is at the centre of this thesis. At the time of the Woonprotest, a new coalition was yet to be formed. Four months later, the new cabinet was

presented and involved a separate minister of housing for the first time since Stef Blok. The new minister, Hugo de Jonge, presented his program Affordable housing. In this report he proposes a strategy with three main pillars: 1) more affordable houses for people with a middle income 2) tackling high housing costs for low-income groups 3) better protection of tenants and buyers. De Jonge wants to achieve these three goals through many policy adjustments, including the following: 30% social housing per municipality; 40% of newly constructed houses should be either middle rent or affordable to buy; rent protection; buy-out protection; higher taxes for private landlords; elimination of gift-exemption (NL: jubelton); making houses more sustainable (Volkshuisvesting en Ruimtelijke Ordening, 2022).

At the time of writing this thesis, the first new laws have been launched. One of the first was the ability for municipalities to obligate self-occupation after the purchase of property. This decreases the possibilities to buy-to-let. Another new rule is the regulation of the now free middle rent segment. In 2024, the point-based system on which social housing rent prices are determined is stretched to €1000. This means that many houses won't be allowed to cost more than this maximum of €1000 per month. Consequently, a large sector becomes significantly more affordable whilst commercially renting out housing becomes less viable. All further regulations aim to release the pressure on the housing market by reducing the profitability of investments in real estate (Volkshuisvesting en Ruimtelijke Ordening, 2022).

## 4.2 The housing protest

The build-up of the housing crisis, as reconstructed in the previous section, reached a milestone on the 12th of September 2021. A large housing protest was organised and attracted 15.000 people. From the 600 pictures that were taken during the protest and posted online, it was possible to extract an overall impression of the protest, to see who was present and to get a first indication of what people wanted / aimed for. For a more profound idea of the beliefs of protesters, some attendees of the protest were interviewed.

The results of this analysis and the interviews are structured as follows: first an overview is given of different attendees (who was present?). Then, their ideas of the causes of the crisis are explained, followed by the effects of the crisis. Hereafter, the ideals and demands of the attendees are presented (what do they want?). Lastly, the motives to protest are described (why do they want it?).

An overview of the interviewees and their corresponding political organisations can be found in Appendix 7.2.

### 4.2.1 Who was present at the protest?

A range of political organisations was identified, especially covering the centre-left side of the political spectrum (figure 10). The most liberal parties that were present were the Jonge Democraten (JD) and Volt. On the other side of the spectrum, there was BIJ1, the communist party Nieuwe Communistische Partij Nederland (NCPN), with their youth movement the Communistische Jongeren Beweging (CJB) and the anarchist association, the Vrije Bond. Notable is the absence of the governing parties of the last cabinet, D66, CDA and the VVD. Finally no right-wing parties were present.



Figure 10 Attending political organisations



The non-political organisations that were present during the protest, are mainly serving the interest of groups that experience the housing crisis (figure 11). The Woonbond for example, is a tenants-rights association that aims for qualitative and affordable housing and a strong position for tenants. The large group of homeless people is represented by De Regenbooggroep. Similarly, students and employees were represented by student organisations and the Trade Union Confederation.

Aside from these political and non-political organisations, many people were present at the Woonprotest without being linked to a specific group. With these individual protesters however, it is impossible to classify them based on only their appearance in a photo.

A complete overview of the depicted organisations is listed in Appendix 7.3.

#### 4.2.2 What is their explanation for the crisis?

Next to the academic literature on the run-up to the crisis, the protesters also have their own ideas on how this crisis has evolved. Having created a first impression of the protest and its protesters and their aims, more detailed opinions of some of the attendees were collected.

Considering the causes of the crisis and the problems it induces, the answers of the respondents can be brought back to a few factors that form the root cause of the crisis. In short, the interviewees blame “neoliberalism” and commercialisation of housing; the transition of social housing associations towards being more market dependent; specific political parties or even politicians; the capitalist economic system; and the concept of property.

*“It started years ago, actually with the rise of neoliberalism and the commercialisation of public housing” - SP member*

In the majority of the interviews the liberalisation and commercialisation of housing was given as a reason for the development of the crisis. The interviewee from the SP summarises this in one sentence. This opinion is widely shared among members of other parties. The representatives of diverging parties as BIJ1, PvdA and JD use the same kind of words. They also see liberalisation as the greatest cause. However, the member of the most liberal party, JD, is not specifically negative on liberalisation in itself, but thinks the pursuit of the ideology has gone too far. The BIJ1 member argues how “handing over housing to the free market” has doubled the house prices. Other interviewees also link the liberalisation to the high housing prices.



Figure 11 Attending non-political organisations



*“Associations are in some kind of imaginary field in between private and state. They are strictly regulated, but still private firms.”*

- CJB member

In the interviews, some respondents think the liberalisation of the association sector also contributed to the shortage of affordable housing. In line with the liberal ideology, the state cut back on financial support for the social housing sector and put a tax on having more than 50 houses, adds the CJB member. Similarly, the members of the PvdA and Volt mention this so-called landlord levy as being harmful especially for housing associations. The PvdA member elaborates on this by saying how these measures made the social housing sector shrink and how “it became only available to a small group, for those with the lowest income”. In the meantime, municipalities were reluctant in building social housing, because the financial profit for the city out of this type of housing is small. The reduction of the social housing stock has therefore led to long waiting times. For the PvdA member, this shrinkage and the aforementioned liberalisation induced the fast and large growth of the private rental sector which made the renting sector expensive.

*“There are so many tools to act with, and these are political choices. This is reluctance, not because it is impossible.”* - PvdD member

The member of the CJB assigns the liberalisation of housing to an individual person. He blames former VVD minister of housing, Stef Blok for liberalising the rents and sees this as the reason for the increase of the rents and housing prices. He is not the only one - also the SP member mentions Blok when describing his interpretation of the cause of the crisis. The PvdD interviewee criticises “the whole VVD” for being the largest governing party during the last ten years in which the crisis became most poignant.

As the most fundamentally critical view on housing, the member of the CJB criticises “the whole financial system” that the housing sector is leaning on. His statement is best illustrated by his own words:

*“The housing prices have increased enormously in the last decade. This is mainly because all of us were gradually able to borrow more money. So everyone gets themselves more and more in debt. It has become some kind of pyramid game. You only win when the prices stay this high, so you need to make sure others also buy in equally high. So those who are in the system, benefit from the system to stay as it is.”*

With this criticism he looks at the bigger picture, the problems he sees in the capitalist system. The way our economy is set up and how it splits up our society in two - those who benefit from it and those who don't.

*“It is strange that we agreed that because someone owns a piece of land, they can appropriate all the value we all created together.”* - CJB member

It is the same interviewee as the one that expressed his critique on capitalism that also sees the problems of property. He thinks land is only valuable because of it being surrounded by a city, or other facilities that are important to a lot of people. And because these facilities are a product of society, he thinks it is strange that people make profit by having land near these facilities. One of the Volt members says he does not agree that property is the problem. However, he does think that property is distributed unequally.

Some of these causes for the crisis are recognised in signs that people were holding during the protest. Liberalisation is being blamed by signs like “Fuck liberalisation” or signs condemning the market “Fuck the housing market”. Others hold the VVD responsible by having signs that say “Stop voting VVD” (figure 12).



Figure 12 Signs addressing causes

#### 4.2.2 What are the effects of the crisis?

The protest started with a program of on stage speakers and artists (figure 13). The speeches illustrated the versatility of the crisis and the different types of problems it entails. Two residents of a demolished social housing neighbourhood told about how they had to make space for houses for wealthier people. A delegate of Verdedig Noord explained a similar problem of how initial residents of some neighbourhoods are pushed out of their area, because houses are only built for those with more money.

One of the speakers was an undocumented woman who explained the hardship of oppressed groups in cities and

the psychological effects of homelessness. Another speech mentioned the rights people lose when they cannot provide an address, and the amount of ‘ghost residents’ this system creates.

There were speeches on the difficulty for students to find housing, but also certain essential professions that cannot afford a house in some urban areas - which creates e.g. a shortage of teachers.

A punk band sang about gentrification, segregation, anti-capitalism, anti-VVD. A rapper spoke and rapped about the intersectionality of the problem. The housing crisis is not an independent crisis, but related to the climate crisis, (institutional) racism, sexism, ableism. Some members of the organisation ended the program by stressing the importance of protests, gathering and raising your voice.

A complete overview of the depicted speakers and artists is listed in Appendix 7.3.3.







Figure 13 Stage program addressing versatility of crisis

## 4.3 What do the protesters want?

After having presented the various attendees of the protest and their ideas on the crisis, I will give an overview on the ideals and demands of the respondents. First the ideologies are explained - how do they think the provision of housing should be organised? Secondly, the more detailed demands of the interviewees are given - which policy measures would they want to be implemented?

### 4.3.1 What are their visions?

The interviewees of the different parties have ideals that can be structured in two strongly diverging views - following the anarchist ideology; following the communist ideology - and a few rather moderate ideals, with the aim to change housing within the current system.

*"We look for example at how things used to be organised. The Soviet Union is an example."*

- CJB member

It did not come as a surprise that the member of the communist movement mentions the Soviet Union as a good example. He refers to how in the USSR housing was state property and people paid only 10% of their monthly income to rent. Ideally, in the Netherlands, the state would have a similar position and

would own more houses. The member of the JD, a rather liberal party, surprisingly speaks positively about communism. He says that in education ideologies such as socialism and communism are made terrifying, but when looking at the fundamentals of communism - equality in goods - he thinks it is a legitimate world vision. However, he is cautious in saying if he completely agrees with it. One of the two Volt members does not believe in the communist narrative. He thinks history has shown that it is a malfunctioning system.

*“Regulation of rents? I don’t know, I think I am more anarchistic than that. ... I don’t think everything needs to be controlled by the state all the time.”* - BIJ1 member

The person that was interviewed as a member of BIJ1 said immediately that they envisioned a system in which people pay for housing depending on their income, not necessarily on the quality or location of the house. With this they want to avoid that underprivileged people are automatically forced to the outskirts of cities. Asking about regulation they stated the above quote. They were struggling a bit with the word ‘regulation’, being a self-proclaimed anarchist. Eventually, they agreed on a more regulated rent sector, but only regulation on the top side, not the bottom. The SP member that was interviewed proposed something that fits in the anarchist ideology. He said that the solution should be formed within the idea that the crisis is a collective issue. He suggests making housing a common resource in a juridical construction in which everyone in the community is the owner resource.

*“We are a society built on capitalism, so we need to change it based on this system. Instead of dissenting from the current system”* - Volt member

Some interviewees are not as radical in their ideals than others. One of the Volt members says there is a division within the movement between those who want to change housing within the current system and those who want to change the whole system. He agrees with the latter. He advocates a housing sector like they have in Vienna. Aside from a social housing sector they have another segment in which the rent is limited, the subsidised segment. The government supports the construction of houses for this sector, when the profit made out of it is invested in either improving the quality of living conditions or the construction of more housing. This creates a large majority of renters among the Viennese residents and therefore in the political debate.

Aside from this specific Viennese example, more interviewees see the solution for the crisis in a stronger and larger social housing sector. The SP member for example wants local municipalities to make sure more social housing is being built. He also speaks nostalgically of the Dutch word *Volkshuisvesting* - Public Housing in english. According to him the concept of public housing was let go of in political decisions. The PvdA member also speaks out about the need for a larger social housing sector.

Another more moderate ideal that was shared among the interviewees of the JD, PvdA, PvdD, and BIJ1 is the aim to have mixed and liveable neighbourhoods. The JD member thinks top down organisation will not entail social cohesion. A more organic way of organisation is needed in neighbourhoods to make encounters happen between different income groups. The PvdD member sees this in his work as a social worker. He says that neighbourhoods that are segregated by income indeed lack social cohesion.

### 4.3.2 Which policy changes do they propose?

The established three strongest ideologies of the interviewees are different in radicality and implementation. However, the distinctness in their actual ideas about policy adjustments seems to be less apparent than in the ideologies. Some proposals were again more radical than others. However, the interviewees seemed to agree with each other on most ideas.

*“In the solution, we need to focus on the group that has been in a crisis for ten years already, not on those who have been feeling it for only 2-3 years.”* - Volt member

Any political decision that is being made for housing should be made with in mind the groups that were the first to notice the housing shortage, according to one of the interviewed Volt members. Also the BIJ1 member finds it important to focus on people with little money, they stand up for creating opportunities for less privileged people to be able to live in places they want to. The interviewees spoke about their own experiences in the crisis, but none of them thought their situation was the main concern. They were all conscious of the more urgent cases of society. What this urgency means, does differ: some link urgency to homeless people, others to international students or young people unable to buy a house.

*“The solution is quite simple to me. First of all, all rents should be regulated.”* - PvdA member

The member of the PvdA has a clear three step approach to the solution for the crisis. Regulation of all rents is the first measure to take according to him. All interviewees agree that rents need to be maximised or regulated differently. Some hope this results in the end of the high housing prices and makes housing a

less interesting investment asset.

The second step of the approach of the PvdA member is making sure the social housing sector has the financial means to grow. This increase of the social housing stock is for many interviewees an important policy measure. The JD member thinks the percentages of required social housing in new construction projects should be made higher. He says this is a local issue as the required balance between social, middle and free sector differs per municipality and its composition of residents.

Thirdly, the PvdA member believes in “unequal investments for equal chances.” All neighbourhoods should be available for all income groups. Therefore some areas need more financial aid to obtain all required facilities. As an example for this, the JD member refers to a successful project in Eindhoven where young families and recently graduated people could live in a problem area for a lower rent. In return, they were expected to create a facility in the neighbourhood for all residents.

*“A group of people is being affected in their fundamental rights. I don't think it is a constitutional right to be a slumlord, but it is to live.”* - PvdD member

The interviewees had a shared aversion against commercial landlords. More specifically, the investors who own multiple properties and rent them out for high prices. It was the first thing that came out of the BIJ1 member quickly after finishing the question on required policy measures. The PvdD member has the same clear opinion on these so-called slumlords. Other interviewees do not explicitly say this group of property owners needs to be tackled, but they do agree that houses are not supposed to be an interesting investment asset. The CJB member wants to find a way to make sure the investors are financially harmed, for example with high taxes.



*“JA21 spoke about the idea of building a new city. Weirdly enough it is not the worst idea. All existing cities are full, if we don’t want to remove the historical heritage.”* - Volt member

One of the Volt members that were interviewed, proposed an idea that the conservative right-wing party JA21 suggested. The idea is to solve the crisis by building a new city. He says that the existing cities are full, so building new cities would create more housing opportunities. The PvdD member thinks this is a good idea. He says constructing new houses is the first measure to take and he believes that the Dutch land is not used properly. Therefore, building a new city in a good location would be a good idea according to him. Others do not agree with this plan. The BIJ1 member is against the idea. They imagine it being a city where poor people can move to when they are forced out of their preferred housing location. Similarly, the JD member does not believe in this solution. He does not think the problem is the lack of houses.

*“I don’t think the crisis arose from the use of space. There are all kinds of vacant buildings that take up too much space.”* - JD member

Many interviewees agree with the need to tackle vacancy. They have a few ideas on the way to do so. All interviewees, besides the members of the PvdA and Volt, were in favour of the legalisation of squatting. Multiple supporters of squatting think it is inexplicable that it is still illegal even in this period of crisis. The PvdA member however, does think it can be a good incentive for the current system, but legalisation is not his preferred solution. The JD member thinks that in some cases vacancy can also be countered by expropriating.

*“I am a proponent of expropriation ... Radical solutions for large problems.”* - PvdD member

Even though expropriation is the most radical measure that came up in the interviews, the majority of the interviewees agreed on it. Except for, again, the PvdA member and the two of Volt. One of the Volt members calls expropriation “a drop in the ocean”. The other Volt member thinks the opposite. He does not think expropriation functions in the system we have. It would place a bomb under the system. The PvdA member sees expropriation as a last resort. It could work as a system incentive, but he thinks it is too expensive for the government. According to him, it is possible to have a housing policy that makes the housing market fit better in a public housing system so expropriation is not necessary. The CJB member is clear on this measure. He thinks the government should buy the property of investors for “normal” non-competitive prices. The investors should feel the financial loss, not the taxpayers.

These different ideas on where to find the solutions for the housing crisis, and what measures to take are also reflected in the signs that were caught on photos (figure 14). They give an inside in what people want to express towards the policy makers. In these signs, protesters specified their policy demands, for example: “weg met het kraakverbod” (Get rid of the squatting ban) or “Tax the rich” or “Onteigen Onteigen Onteigen” (expropriate expropriate expropriate), but also more moderate, for instance “Reguleer de vrije sector” (regulate the private sector).



Figure 14 Protest signs reflecting policy demands

## 4.4 Why did they protest?

In the previous subsections it has been made clear how the opinions on housing and its policy are different when it comes to their housing ideologies and simultaneously similar when zooming in on the actual policy steps they would like to see being taken. Having opinions on a subject is not necessarily the reason people take to the streets. To get a more complete image of the rationale behind the presence of attendees and to get to know their reasons for protesting, this section presents different protest motives detracted from interviews.

### 4.4.1 Motives to protest

During the interviews, the respondents were asked about the specific reasons they had to come to the protest. Some admitted immediately that it was mostly because of work-related obligations. For example, the JD member was coordinating the participation of the JD in the demonstration. However, he was also interested in the speakers and keen to be more informed on the topic. To him it was a new topic, for it being the housing protest since

the 80's. A protester from Volt said he mainly joined the protest to meet other members of the party. Both these JD and Volt members were not certain if they would join the next protest if it was not an organised group excursion of their parties. However, this Volt member does add that he also felt like representing his mother and her housing situation during the protest. Another interviewee from the same party said he was there for the interest of himself and his generation, but most importantly for those who were the first to notice the crisis - the marginalised groups. This is a similar incentive to join the protest as the PvdD member had; he works as a social worker and joined the protest for the residents in poignant situations he meets in his work.

Assuming that people join a protest with a purpose in mind, the respondents were asked what they think a successful protest entails and what the goal of the protest was for them. There were many different goals mentioned by the interviewees. The ideas about the purpose ranged from activating a new (young) group to protest; to enabling people in precarious housing situations to see the extent of the problem; or to hearing new ideas on housing and that it offered possibilities to change people's worldview by the large variety of attendees.

Multiple interviewees also saw the goal of the protest to raise awareness for the housing crisis. The PvdD member elaborated on this by saying how important it is that the protest was picked up by the media, which made it possible to reach people who weren't present during the protest. The purpose is also seen as sending a strong signal to those in power, being "the wake up call". The respondents did agree that there was one commonly shared message or thought that they assumed all protesters would have in mind, being "this cannot go on like this." Some interviewees

said their main aim of the demonstration was to express their frustration “towards specific political parties and their reluctance to actually tackle the problem”. To another respondent, the protest would be a success if afterwards “people believe that change is coming, and that it helps to protest.”

It became clear in the interviews that many respondents had opinions about the motives of other protest attendees. For example, the PvdD member disapproves of large groups representing political parties waving their party’s flags. He thought this was inappropriate and doesn’t think a protest is the place for campaigning. However, he supports their presence, but would appreciate it if they would just join the protest to listen instead of taking advantage of it.

During the protest, many interviewees were intimidated by a group of people wearing only black clothes (the anarchist black bloc). A Volt member accuses them of coming to the protest to riot. The CJB member agrees and thinks this way of protesting does no good to the goal of the protest. However, not everyone shares this opinion. The BIJ1 member strongly supports the black bloc and sees the importance of it. They find it important that radical voices are also put forward. This anarchistic protest would be needed as a counterweight to the harmful development that protests become trendy. “It now needs to be instagrammable, with fun signs.”

Showing pictures of signs that people were holding during the protest, people were surprised by some of the messages other people carried out (figure 15). For example, one sign had the words *My tiny house needs a plot*. Some interviewees found this individualistic. “If you’re there only for yourself, why not write a letter”. The SP member had difficulty with a

sign that said *End housing discrimination*. He thinks it distracts from the core message of the protest, which is according to him “getting as fast as possible to enough affordable houses for everyone”. He thinks that the housing crisis is a class issue and that class is not related to the colour of skin. He claims that the acknowledgement of racism on the housing market will not solve the crisis. The PvdD member responds to this comment, by saying that it doesn’t surprise him, the SP is known for only fighting for white poor people.

An overview of the signs that were shown during the interviews can be found in Appendix 7.3.4



Figure 15 Criticised protest signs

## 4.5 Interview analysis

Out of these results from the interviews, it can be extracted that the respondents are on the same line when it comes to pointing out the origins of the crisis. All causes that are mentioned by the interviewees can be brought back to the financialisation of housing. The words they use to describe this trend differ. Some call it neoliberalism, others liberalisation or “handing it over to the market”. Some blame individual politicians, but all members of the liberal party VVD. Also capitalism is named, which is the economic system that is



tightly connected to political movements like liberalism.

In the visions of the respondents' ideal housing systems, three rather different ideologies can be distinguished. These approaches for a functioning housing system are anarchism, communism and thirdly, the more moderate vision in finding a solution for the crisis within the current system. The three ideologies are conflicting and respondents advocating them have strong opinions towards the other visions. Some interviewees create a certain distance to others by calling them "the anarchists" or "the communists".

When it comes to the actual policy measures interviewees would like to see being taken for a well-functioning housing system, the respondents' ideas are much closer to each other. Those with radical ideologies agree with and propose quite moderate policy ideas, and the more radical ideas are similarly even supported by many moderate party members. Expropriation and squatting are the most extreme ideas, but approved by the party members from e.g. BIJ1, JD, CJB, PvdD and SP - parties that cover a large range of the political spectrum.

# 5 Conclusion and Discussion

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In this final chapter, the research comes together in its conclusion that is drawn from all results that are previously presented. Answers are provided for every research question that was asked at the beginning of the research. Afterwards, in the Discussion section, this conclusion is discussed in relation to literature within Social Movement Theory. Lastly, the relevance of this study is determined in both a scientific and societal context, and a follow up research project is proposed.

## 5.1 Conclusion

This research is about the large housing protest of the 12th of September 2021. The protest was abundantly picked up by the media. In these news articles and items, the attendees were framed as one group that stood up against the housing crisis and the failing housing policy. The assumption that these 15000 protesters had more profound ideas on the housing system, led to the main research question:

*What do the attendees of the Woonprotest stand for and are their housing ideologies and protest motives diverging or converging?*

The main research question is broken down into the following sub-questions to give structure to the research.

1. How did the housing crisis evolve in the Netherlands?
2. Which political societal actors were represented during the Woonprotest in Amsterdam?
3. Which are the ideologies on housing politics the attendees represent and how do they differ and coincide?
4. What are the protest motives of these attendees and how do they differ and coincide?

The literature analysis shows how the controlling institution for housing shifted since the implementation of the housing act in 1901. With this law, housing associations received financial support from the state to increase the housing stock and to improve the quality of living. This organisation was a political compromise having no specifically controlling government or market, but emphasising the needs of civil society. In the reconstruction after WWII the government became more controlling. It lasted until the 1990's, when the housing policy of the Netherlands went along

with global liberal trends. This resulted in a shift from state to market control on housing provision. Consequently, housing became a profitable investment, which made housing and rent prices increase enormously. The social housing sector shrank which gave space for the private rental sector to grow. Consequently, housing became unaffordable for less privileged classes.

Many people took to the streets out of discontent with the lack of political intervention. The protest was both attended by political organisations and independent protesters. Through a visual analysis the political attendees were determined. These covered especially the centre-left side of the political spectrum. Additionally, multiple organisations and interest groups joined the protest. These were mostly organisations that serve the interests of groups that are experiencing the crisis, for example homeless people, students or tenants.

The attendees that were interviewed in this thesis have different ideas on the ideal housing system. Three different political ideologies can be derived: anarchism, communism and solving the crisis from within the current system. When looking at their ideas at a more detailed level, it becomes clear that the opinions of the respondents are not as divergent as their ideologies. Even the most radical ideas such as expropriation and squatting are widely supported among the interviewees, regardless of their position on the political spectrum.

Considering the possible motives to participate in a political protest, the attendees' opinions are more aligned. Most joined the protest to represent and out of support for a collective. This is not necessarily a group they are part of, but one they acknowledge the poignancy of. The differences between instrumental and expressive motives are in

this research not evidently found. In general, most respondents have joined the protest out of both instrumental and expressive reasons.

This research shows that the housing ideologies of attendees of the Woonprotest diverge and that they have strong opinions towards each other. Protesters mention three different ideologies: communism, anarchism, and solving the crisis within the current system. However, the respondents' opinions on actual policy changes are very similar, even when it comes to radical ideas. Considering the protest motives, the respondents have equivalent purposes to protest. Protesters want to express their discontent with the housing shortage and they want something to change after the protest.

## 5.2 Discussion

After having answered the research question, the results are discussed in relation to literature on this same topic. Firstly, the two theories that the theoretical framework consists of are discussed. Then, the possible implications of the criticised anarchist radicalism within the protest is explored. Lastly, the relevance of this research is determined which brings about a recommendation for future research.

### 5.2.1 Social models of Pestoff (1992)

This study started with the case of the Woonprotest in Amsterdam and the involvement of two theories. The first theory deals with four possible institutions that can be in control for the organisation of welfare services, housing in this case. The triangle of Pestoff (1992) that shows the interrelations of the different institutions was in this research mainly applicable for structuring the reconstruction of the origin of and the run-up to the crisis. From 1901 up to the present, the

shifts between different controlling institutions can be clearly followed in the triangle. Looking at the results of the interviews from the perspective of the four social models of Pestoff, two of the interviewees' ideological visions can be brought back to the social order triangle. These concern communism and the belief to find solutions within the current system.

The aforementioned communist ideology entails aspiring a strong and leading state and favouring property that is publicly owned (Engels, 2017). Deducted from the interviews, opinions like having the wish for the nationalisation of private property indicates the appreciation of communism and therefore the state as controlling institution.

The interviewees that call for solutions within the current system, agree that the market has played too big a role in housing provision. Therefore they speak about offering housing associations the public means to increase the housing stock and enhancing the social housing sector. In the Pestoff triangle, this marks the centre. Private associations should provide housing with financial support from the government. This is the same system as the housing act of 1901 allowed and facilitated.

The triangle represents four institutions that could take a controlling role in the provision of social welfare services. In this thesis, these are interpreted as indicators for ideologies. The theory itself does not explicitly refer to the term ideology, but as alternative approaches to organise social services (in this thesis, housing). However, it appears that the ideologies deducted from the interviews, do not necessarily correspond to an approach in the triangle.

For example, the anarchist ideology that was shared in the interviews does not fit in the triangle. Williams (2007) defines anarchy with the following phrase: "the only

thing that is consistent about anarchism is its inconsistency". Anarchy theorists see anarchism as a discourse, or an evolving tradition (Williams, 2007). Therefore it is a more broad and overarching ideology that goes beyond the three corners and four faces of the triangle of Pestoff. A recurring characteristic of anarchism is "opposing the presence of coercion, hierarchy, and authority in human affairs" (Williams, 2007). It therefore does not fit this ideology to assign either of the four institutions the responsibility of the provision of housing. Thus, anarchism could be seen as transcending the Pestoff triangle (figure 16).



**Figure 16** Anarchism transcends Pestoff triangle

In the results of this thesis, there seems to be a common idea of the 'wrong location' in the triangle of Pestoff. Among the interviewees, a certain resentment prevails towards the idea of the market when it comes to housing provision. Signs like "Fuck de woningmarkt" (Fuck the housing market) or slogans like "Mens boven markt" (Human above market) that were chanted from the stage, endorse this aversion among protesters. It could therefore be interpreted that in general, the protest had a tendency towards being anti-market. This anti-market character of the protest is also apparent in the manifesto that was written to summarise the demands regarding housing

policy. While opposing the idea that the market could be a good institution for the organisation of housing, both the manifesto and the protesters seek refuge in the idea and the expectation that the government needs to step in. The manifesto claims that the government is responsible for securing the right of housing for everyone. This also became clear in the interviews. Respondents think the government should intervene and take back control over the market. To see this from the perspective of the Pestoff triangle, it seems like the general ideals behind the protest are in favour of the state and against the market as a way to organise housing.

### **5.2.2 Motives of Walgrave et al. (2013)**

This study started with the case of the Woonprotest in Amsterdam and the involvement of two theories. The first theory comes from literature within the social movement theory and focuses on possible motives of people to be present at a protest. Walgrave et al. (2013) clearly found distinguished motives of protesters in his study to establish the typology of instrumental-expressive and individual-collective motives. However, in this thesis on the Woonprotest, an evident differentiation between the opposites of the axes was not found among the interviewees.

The interviewees were asked about the protest goals they had in mind before going to the protest and what a successful protest would mean to them. The follow up question was whether they think the housing protest was successful or not. Most goals that were mentioned in the interviewees' answers could be interpreted as being on the expressive side of the axis. According to most respondents, the goal of the protest was to send out a message or a strong signal. An interviewee said he came to the protest to express his frustration.

On the other side, one respondent feels that a protest is successful only when something changes after the protest. His statement is an example of protesting with instrumental intentions - the protest needs to lead to changes. One respondent however, does add to his answer that he knows that change never happens after one protest. Moreover, some answers of respondents are more ambiguous and not easily assigned to one side of the axis. As written in the results section, someone said that for him, the goal of the protest was to give a voice to the young generation. Giving a voice to a group can be interpreted as both instrumental and expressive. On the one hand, it is instrumental, because his goal is to make a change by means of the protest - to have the young generation express themselves. On the other hand, he hoped students would show their concerns on housing. For him the purpose was for people to express themselves. In general, among the interviewees of this research, their motives are not allocated to a specific place on the instrumental-expressive axis.

Considering this instrumental-expressive axis, the motives of most interviewees lie somewhere in between the two ends of the axis. The general idea among the respondents was that the goal of the protest entailed sending out a message. On the other hand, there was a shared opinion that the government should step in. Hence the duality in the respondents' reasons to protest.

The second dimension covers who protesters represent during a protest, whether it is on behalf of an individual or a collective. Among the respondents, the nature of their presence was predominantly for collective reasons. They all spoke about their concerns for the young generations, those with minimal income or homeless people. These all refer to



groups the respondents are either part of or not. However, one interviewee said to have joined the protest on behalf of his mother, who is not able to buy a house because of the high housing prices. This representing one singular person, seems an indication of an individual motive.

A possible explanation for this outcome is the approach of this research: all interviewees were members of a political party and some even highly involved in politics. In literature, a link is found between collectivity and political engagement. It appears that political participation of individuals can be increased by group consciousness (Miller et al., 1981). However this could also indicate that people committed to politics see collective relevances of protests.

### 5.2.3 SMT or NSM?

The division between the Social Movement Theory and the New Social Movement Theory has been explained briefly in the theory section. The two theories see different causes for social movements to arise. Melucci (1980) recognised some shared characteristics in new social movements. A few of these are, in short: no separation between public and private spheres; no focus on political systems; solidarity as an objective. Some of these characteristics do not match with the housing movement of 2021 - the movement is clearly focused on political systems, and solidarity is not an objective (affordable housing is). From the interviews and the other results of this thesis, it appears that the housing movement simultaneously does and does not allow the end of a separation between public and private spheres. It seems to depend on whether people acknowledge that intersectionality is a significant factor in the housing crisis. The results show how some protesters see discrimination as an important

issue to address within the housing movement. Others, however, think the movement should not focus so much on issues such as racism - the housing crisis is, according to them, a class war "and class is not related to the colour of skin". Therefore, it could be stated that there is a dichotomy in the housing movement. Theoretically, some approach it within the context of SMT, others feel their cause is best discussed from an NSM perspective.

### 5.2.4 Radicalism in the movement

In many interviews, the so-called "black bloc" was criticised. This black bloc is an (anarchist) protest tactic where a group of activists wear black clothes and masks to make other protesters aware that they are prepared to use violence if needed. This black bloc in a protest makes it possible for people to know where violence can come from, so they can avoid it (Graeber, 2012). In the interviews people said how intimidated they felt and that they disapproved of the violence the anarchists used during their attempt to squat a building. This is supported by the literature, as two of the characteristics of contemporary anarchism are described as "practical radicality" and its "advocacy of direct action" (Scher, 1999). Even though some of the interviewees thought the attitude of the black bloc would detract from the message of the protest, radicalism in a movement can also have a positive outcome (Haines, 2013). Research on different social movements has found proof for the so-called "radical flank effect". This effect indicates the interactiveness between the moderate and radical flanks within a movement. In case of a positive effect, radicalism within the movement can contribute to the reputation of the moderates; violence or disorder on behalf of the radicals can create critical situations that authorities may try to overcome by going along with moderate requests (Haines, 2013). In the

housing movement this would mean that, for example, the actions of squatters create more pressure on politics to meet the moderate demands of the movement. Pruijt (2012) confirms this statement. Shown in his study on the Dutch squatters' movement, squatting appears to have put the housing shortage on the political agenda during the 1980's.

Aside from the possible positive effect of the radicals, there is also scientific literature that proves how they can have a negative impact on a movement. This can be induced by outsiders of the movement who are not able to separate the moderates from the radicals and think of the whole movement as evenly aggressive. The effect is especially apparent when authorities use this generalised movement image to silence both the moderates and radicals. The criticism towards the black bloc that came up in the interviews, probably comes from the fear that this negative effect occurs.

There is little to be found in literature, but I assume that the media could possibly play a role in whether the radical flank effect moves towards a positive or negative direction. There is existing literature that proves that the framing of a protest action does partly influence the level of criticism of media consumers (Kilgo & Mourão, 2021). However, the link to the radical flank effect is not specified.

### **5.2.5 New policy by Hugo de Jonge**

Doing research on a topical issue such as the current housing crisis, always carries the risk of being overtaken by new (political) developments. In this thesis, it offered the opportunity to ask the respondents about these developments. The Dutch minister of Housing, Hugo de Jonge, proposed new laws and closed deals during the writing of this thesis. These have the aim to put restrictions on the liberated rental market and to increase the housing

stock. The respondents in this research were hesitant in applauding these interventions. In general, the response of the interviewees was that these actions of De Jonge are a good first step, but they do not expect that this will solve the crisis. More radical actions are wished for, but it is not clear from this research whether the interviewees expect De Jonge to make these profound reforms or that they are only their ideologies. For now their response is in general: seeing is believing.

### **5.2.5 Research relevance**

This study is a contribution to the large amount of literature that is referred to as the Social Movement Theory. However, for the housing movement this research revolved around, it is ambiguous to which social movement theory it belongs. The series of protests that started in 2021 focussed on the housing crisis in the Netherlands, could be argued to be described by both SMT and NSM theorists. Research on movements is abundant, but not much literature is available on protest-level. This research uncovers the conflicting, but also mutual beliefs that have accumulated within a specific protest. It shows how radical ideas are broadly accepted among the protest attendees, despite their different positions on the political spectrum. This research therefore adds to either SMT or NSM by exposing a part of the large collection of thoughts that together form a protest. Secondly, this study adds to the large amount of literature on housing in the Netherlands and the crisis. As the protest was an important moment in the Dutch housing chronology, research on the demonstration cannot be missed. This study shows both the awareness of urgency among the activists and the possibilities that they see for policy makers.

Aside from the contribution to available literature, this study has value for societal

reasons. Since the sequence of protests in 2021, the housing movement has not been active with similar massiveness and extensiveness. Smaller and more case specific protests did occur, for example against social housing for sale, or squat evictions. It should be valuable for everyone linked to a movement to be aware of the content of all the opinions that shape that movement. As a supporter of the housing movement, I feel even more empowered after having finished this research. During the protest, there were some groups I preferred to not be associated with and therefore avoided them when possible. Personally, the outcomes of this research makes such reluctant behaviour seem unnecessary. I could even imagine that this research could make the movement grow, though I confess this statement suffers from a lack of scientific backing.. But I speculate that if people knew that most of their ideas are widely shared among fellow protesters, this could create a stronger and more combative movement. This research could help in raising this awareness.

For further research, I would recommend researching the implications of the differences in the current Dutch housing protest movement. The literature on the radical flank effect is mostly theoretical or applied to other social movements than housing. It would be valuable for the continuation of the housing movement to know what the different levels of radicalism entail. This would not only be relevant for the radicalism that lives within the Woonprotest, but also for the variety of perspectives on the organisation of housing in the Netherlands that this thesis identified.

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# 7 Appendix

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## 7.1 Interview guide

Wanneer ben je lid geworden van ....?

Was er een bepaalde aanleiding?

Wat is jouw rol in de partij?

Met welke onderwerpen hou je je bezig? Ook wonen?

Wat werkt er niet aan het huidige woonsysteem?

Hoe zie jij de oplossing voor de wooncrisis voor je?

Als jij het voor het zeggen had, hoe zou het woonbeleid eruit zien?

Ik sprak iemand en die haalde het JA21 idee aan om een nieuwe stad te bouwen als potentieel niet slecht idee, wat vind jij?

Heb je zelf te maken gehad met de wooncrisis?

In hoeverre heeft je eigen woonsituatie invloed op jouw ideeën hierover?

Wat was de voornaamste reden dat je aanwezig was op het woonprotest in amsterdam?

Voornamelijk namens partij of ook uit persoonlijke overwegingen?

Wat was je verwachting van het protest?

Wat was denk je het doel van het protest?

Was dat ook jouw doel?

Wanneer zou het protest voor jou het geslaagd zijn?

Wat je vond van de rest van de aanwezigen?

In hoeverre denk je dat hun ideeën overeenkwamen met die van jou?

Had jij het idee dat er onder de aanwezigen een overstijgende/unanieme/gedeelde boodschap was? Een die iedereen die er was deelde?

Hoe zou je de unanieme boodschap van het protest formuleren, als die er volgens jou is?

Hoe zag jij jezelf ten opzichte van de rest? In hoeverre voelde je je verbonden? Een eenheid? mensen van Volt vertelden dat ze zich geïntimideerd voelden door NCPN leden, dat ze werd gevraagd waarom ze er waren, waarom wordt dat aan mensen gevraagd?

Wat denk je dat mensen van jou vonden?

Meerdere die ik heb geïnterviewd, voelden zich geïntimideerd door de zwartgeklede antikapitalista roepende mensen. Hoe heb jij dit ervaren?

Laatst zijn door het kabinet nieuwe plannen voor wetten gepubliceerd, hoe denk je daarover?

Ik ga nu een verzameling foto's laten zien van borden die verschillende mensen met zich meedroegen tijdens het protest.

Is er iets was je denkt als je deze borden ziet?

Welke borden sluiten aan bij jouw meningen en ideeën?

Waarom?

Zou je met deze borden willen rondlopen?

Met welke borden zou je niet rond willen lopen/ niet geassocieerd willen worden?

Wat denk je dat het protestdoel van de mensen met die borden is?

iemand van de sp vond de borden zoals 1 en sprekers die het over racisme en discriminatie hadden afwijken van de kernboodschap. hoe zie jij dit?

Ben je nu nog actief in de woonprotestbeweging? Hoe uit zich dat?

Ben je het van plan om er actief in te worden?

Zou je weer aanwezig zijn bij een volgend woonprotest?

Wat zou je er dan van verwachten?

## 7.2 Overview interviewees

Party	Age	Gender	City	Profession
SP	57	Male	Doetinchem	Political Group Staff SP
PvdD	28	Male	Almere	Council member Almere
BIJ1	26	Non-binary	Amsterdam	Student
Volt	32	Male	Den Bosch	Council member Den Bosch
Volt	21	Male	Wassenaar	Student
JD	23	Male	Rotterdam	Policy advisor
PvdA	32	Male	Amsterdam	Policy and strategy advisor
CJB	28	Male	Nijmegen	Housing governance strategist



## 7.3 Photo analysis

### 7.3.1 Attending political organisations



1. Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA)
2. Nieuwe Communistische Partij van Nederland (NCPN)
3. GroenLinks
4. Communistische Jongerenbeweging (CJB, youth movement of NCPN)
5. Haagse stadspartij
6. Partij voor de Dieren (PvdD)
7. BIJ1
8. Socialistische Partij (SP)
9. ROOD (former youth party of SP, now independent)
10. Volt
11. Jonge Democraten (JD, youth party of D66)
12. Vrije Bond (Anarchistic self-organisation)

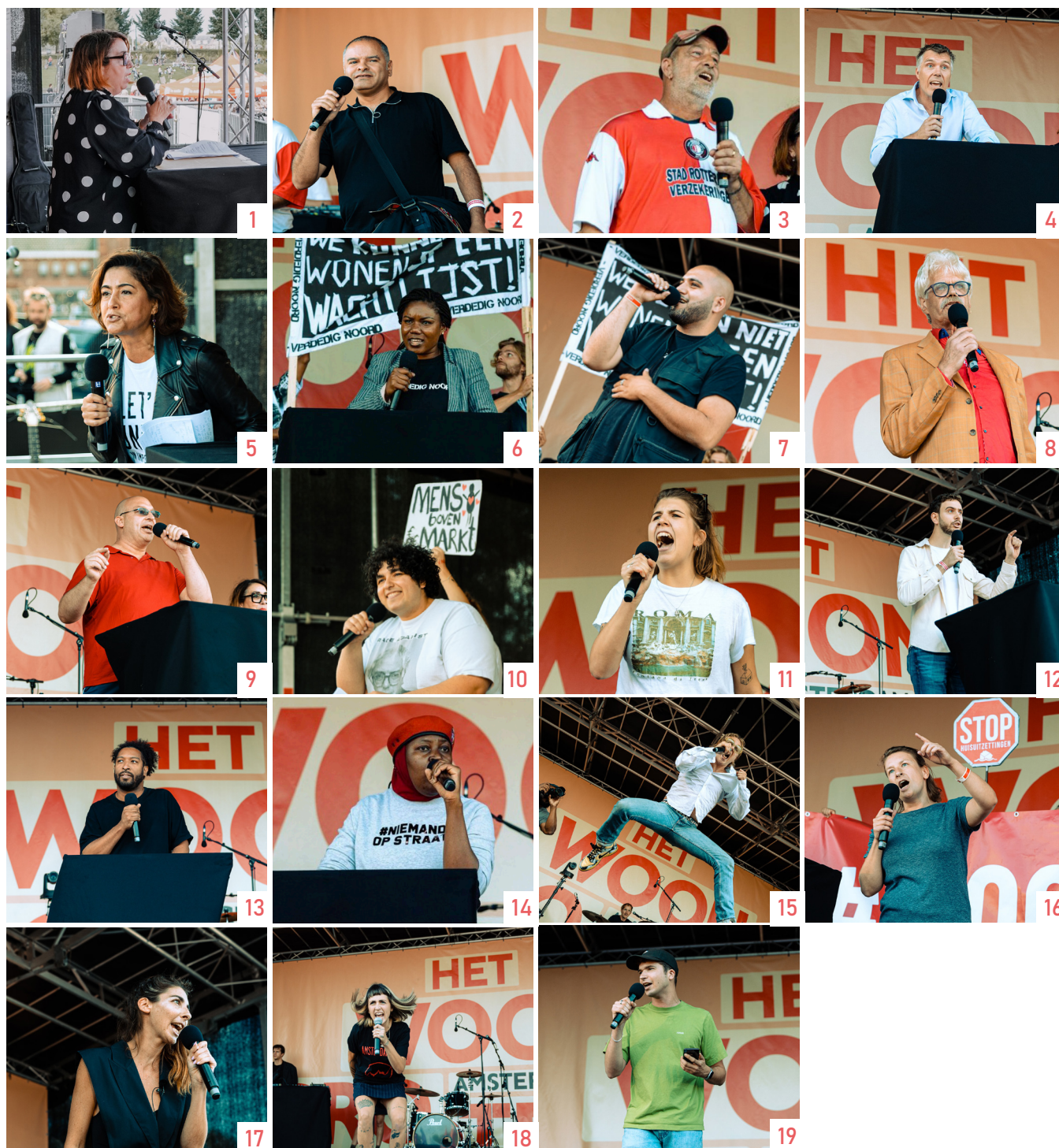
### 7.3.2 Attending non-political organisations



1. FNV - Federation of dutch trade unions
2. Woonbond - Dutch national tenants association
3. LSVb - Dutch national student union
4. Regenboog Groep - Amsterdam based organisation that supports vulnerable groups in the city
5. CNV Jongeren - Dutch national youth trade union federation



### 7.3.3 Speakers and artist during stage program



1. Fatima faid - Chair of local party: Haagse stadspartij. Moderator of the stage program
2. Mustapha Eaisaouiyeen - Resident of demolished neighbourhood (Tweebosbuurt - Rotterdam) spoke about the role that wealth plays in the certainty to be able to live somewhere and to be allowed to stay. System change is needed.

3. Edwin Dobber - Resident of demolished neighbourhood (Tweebosbuurt - Rotterdam) spoke about the current state of the trial against their housing association.
4. Zeno Winkels - Managing director of the Woonbond. Shared facts and numbers on the housing crisis, and policy choices that have caused the crisis.
5. Sadet Karabulut - former representative in parliament for SP. Spoke about the liberalisation of housing and the breakdown of public housing. Shames VVD and minister Stef Blok for wanting to close the borders for foreigners, but also stimulating foreign investors to buy houses.
6. Terra Dakota Stein - Verdedig noord. Spoke about gentrification and how initial residents of neighbourhoods need to leave, because their rights are less valid than those of developers.
7. Massih Hutak - Verdedig noord and rapper. Spoke and rapped about the intersectionality of the problem. The housing crisis is not an independent crisis, but related to the climate crisis, (institutional) racism, sexism, ableism.
8. Winfried (?) - Niet te Koop. Spoke about the sale, demolition and liberalisation of social housing. Fight against segregation, the right of every income group to live in the city.
9. Lode Vermeulen - Spoke about ghost citizens - those who are not in the position to register at an address in the municipality they live in and therefore lose many rights.
10. Mert kumru - UN Youth representative. Spoke about the position of (young) people whose future prospects have been complicated by policy makers.
11. Freya Chiappino - LSVB. Spoke about difficulties for the young generation on the housing market and how all policies are driven by economic value. About the shortage of houses for students.
12. Bas van Weegberg - FNV. Spoke about the income/rent ratio and how certain essential professions can not afford housing in cities.
13. Dean Bowen - Poet, spoke about the way policy makers push citizens into a corner. The hype they build around the cities. Policy can always be reconsidered.
14. Hidaya Nampiima - Amsterdam City Rights, Ugandan human rights activist who lives in Amsterdam as an undocumented person. Spoke about the struggles of oppressed groups in cities. The preconceptions of refugees and the psychological effects of having no housing.
15. Hang Youth - Punk band. Sings about gentrification, segregation, anti-capitalism, anti-VVD.
16. Gwen van Eijk - Recht op de Stad, organisation protest. Spoke about following protests and ways to stand up for neighbourhoods or marginalised groups. Calls out to everyone to join an organisation to do something against the current policy.
17. Melissa Koutouzis - Organisation protest. Spoke about the four main demands of the protest of the manifesto. 1. Sufficient and affordable housing 2. Retake control on escalating rent/housing prices 3. Stop racist and class-based housing/demolition policy 4. Tackle real estate investors
18. Sophie Straat - Singer. Sang about wanting to live in Amsterdam, where she grew up, but not being able anymore.
19. Sander van der Kraan - organisation. Spoke about the illusion that the interests of the rich are evenly beneficial for the lower classes. It is not the fault of the victims of the housing crisis. Activates the audience to fight for our collective rights.



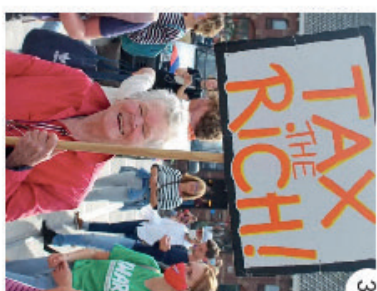
### 7.3.4 Signs that were hold during the protest



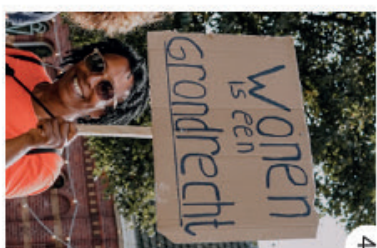
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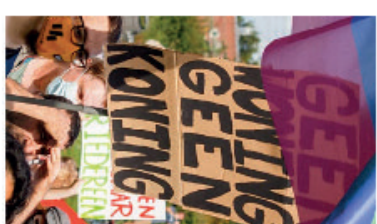
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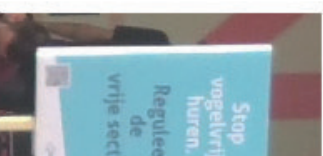
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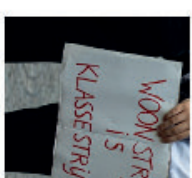
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