Can you design self-organization?

Providing affordable housing in Houthaven through building groups

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MSc thesis

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Contents

4    H1: Project description
14   H2: Reclining government and self organization
26   H3: Building groups and affordability
38   H4: Building group types
46   H5: Urban plan
52   H6: Process design
58   H7: Block typology
68   H8: Reflection
72   Bibliography
**H1: Project Description**

*Start building affordable housing again - through building groups*

Who gets to live within the Amsterdam ring road? The Dutch social housing system made it possible for people with modest incomes to live in the city center, which contributed to making Amsterdam a pleasant and mixed city. However, this system is currently in crisis. The economic crisis has halted housing construction, and corruption scandals have eroded the credibility of housing corporations. However, the waiting lists for social housing show the demand for affordable housing is still growing.

I want to propose a different system for creating affordable housing, based upon an idea which is very popular at the moment: that the self-organization of people should take over where large institutions fail. Building groups offer various ways to organize financing and cut costs, so housing can be realized in a cheaper way.

Houthaven, a harbor site which has seen a small pilot project with building groups, but for which development is mostly still in limbo, will be a good testing ground for this.

**The stalled development of Houthaven**

*Location*

The location of my graduation project is Houthaven, a former port site in Amsterdam. It is located alongside the IJ water in the West borough, close to the city center of Amsterdam. For years it has been a site with only some temporary functions in temporary buildings, awaiting further development. Redevelopment plans are moving forward at a very slow pace.

Houthaven is located next to the Spaarndammerbuurt, a neighborhood with many houses built in the 1920’s School of Amsterdam architecture style. This expressionist brick style became popular in the years after the passage of the housing law in 1901, and symbolizes the progressive ideals of housing corporations in those days. The portmanteau “Spaarndammerhout” was used when making the early plan for redevelopment, to describe the goal of merging the new and the existing city.

However, a clash between Spaarndammerbuurt and Houthaven seems unavoidable. This clash is not only because of a difference in urban typology, but also about the idealism underlying this design. Spaarndammerbuurt was developed by institutions convinced they knew what is best for people, and it is clear that Houthaven will be developed in a more market-oriented way. For this reason it would be
interesting to see whether the old ideals of creating making living in Amsterdam affordable for everybody could be realized in Houthaven in a way which fits in with the current era, which enables and values self-organization.

Houthaven is a former harbor area. Except for one wood trading firm, all industrial activities have now left the site. However, many temporary functions have moved to the area: a lot of student housing, schools, a floating office building, an urban beach pavilion and a party center in a circus tent. Development has been in limbo for so long many of these temporary buildings look quite shabby by now.

Though the area is used by many people (students who live there, the creative people who have an office there, kids who go to school there, partygoers...), few of them have a stake in the area. Most use is purely functional, except for some people from the neighborhood walking their dog, and some people who come by car to spend their lunch break at the waterfront. There is not much of a connection to the rest of the city. This character, typical for the leftover space it currently is, will invariably change when development gets up to speed.

Next to Houthaven is the late 19th, early 20th century Spaarndammerbuurt neighborhood. This used to be a working class neighbourhood with many migrants, close to the city center. At the moment the neighbourhood is gentrifying. Social housing is sold off at a rapid pace, illegal subletting brings in wealthier residents like expats, and hip bars are replacing brow cafés. Also adjacent to Houthaven is the Minervahaven port, which is currently transforming into an office area. Because of environmental restrictions due to still operational port activities, housing is not allowed here. Many of the newly constructed offices are still empty.
Developments so far
Originally, development was proposed in a top-down way, with three major parties involved, each representing one of the three parties always present in Amsterdam developments: the municipality represented by project bureau Houthavens, the social housing sector represented by housing corporation Stadgenoot, and the private sector represented by project developer Synchroon. An idealistic policy document was written explaining how the new quarter would have a strong connection to neighboring Spaarndammerbuurt, so it would benefit from the development. Then, a tabula rasa urban plan was made by the municipality, with input from Sjoerd Soeters’ firm, showing a series of isolated islands instead.

After legal plans were approved, social connectivity ceased being an issue. The focus shifted to the question of how to realize the urban plan. Because the priority was given to other developments in Amsterdam, like Overhoeks, temporary functions were built instead: student housing, temporary school buildings, and floating office space. In 2009, when the permanent development of Houthavens should have begun, the economic crisis had already started. Though it was tried to develop the first plot, ‘Blok o’, this attempt was halted because too few units were pre-sold.

To get out of the deadlock, the director of the housing corporation proposed a more bottom-up way of development. This was based upon an idealistic notion of giving power to individual users, rather than large institutions. The plot was divided into smaller ones, which were sold to groups of people, on which they could build following certain rules, including environmental targets. Because the urban plan called for highrise (22 till 29 meters in height) people would have to enter into collectives to be able to develop a plot. There were opportunities for both living and working. Within this structure of individual plots, small pockets of social housing could be built. This way, a lively, mixed and entrepreneurial part of the city would be created. This vision appealed to people and the sale of plots was a success, with different collectives having to enter into a lottery.

The formation of these collectives was done by project developers and by architectural firms seeking new commissions. The resulting designs are generic. They show no outward expression of individuality, or of a collective vision other than the choice between modernism and post-modernism. No collective functions or work spaces are mentioned. The only freedom offered seems to be in the interior. There was also no more space available for social housing, causing the initiator, Stadgenoot, to withdraw from the project. Bottom-up seemed to work as a marketing tool, rather than offering the diversity of a bottom-up city.

However, this is not the only way in which people influence development. The amount of money the people of Spaarndammerbuurt spend locally influences the attractiveness of the neighborhood and of the proposed Houthaven development. Spaarndammerbuurt is rapidly gentrifying. The way in which people vote determines the composition of the municipal council, which influences the policies of the borough and the project bureau Houthaven. Spaarndammerbuurt overwhelmingly votes Labor. People also try to influence the development of
Houthaven through participation processes and lobbying. However, since the legal plan has already been approved little participation is happening at the moment.

All of these ways to influence the development of Houthaven are influenced by the demographics of the surrounding area. Because of the profitability of subletting, low-income people leave the area, to be replaced by students and expats. Because of the sale of social housing, newcomers are more often part of the middle-class. Some middle-class people move away to a more rural setting. However, this Is counterbalanced by low-income people whose income rises, making them part of the middle-class. The project bureau already advertizes with Houthaven’s proximity to the new ‘Pijp’. Though Spaarndammerbuurt retains many characteristics of a working class neighborhood, this tale comes closer to the truth each year.

The housing market crisis
The current housing market is plagued by many probes, many of them caused by policy at the national level. Housing in general is a controversial political issue in the Netherlands. Both renters and home-owners are invested in maintaining the government subsidies to the housing sector, with the labor party advocating for social housing and rent control, and the liberal party backing the mortgage tax deduction for home-owners. As a result of this, all plans for reforming the housing sector have failed politically.

The current crisis on the housing market might change this however. The housing market is currently seen as inflexible and requiring too much subsidies to both renters and home-owners. Houses are seen as overvalued, which limits the construction of new housing. Current plans involve liberalization of the rent market and reduction of the mortgage tax deduction.

The social housing sector is especially the subject of political scrutiny. Corruption scandals committed by housing corporation executives have recently been exposed by the crisis. This has caused political pressure to make sure housing corporations perform only their core mission, providing social housing, without spending money on other projects. Many housing corporations are not pleased with this. They don’t see their task as limited to providing social housing, but to taking care of the all aspects of the social and physical maintenance of neighborhoods with social housing.

Before the economic crisis, this area development strategy was part of the economic model used by housing corporations to finance social housing. After 1995, financial ties between housing corporations and the government were loosened in exchange for abolishing debt. After that, housing corporations had to arrange
financing for new social housing themselves. With house prices increasing, this could be done by selling existing social housing units. By encouraging gentrification, the value of social housing would increase, so for the sale of one apartment more than one could be constructed.

This economic model is no longer viable after the crisis. Because of decreasing house prices multiple apartments have to be sold for each one which can be constructed. Housing corporation programs to encourage gentrification used to be applauded by municipalities, but are now politically discouraged on a governmental level. There is not yet an alternative model for financing social housing, and the construction of it is now coming to a halt. The extra tax on housing corporations proposed by the government could add to this problem. A new way of financing affordable housing is therefore required.

Most of the paperwork necessary for the development of Houthaven has been completed a long time ago. Based upon the urban plan made in cooperation with Sjoerd Soeters, the land use plan has already been changed. After the start of the economic crisis, the municipality did an audit of all their plans, to see which of them could still be viable. Houthaven was seen as potentially viable. After a round of optimization, which included lowering the percentage of social housing from 20% to 30% and turning some of the islands into peninsulas, the decision was made to continue with the development of Houthaven, and approved by the municipal council.

Though little red tape remains, there are some regulations influencing development. To comply with environmental regulations, the plan contains a ground level tunnel and a high and continuous deaf façade facing the port. However, it only has to be made credible these will be constructed at some point. The only thing impeding realization of the land use plan is the economic situation.

For most of the area, no concrete plans have been made for its realization. An exception is Blok 0. At the moment building groups are busy drawing up plans, which have to be approved by the Houthaven project bureau. Some building groups seem to be on course for this, others have only just started looking for members. When the project bureaus judges the plans to be financially secure and the plans to be complying with urban and environmental regulations, there are few obstacles for development. The only other thing under development is that of a municipally financed school building, for which preliminary ground work is now being done.
The actors involved
For my graduation project I chose to take only the current state of the development of Houthaven as the environment, while recognizing that this is highly influenced by policies and developments on the scale of the Netherlands. At this moment power relation are mostly at work and being reshaped by the development of Blok o. However, the future of Houthaven is still uncertain and power relations are not fixed. As for “the people” to whom my project is aimed is chose to focus on house seekers. This means disregarding other people who could be seen as stakeholders, such as the people living in nearby Spaarnsdammerbuurt or those who make temporary use of Houthaven.

The people
With Blok o, a first attempt has been made at developing Houthaven through building groups. However, this has resulted only in a very limited empowerment of future residents. Because of the way Bureau Houthaven organized the application process and because of the way the Dutch building industry is structured, the building groups were initiated and directed mainly by building professionals, in particular developers and architects. No residents have been able to initiate their own building groups. Compared to regular development, residents are empowered have more choice, because they can choose between different building groups rather than one design.
However, the differences between the building groups are limited. On one hand this is because the municipality has prescribed many rules: technical rules like the requirement of constructing a deaf façade, urban rules like the discontinuous blocks alongside the water, and ideologically inspired rules, like the obligation of building in a climate neutral way. On the other hand, the parties backing the building groups have a commercial starting point rather than an ideological one, so they want to make sure their designs are attractive to a wide variety of people and are not too extreme. All building groups only offer owner-occupied units. These are not accessible to people with an income too low to qualify for a mortgage.

Businesses
Businesses have very different roles. At the moment developers and especially architects are empowered by the process. They have the knowledge and creativity to convince people to join a building group, and also the understanding of the bureaucratic processes to make it a reality. Having initiated a building group they can make important decisions, like the global design and the financial structure, and limit the input of residents to less consequential issues, like the materialization of the façade and the interiors of the apartments. The building group structure allows them to steer development while taking a lower financial risk. In addition to building professionals, businesses also have a role in the development process as consumers of space. Finally, the willingness of banks to provide mortgages is a concern in the background, because development requires some degree of lending.

Institutions
Few non-profit institutions are currently involved in the process. Though a housing corporation initiated the development of Blok o by building groups, they had no clear reason to do so apart from prestige. Their involvement did not result in any social housing units and they are currently no longer involved. Though housing corporations own development rights for Houthaven, they choose not to use these at the moment, because of uncertainty about both the housing market and national housing policy.

Public authorities
The municipality of Amsterdam is the only public authority directly involved in the development of Houthaven. To this end they created the project bureau Houthaven, as a cooperation between the central city and the borough of West. Their aim is to get the development of Houthaven started as soon as possible, even though the execution of current urban design will be expensive for them, because it will involve making land, making water and building a tunnel. They expect development to result in investments into the city, and in ground lease income for the cash-strapped municipality.

Diagram of actors currently involved in the development of Houthaven. (own diagram)
What are the actors in the current development process of Houthaven thinking? (own illustration)
Research question
The construction of social housing is coming to a halt. In combination with the sale of social housing and the liberalization of rent control, parts of Amsterdam, especially around the center, could become unaffordable for people with modest incomes. Without a new way of financing affordable social housing, new developments like Houthaven would contribute to this process. Politically and economically there is no possibility to finance social housing with public funds only. Therefore, it is necessary to find a new system to provide affordable housing, in a way which is fitting for today.

My goal is to find a new system to provide affordable housing. It should be a system based upon the self-organization of residents, supported by institutions. As a model for this I will use the building group. I will apply this system to the further redevelopment of Houthaven. In the first place, this means devising a system for individuals to work together in building groups, and for institutions to support this. Secondly, it means figuring out the urban questions which are posited by this way of development, and solving those with a global urban plan.

The main research question of my graduation project is:

How can affordable housing be provided by development through building groups?

Methodology
To answer this question a series of steps are necessary. Though they are presented here as a continuous progression, going from research into design, in practice many of these steps happened simultaneously.

Theoretical research
The theoretical research for this project went into many different directions. Data was gathered on the housing market of Amsterdam, showing the declining numbers of social housing, coupled with growing waiting lists. Secondly, there was research into the general principle of self-organization, especially the history of this idea, which can be found in chapter three. At the same time, research was done into perspectives on the importance of building groups, including a discussion of the various terms relating to this phenomenon. This was then combined with research into the importance in which affordable housing can contribute to making a good city, which can be found in chapter four.

Case studies research
The theoretical research was combined with research into a couple of real examples of building groups. A few notable examples from different periods were studied, which were different not just in urban type, but also in their concept or ideals, their own organizational structure and in the organization of the planning process they had to work with. This can be found in chapter four.

Typological research
Based upon the case study research, four factors were chosen to classify building groups: height, size, openness and collectivity. By taken the two extremes for each of these factors, 16 building types are possible. A small representation of each of those was made, combined with numerical data describing each variant.
Interviews
The demands and wishes of building groups are hard to predict. The case study research and the typological research had shown how different building groups can be from each other. To ensure my project reflected real desires for the creation of building groups, I interviewed seven building group initiators. I chose building groups with an idea on the subject of affordability which was relevant to the project. Using the sixteen typologies for input, they were asked about their ideals, desired program and organizational structure.

Urban Plan
As the interviews did not reveal important preferences for a position in the urban plan, the urban plan was made in a rather traditional way: by starting with the most important public spaces, defining city blocks, designing street profiles, and making building regulations for each block.

Process design
Using input from the case study research and from the interviews with building group initiators, a ‘federative system’ for building is designed. Taken from Hein de Haan, this means a system in which each building group maintains their own independence, but they cooperate on a block level during. Cooperation can mean lower costs during the planning level, and lead to cooperation past the construction stage as well.

Block design
Finally, a design is made on the level of one block. At first a general structure for the construction allowed on this plot is made. Then, all of the interviewed building groups get a place in the block, to see how building groups might use such a structure.
H2: Reclining government and self organization

The economic crisis has caused a housing market crisis as well. According to organizations of both renters and home-owners, the organization of the Dutch housing market is inflexible, recklessly financed, requires too much subsidy for both rental and owner-occupied housing, and discourages the construction of new housing (Mulder, Paping, Calon and Hukker 2012).

For these reasons a liberalization of the housing market is expected, but for now this situation continues. At first only private developers stopped investing, but now investments by housing corporations have halted as well. Over the years Dutch housing corporations have transformed from organizations serving their residents to instruments of the welfare state, serving public policy. Corruption scandals have taken away the credibility of the housing corporations’ claim of serving the common good by taking care of the public domain. A devaluing building stock and increased political scrutiny have severely reduced their ability to invest in new housing (Beekers 2010).

Development through building groups is seen as way to circumvent current housing market problems, because it utilize the personal finances of building groups residents, partially bypassing the financial sector, while still creating a high density apartments. Resuming the production of housing serves a social need. There are long and growing waiting lists for social housing and the Amsterdam region is still expected to grow.

However, the housing market situation can also be seen as a symptom of a wider trend in society: the empowerment of individuals as opposed to institutions. The information age has provided people with tools to do what previously required large corporations or governments: writing encyclopedias, producing electricity, covering news events, and even organizing protests against oppressive regimes (Tegenlicht 2012).

This process of self-organization is not just a result of from technological change, it is also a development championed by politicians. Philip Blond’s ideas on the ‘Big Society’ (2009), a conservative communitarianism in which government would create incentives for people set up small trusts to take over where government and big businesses failed, were taken up by David Cameron and played a big role in his victory in the 2010 UK general elections. However, this made the ideal of the big society very controversial, with its Labor detractors claiming it was just a way to justify small government relinquishing its public tasks.

Failing government? We’ll tackle that together!

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A possible future government campaign? (own illustration)
In the Netherlands, the concept of self-organization is championed less by politicians, but very popular with governmental agencies. Recent years have seen many reports about this topic, for example by the Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (Veldheer et. al. 2012), The WRR (2012), Raad voor het openbaar bestuur (2012) and Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving (Hajer, 2011). What these have in common is that they see fundamental shift in the way society is organized, going from a top-down to a more bottom-up structure. However, these reports lack a consistent perspective on what this means for government policy.

According to Drosterij and Peeters (2011) Dutch politicians often appeal to self-organization as a way to justify their own failures: social problems are not the result of failing government policy but of citizens refusing to take matters into their own hands. In an editorial, Marc Chavannes characterized this attitude as “citizens have to do what they were once allowed to do” (2012). The vast differences in the way people understand self-organization prompted me to do research into the history of this concept.

The Influence of Systems Theory on Society and Urbanism

In the last half century, society seems to be transitioning from modernism into a network society. As hierarchical systems of organization are failing, understanding the unplanned systems which structure society becomes more important. Conflicts between top-down and bottom-up planning occur. Since urbanism is a mirror of society, the conflicts caused by this transition can be seen in the history of this discipline.

As the world is becoming more interconnected, people’s lives are ever more dependent on global systems they cannot control, like the economy and the EU. Though manmade, these systems operate according to their own logic, and seem to resist any human intervention. As a result of this people feel powerless to change the world for the better, and the enlightenment idea of humans as masters of their own destiny seems to be losing strength (Curtis 2011a). People need a vision of the future in which they are not just cogs in a machine, but actively improve their own lives and that of others. Since the sixties, theories on systems have inspired such a vision: a future in which each person lives as a free individual without hierarchical control, but which is peaceful and stable nonetheless. Urbanism is important in this regard, because selling desirable images of the future is its core business.

In this paper I want to discuss the way ideas on systems and complexity have shaped society in general since the Second World War, and urbanism specifically. This will be done by looking at three periods: the post-war era, the ecological movement of the sixties and seventies, and the period following the dot-com
boom of the nineties. Each of these periods had high hopes for a better future. These were reflected in systems theory, and helped to shape society and urbanism in turn. In each phase, the Flevopolder will serve as a practical example of the way these thoughts have shaped the physical landscape. The Flevopolder can be seen as a ‘blank sheet’ on which urbanism could ingrain its ideals over the last 50 years.

Modernism after World War II: 1945-1965

Desired future – prosperity through technology
After the horror and deprivation caused by the Second World War, people longed for peace and prosperity. The combination of wartime destruction and a population boom resulted in a lack of housing and many other goods. Technological advancement was seen as the only way to meet the great demand for products. The standardized production of housing and the mass production of consumer products would create a society free from material shortages. Modernism was no longer a philosophy for avant-garde thinkers and designers, but became government policy.

Systems theory – cybernetics
Science was regarded highly during this time, as the driving force of technological progress. Organizing a society on rational principles required collaboration between scientific disciplines. To provide a scientific framework for such collaboration, Ludwig von Bertalanffy developed the general systems theory. According to this theory the world is one giant system composed of many subsystems. The world could be understood by quantifying the variables in each system, and uncovering the mathematical relations between them. You could identify physical, electrical, social, political and biological subsystems, but each functioned in essentially the same way, as a network of interacting components stabilizing themselves through feedback loops.

As a computer engineer working for the US Department of Defense, Jay Forrester tried to use von Bertalanffy’s ideas to prevent nuclear war. He believed technologic advancements had made it impossible for people to oversee all consequences of their actions. His solution was to leave decision making to technology as well, by creating computer models which could do so. Instead of having people deal with political crises as they occur, he proposed to see the entire cold war as a system of which the variables stabilized each other through feedback loops. By putting data on these variables into a computer model and running simulations, crises could be predicted and prevented before they would fully erupt. The idea that not just the cold war, but the whole world could be seen as a system which could be predicted and stabilized, became known as cybernetics.

Government policy reports on self-organization. (covers by Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, Raad voor het openbaar bestuur and Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving)

Le Corbusier’s Hand of God floating above a model of his Plan Voisin.
Urban theory – a managerial revolution
In urbanism, the post-war period was also characterized by a distrust in individuals and the search for rational methods to integrate disciplines. Before the Second World War, modernist city planning was seen as a task for enlightened designers. They needed to combine the knowledge to interpret survey data, the charisma to convince administrators, and the ability translate rational design principles into an urban plan. Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin and the General Expansion Plan of Amsterdam by Cornelis van Eesteren were examples of such planning through polymaths. Though based on scientific survey data and the modernist ideals of nature, sun and water, such plans were intended to be a complete urban composition in the first place.

Post-war modernism, also called the International Style, was less concerned with issues of urban form. Its main goals were increasing the efficiency of production and meeting social needs. This meant producing housing on a massive scale. The bureaucratic system was reorganized to ensure town planning followed rational principles, so the construction system would function efficiently. Creating a synthesis from the data coming from different scientific disciplines was mainly a task for the bureaucracy rather than the designer, making issues of urban composition less important during this period. The efficiency which enabled the post-war construction boom was therefore mainly a result of a managerial revolution, rather than the work of architects and urbanists (Wagenaar 2011).

The Flevopolder – the urban plan for Lelystad
The construction of the IJsselmeerpolders, creating a new province from the sea, was a demonstration of the confidence in science and technology. The clash between pre-war and post-war modernism can be observed by looking at the planning for its capital. There were two public bodies tasked with the creation of the Flevopolder: the Dienst der Zuiderzee werken (DZZ), responsible for the engineering works, and the Rijksdienst voor de IJsselmeerpolders (RIJP), responsible for the landscape and the buildings. Cornelis van Eesteren had a long running interest in the future capital, Lelystad. As a professor of urbanism in Delft, he shared his ideas with the Delft-educated engineers from the DZZ.

In 1959, DZZ and RIJP jointly commissioned van Eesteren to design Lelystad (Verdonck 2008). Van Eesteren took it as his task to incorporate all available information into an urban composition following C.I.A.M. principles. The result was a city housing 100,000 residents. Central in the design was the highway, which would be a structuring element for both Lelystad and Flevoland. The relation with the water was inspired by Eliel Saarinen’s Munksnäs-Haga plan, showing a city oriented towards a bay, but with its core inland.
However, the RIJP had a very different ideas on what an urban plan should be. The Wageningen-educated agricultural engineers were less concerned with urban quality. They saw the construction of Lelystad as an engineering task, to be performed rationally and efficiently. The Rijksdienst did not want to settle on any definite city size, but emphasized the need for flexibility. They thought van Eesteren’s plans were too rigid and too costly, and wanted to start building where the soil was best suitable for construction. After repeated clashes between van Eesteren and his client, the design of Lelystad was taken over by the Rijksdienst entirely. They decided not to make an urban plan, but only a growth scheme (Hemel 1994). As a result, Lelystad remained an incoherent result of competing design attitudes.

The balance of nature: 1960-1975

Desired future – a non-hierarchical society
By the sixties, the postwar industrialization effort had made the Western world into a prospering consumer society. With people’s basic material needs met, striving for a future in which technology would bring prosperity did not seem so urgent anymore. The youth culture became a counterculture which rebelled against the values of the consumption society: the focus on the collective was seen as coercive to the individual, and industrialization as destructive to the environment. After the counterculture failed to change society through protests, they wanted to do so through their positive energy alone. They imagined a future in which people would live in freedom, without a need for hierarchical control, in balance with nature (Curtis 2011b).

Systems theory – ecosystems
The countercultural moment gave a spiritual interpretation to cybernetics. People, nature and technology are essentially one: there is just one universal man-nature-machine system. People should not be seen as the center of all creation, but simply as a part of a global system. This idea greatly influenced ecology. According to Howard and Eugene Odum, the world consisted of interconnected ecosystems. Each ecosystem was a habitat consisting of various quantifiable and interacting components, which keep each other stable through feedback loops. Because of this, ecosystems react to disturbances by gradually returning to their original state. This was called the balance of nature.

This cybernetic ecology explained how nature could remain stable without any plan, despite all kinds of disturbances. It inspired the countercultural movement to think how human society could remain stable without hierarchical control as well. To model this they set up communes without leaders, but in which the participants saw themselves as one interconnected system, remaining stable through the

The nitrogen cycle, a visualization of the components of a self-stabilizing subsystem of an ecosystem.

The ‘prediction of doom’ from the Limits to Growth report. Results of the ‘standard run’ scenario of the World3 computer simulation designed by Jay Forrester.
feedback of one-on-one interactions. Cybernetic utopians believed that personal computers could one day provide the feedback to enable such a commune system to function on a global scale (Curtis 2011b). The transition of cybernetics from a military creation to a hippie ideology was complete when the Club of Rome used Jay Forrester’s computer simulations to validate their 1972 report “Limits to Growth” (Meadows et al.).

**Urban theory – organic architecture**

These views on the unity of nature, mankind and the built environment translated into urbanism in many different ways. A very literal example of such a translation can be found in the ideas of metabolist architects. Kisho Kurokawa saw capsule architecture as the ideal fusion of machine and organism. Architecture was a continuation of the body. The capsule, a fully self-contained living cell, should be seen as a person’s second skin, an intermediary to the outside world. Megastructures, buildings made up of repeating configurations of such cells, were like organs. The resulting city was like an organism (Schilders 2010).

Buckminster Fuller saw his designs for geodesic domes as an embodiment of the unity between man, nature and technology, and a model for a better society. It was a shape often found in nature, for example in the shape of a tortoise shell. It consists of many fragile parts which nonetheless combine into a firm whole. In the same way, people are part of nature, powerless on their own but powerful when working together in harmony with nature. Fuller popularized these ideas through his “Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth” (1968), containing a vision of the future which combined technological optimism with concern for the environment. He had no faith in traditional politics to bring about his vision; it had to be done by people themselves. His ideas inspired the foundation of non-hierarchical communes, in which people tried to live in balance with nature. Many of these had improvised geodesic domes. Examples of this were Drop City and Synergia in the USA and De Kleine Aarde in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands, the magazine Forum was influential. The Dutch Team X members who founded this magazine, including Jaap Bakema, Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger, thought architecture should enable people to return to nature. The magazine contained many images of African tribes, free from bureaucracies and conventions, living in balance with nature. They criticized the International Style for disregarding artistic values and compartmentalizing human life through the separation of functions. Instead, they appreciated the structure of the historical city in which all functions were united, calling it organically grown urban tissue. They advocated the construction of hybrid buildings, and stressed the theatrical aspects of the public domain in urban design. With architecture providing the meeting places, people would organize themselves naturally, rather than following some technocratic plan (Wagenaar 2011).
Geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller as the United States pavilion for the 1967 World Fair, now housing the Environment Museum Biosphère in Montreal. Photo: Wilfried Zeise

The geodesic domes of the Drop City commune in Colorado. Photo: Clark Richert
The Flevopolder – organic growth
In the Flevopolder, the disapproval of traditional urbanism is visible in the work of architect Frank van Klingerken. The Rijp had no interest in making detailed urban plans for town centers, which could get in the way of the efficient construction. Van Klingerken believed urban plans were overly technocratic, and that the social functions of a town could be concentrated in one multifunctional building. Of the community centers het designed for the Flevopolder, de Meerpaal, built as the heart for Dronten in 1967, is the best known. It consisted of little more than a roof which would shelter different functions like theatre, religious services, the weekly market and sports at the same time, with minimal compartmentalization. The resulting nuisance should be seen as positive, because dealing with it would require breaking social barriers (Wagenaar 2011).

Van Klingerken criticized the traditional urbanism from Delft, and supported the Rijp’s ideas for development without a masterplan. Though the construction of Lelystad was considered a disappointment, Almere offered a new opportunity for the Rijp to build a city. This time the Wageningen-approach had full control from the start. Their design philosophy embraced many trends in the urbanism of the time. They wanted to create a polynuclear city, which would enable the city to grow organically. With ‘organic’ they meant a kind of growth which depended on the demand through time, instead of being aimed at the realization of a plan (Schilders 2010). The polynuclear city supported such growth because the number of cores could be varied, as well as the character and density of each core, but still each resident could look forward to their core being completed in the foreseeable future.

The landscape design had prominence over the city cores situated within the green chambers. This idea was modeled on the nearby area ‘Het Gooi’. The green structure would enable the increasingly prosperous middle class to live in their own estates, close to nature, just like the prosperous merchants who had moved to ‘Het Gooi’ in centuries past. The most important function was not dwelling or working, but recreation. The green space should function as a forum, a public space to meet others. Though this setup was criticized as being anti-urban, it proved attractive to many people (Feddes 2008).

The information era: 1989-present
Desired future - the Californian ideology
With the fall of the Berlin Wall, capitalism was victorious in its battle with communism. According to Fukuyama (1989), this meant the Western World had no more need a bright future to match that of the communist utopia. With liberal capitalism as the only possible political system, economic calculation would guide civilization, without any need for idealism or art. The only challenges left would be technical issues: meeting consumer demands and protecting the environment.

The promise of a better future was not only obsolete, history had shown it to be dangerous. The areas built with the highest of ideals turned out to be some of the most deprived. The modernist high-rise housing estates of the welfare state proved to be hotbeds of poverty, crime, boredom and substance abuse. The organically grown cities of the IJsselmeerpolder did not fare much better. Instead of thriving communities, organized around theatrical community centers and living in balance with nature, they turned out to be self-centered commuter towns with high unemployment, vandalism, green widows (stay-at-home mothers without social contacts) and sherry abuse (van Casteren 2008). The era of the malleable society was declared over.

However, despite these disillusionments, the ideal of the non-hierarchical society was sneaking back in even as it was being kicked out. During the dot-com boom of the nineties, people working in the high-tech industries of Silicon Valley developed a new idea for a better future, based on cybernetics. Through Wired Magazine, they developed a Californian ideology, which reflected how their flexible working practices had blended the divide between the organization man and the hippie.
To them, the information technology was not just another upcoming economic sector. Based on complexity science, they believed that once people were connected to the internet, new social and economic patterns would emerge. Economic growth would no longer require natural resources, but could be fueled by information alone, which was an inexhaustible resource. The connectivity of the internet would work to stabilize economic systems. This would produce a 'New Economy', which would lead to boom without bust (Curtis 2011a).

They believed the development of the internet would inevitably bring about a Jeffersonian democracy, a society which is governed by self-sufficient individuals rather than nations, political parties, corporations or other collectives. People from the right expected cyberspace to transform markets with natural monopolies to ones with free market competition, with the internet entrepreneur as an Ayn Randian hero. People from the left thought the internet’s gift economy would produce the tools and information people need to free themselves from control by corporate capitalism and big government. The Californian ideology was attractive because its hazy promise of a better future appealed to both groups, and because realizing this better future would not require active engagement (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995).

**Systems theory – complex systems**

By the end of the seventies, empirical research had shown the self-stabilizing ecosystem to be too much of a simplification. Nature was too complex to understand using the reductionist model of splitting a system into its parts, and then understanding each of those. Therefore a new kind of systems theory was developed, describing complex systems. Though there is no single definition of a complex system, two characteristics are central: scale-free or fractal properties and emergent properties. The notion of emergent properties especially influenced urbanism.

Emergent properties mean that, when a system is composed of many parts each interacting with its neighbors according to simple rules, the result does not have to be uniformity. Sometimes a very complex order emerges, with properties you could never predict by looking at the rules, only discover by running the system. This is illustrated by the mathematical model of the cellular automaton. Cellular automata can be seen as an analogy for all kinds of systems: computer systems, biological systems and social systems. An example of this is the 'wisdom of the crowds' found in ant colonies. Though an individual ant has only a vague idea of where the colony is, hundreds of them together are very efficient at finding their way.
An important trait of complex systems is the notion of the ‘tipping point’: the minimum number of parts needed before the complex pattern emerges. As an example, biologists use the tipping point to explain the difference between humans and animals. Human brains have the same kind of neurons as chimpanzees, but because we have more of them complex behavior starts to emerge, which ultimately lead to all technological progress (Sapolsky 2010).

In many cases, complexity theory was more successful in modeling real-world phenomena than traditional systems theory. However, complexity science also makes clear how difficult it is to predict the future, since tiny differences on a low scale can have drastic consequences on a larger scale: the butterfly effect. The only way to be sure of the outcome of a system is running it. Still, many people tried to use complexity theory to try to create a better future.

In one way, complexity theory can be seen to empower the individual, since it opens the possibility that one person’s actions, through the butterfly effect, change the outcome of the entire system. This would mean local interventions can be more than a fine-tuning of global influences; they can be a catalyst for change on a larger scale (Manson 2000). In another way it dehumanized people, since it saw people as nodes in a system which respond to stimuli, rather than individuals who shape their future through their decisions. It is common to use the first interpretation for yourself, and the second interpretation for everybody else.

![Glider pattern within the cellular automata ‘Conway’s Game of Life’](image)

**Urban theory – deliberative rationality and the rise of the creative class**

There were two main ways in which complexity theory translated into urbanism. On the one hand, there is the idea that a good spatial configuration would automatically emerge when urbanism facilitated unbiased interaction between all stakeholders. On the other hand, there is the idea that cities can become prosperous by attracting a critical mass of creative people, whose interactions would make the city a self-strengthening hub within the global flows of culture, knowledge and money.

Following the distrust in idealism of the time, the first approach argued that planners should not offer a vision of a better future. They may specify goals, but not the strategies with which to meet them. When left to the ‘wisdom of the crowds’, means would emerge automatically. Often the slum is romanticized as the ideal urban form (Schilders 2010), but to make this principle work in the Western context urbanists tried to find a compromise between anarchy and traditional planning.

Their role should be bringing together stakeholders, giving them the prerequisites of a plan, and facilitating a constructive dialog between them. Each party would then bargain with the others to pursue their competing interests, until a compromise was reached. Because such a compromise is reached through the ‘wisdom of the crowds’, it should, on average, be more beneficial to the stakeholders than one made by a planner. Following Habermas, this principle was called ‘deliberative rationality’ (Healey 1992). Planners from the right advocated public-private partnerships to reach this, while those on the left emphasized the importance of special interest groups.

In practice, it is proving difficult to realize mutually beneficial solutions. In the Dutch context, power differences seem to prevent an unbiased exchange of ideas, and there is a strong tendency to bureaucratize the process. As an example, the conflict of interest between developers requiring new roads and environmental organizations opposing them was, in a couple of cases, solved by nature compensation. To speed up the negotiation process and to safeguard the ‘weak’ interest of the environment, nature compensation then became official planning policy. In current planning projects, nature compensation is treated more as a legal requirement than an ecologically sensible solution.

The second way in which complexity theory influenced urbanism was through Richard Florida’s (2002) adaptation of the Californian ideology into urban theory. He thought the world should be seen as a complex system, with cities as nodes. In the ‘New Economy’, wealth is generated through the work of the creative class, the people who know how to make full use of the opportunities of the internet. The internet has made both companies and creative professionals footloose, so they can do business and play anywhere. Cities can become successful by offering more attractive living and working conditions for the creative class than their competitors. Once the number of creative people has reached a tipping point, their interactions would make the city a self-strengthening hub within the global economy. This would generate unprecedented growth, which would then trickle down to the rest of society.

In practice, this was taken to mean cities should prioritize attracting the creative class through landmark cultural buildings and city marketing, and attracting companies by subsidizing new central business districts and offering tax breaks. To right-wing politicians, the notion of the city as an entrepreneur in a competitive market appealed. To left-wing politicians, the importance attached to culture was attractive, and also that it seemed to offer a way for their undereducated and ageing electorate to benefit from the information age.
The Flevopolder – Almere Smart City

In Almere, the seventies principle of organic growth is still being used, but now with a different meaning. Alderman Adri Duivesteijn wants to develop the city through private commissioning. This way, a large number of stakeholders would be involved in the planning of new city cores, and a good city form would emerge from the interactions between them. Many programs were set up to stimulate private as well as collective private commissioning, including Het (ge)Wilde Wonen in Eilandenbuurt, ikbouwijnijhuisinAlmere and ikbouwbetaalbaarinalmere. The visual diversity should set these new neighborhoods apart from the planned city, but more important is that they should make people take ownership of their environment.

Almere tries different approaches to planning the organic city. In Homeruskwartier, an urban plan is implemented by the municipality. Only the architecture is left to private commissioning. For the development of Oosterwold, the proposal is not to make a traditional urban plan. There are only laws and guidelines, 'orgware', to steer the process of lot division and the construction of the public domain (Schilders 2010).

At the same time, Almere is tries to implement the ideas of Richard Florida. In the past, Almere has tried to rise in the hierarchy of Dutch cities by building a new city center. The OMA designed plan for this center contained retail and landmark cultural buildings like De Kunstlinie. Its density was a break with Almere’s anti-urban past, to make the city appeal to a wider range of people.

Almere also tries to practice Florida's ideas by mixing them with the traditional Californian ideology. Influenced by similar organizations in other cities, the municipality set up ‘Almere Smart City’, in partnership with technology companies like IBM, Living PlanIT and Cisco. This organization aims to make Almere a smart city by spreading information technology tools for people to communicate with each other and with the administration. This will not just make the city more attractive to technology companies. When the residents make full use of the opportunities of information technology, the provision of public services will be more efficient, and their interactions will make Almere will a competitive hub within the flows of the global economy (Jorritsma 2013).

Though Almere Smart City takes the urban development of Almere as the historical context, it doesn’t offer a vision on the spatial aspects of future development. The only concrete proposal affecting public space is for ubiquitous camera surveillance, not just to increase safety but also to help providing public services. Almere Smart City can be seen as the Flevopolder’s planners most self-organized vision for the future. No grand vision for a modernist future like van Eesteren, no pragmatic vision for living close to nature, not even a plot of land to be filled in by interacting stakeholders, just technology companies distributing communication tools.

Conclusions

The spread of complexity thinking has influenced society and urbanism. The trend is an increasing skepticism about our ability to plan cities, and an increasing reliance on bottom-up solutions to create attractive cities.

After World War II the image of the lone planner shaping society was seen as outdated. Leaving the design of a city to the whims of a few visionaries was inefficient. A strong and efficient bureaucracy was needed to keep them in check. In the sixties and seventies, the bureaucratic efficiency was seen as too restrictive. Societies could not be planned, but cities could still be designed to accommodate the new self-organizing people: by emphasizing recreation, bringing people close to nature and by mimicking nature itself. By the nineties, these seventies ideals about self-organization were seen as naive and overly permissive. Self-organization won’t happen as a result of idealism, but will result from the inevitable spread of information technology. The goal of urbanism was no longer about designing an urban form to fit the times; the planning process itself had to mimic the networks of the information age.
This approach has provided new tools for understanding cities, but at the same time made us doubt our abilities to change them. In some cases urbanism seems to become a matter of increasing connectivity only, rather than securing urban quality. In my opinion, it is good to facilitate organic growth when this adds character to a city, and bad when it means urban quality is left to chance. I agree with Joris van Casteren (2008) that cities should never just be utilitarian, but also provide inspiration and embody higher ideals.

The Californian ideology inspires people to strive for a better future. However, that doesn’t mean all of its tenets are true. The stabilizing power of the internet could not prevent the dot-com bubble or the current credit crisis (Curtis 2011a). iPod liberalism, the idea that with enough electronic devices and connectivity democratization is inevitable, seems false. It disregards people’s agency and the political struggles they face. The Iranian election protests have shown the internet can be used for democratization, but also for oppression (Morozov 2009).

Selling visions of a better future has always been a task of urbanism. Urbanists now seem inspired by the Californian ideology, rather than inspiring anyone else. There is nothing wrong with latching on to the popular idea that increased connectivity will bring democracy and prosperity. However, the best thing urbanism can do to make this prediction come true is to show what such a brighter future might look like, rather than stepping back and waiting for self-organization to happen.

For this reason I abandoned earlier ideas I had about designing a digital platform in which individuals and building groups could interact with each other. Instead, I decided to work more on traditional urban design tools. A pleasant public space, will be the best advertisement for building groups. To reach this, some top-down design is not necessarily a problem. The design for the public domain does not have to be fully collaborative, as long as the influence of each building group on the public space can be seen.

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H3: Building groups and affordability

This chapter aims to explain how development through building groups can help to create an open city.

In recent years, a new kind of housing is becoming popular in Western Europe. In first place it is a new system to build housing. Individuals choose to form an association to build their houses or apartment building together, at their own risk, with less reliance on institutions like developers or housing corporations. Secondly, it describes a type of housing with additional shared facilities. Because people often gather into these associations based on a shared ideal or lifestyle, they have the common ground to make these a success.

Many different terms are used to describe this development. The first section of this paper describes these terms, and explains why the phrase ‘building groups’ was chosen to describe them in this paper. After this, some of the values which have contributed to the current attention for building groups are listed.

After this, the ideal of the open city will be examined. Its meaning will be explained as well as its relevance for urban development, particularly in the context of Amsterdam. Then, the qualifications ascribed to building groups are compared to the qualities of the open city. Based upon this, criteria are developed which answer the main question: How can development through building groups help to create an open city?

Finally, by looking at three practical examples, it will be shown how these criteria can be used to see whether a particular housing group contributes to creating an open city.

What terms are being used to describe building groups?

When discussing these kinds of self-organizing developments, an important problem is the absence of a consistent terminology to describe them, both in academia and in practice. There are many definitions, which often only partially overlap (Tummers 2011). To understand what is meant by building groups, it is useful to describe and compare the terms used by different scholars to describe such projects.

CoHousing
The word ‘CoHousing’ is used mostly in the English speaking world. Lafond et al. (2012) say ‘CoHousing’ ‘emphasizes collaborative and self-managed social architectures’ (p.17). This notion is quite similar to ‘intentional communities’. However, in ‘CoHousing’ the daily communal life is central, whereas in ‘intentional communities’ the values residents share are most important.

Intentional communities
Tummers (2011) uses the phrase ‘intentional communities’ to describe this phenomenon. Although no definition is given, ‘intentional communities’ emphasizes the values and ideals which unite residents. Tummers contrasts this with other terms, like ‘building group’ and ‘CPO’, which focus more on the process of realizing housing.

Collective Private Commissioning
The phrase ‘Collective Private Commissioning (CPC)’ is used exclusively in the Netherlands. It focuses on the process of building rather than living. Otter (2012) mostly uses the definition of the Housing Experiments Steering Group (SEV): “CPC is a kind of commissioning in which a collective of like-minded individuals acquire land and decide collectively how and with which parties the houses are realized and the private space (and sometimes even the public space) is furnished.” (p.13), but argues reuse projects can also be a kind of CPC. In practice, the phrase CPC is often also used for collective building projects initiated and managed by a commercial party, which severely limits the freedom of residents to choose with which parties the development is realized.

Building groups
Temel et al. (2009) derive their terminology from the German context. They use the phrase ‘building communities’ (Baueinheit) to describe the general phenomenon, and use ‘building group’ (Baugruppe) to describe particular examples of the same. They define it as “building new housing based on thorough collective resident participation” (p.4). Temel et al. prefer this definition because it stresses self-determination within a community, rather than older phrases like ‘participation project’, which focus on community life.

Common-Interest housing Developments
McKenzie (2003) uses the word ‘common-interest housing developments (CIDs)’ to describe this phenomenon. This is a broad term, which includes “gated communities, townhouse and condominium projects, and other planned communities” (p.1). McKenzie does not provide a definition of CIDs, but lists five characteristics all projects share: Common ownership: At least some of the space is owned by all residents collectively.

Private land use controls: Residents are obliged to follow a set of rules.

Private government: Automatic membership of an association to make and enforce the rules.

Master planning: The development is designed for a specific target audience.

Security measures: Entry controls are installed to keep out non-residents.

I choose to use the phrase “building group” to describe the phenomenon of people building their homes together, because urbanism focuses more on the development, rather than the living phase. It is already used in the Dutch context to describe individual examples of CPC. Also, in Germany, a country with a strong tradition of development trough building groups, the word Baugruppe is used with the exact same meaning.
Trudeslund - Birkerød - Denmark

Process diagram for Trudeslund.

Plan view of Trudeslund.

Aerial view of Trudeslund.

Evuation of Trudeslund.

Building group formation

Choosing a site

Agreement on project proposal

Land sale

Architect/preliminary design

Design competition

Adjustments

Project design/planning meetings

Construction

Rising interest rates

Architectural firms

Leaves

5. Ownership structure secures affordability
Because all houses can be sold individually, prices have risen a lot since the completion of the project.

4. Building groups open to non-residents
Although the facilities are located in a separate building they are not used by outsiders. No other building groups are nearby.

3. Communal facilities in building groups
There is a large range of communal facilities, located in a central building separate from the houses. These facilities are well used.

2. Appeal to different kinds of people
The building group started with idealistic young families, but has grown more diverse over the years.

1. Conveniently located for services
The building group is located in a suburban location, accessible only through one entrance without being part of the street network.

(source: Google Earth)
What values lie beneath the current popularity of building groups?

Just as each of the authors give their own definition to development through “building groups”, they also have their own ideas on which values make this idea popular at the moment. All of them mention the current interest in building groups, and want to explain this based on the benefit it brings house-seekers or policy makers.

- Lafond et al. think CoHousing improves communication between people in a housing project in the first place. Secondly, it enables experimentation with new sustainable concepts. Thirdly, “CoHousing, depending on ownership structures – but also on local housing, rent and land use policies – can (...) feed gentrification, but before all else be a force for integration and affordability” (p.17) because its ownership structure discourages long-term speculation.
- According to Tummers, intentional communities enable people to organize with like-minded people in pursuit of an ideal. Three important values which bring people to live in this way are self-management, sustainability and keeping distance from mainstream society.
- For Otten, the main reason CPC is commendable is that it gives people control over their own living environment. CPC is also encouraged because it contributes to social cohesion, but this is up to debate.
- As reasons to promote building groups, Temel at al. mention the freedom for people to shape their own environments, tailored towards the needs of their group, with more contact with neighbors.
- McKenzie singles out the blurring of the border between private and public as the interesting aspect of CID’s. This can result in inventive solutions on three dimensions of this separation: access (how open?), agency (how governmental?), and interest (concerns how many?).

Many of the reasons these authors mention overlap each other. When summarizing, you can find four main reasons for the popularity of building groups. All four reasons can be seen both as a benefit to the residents and as a benefit to society:

- Building groups encourages good relations between neighbors. (Mentioned by Lafond et al., Otten, Temel et al. and McKenzie.)
- Building groups enable residents to control their own living environment. (Mentioned by Tummers, Otten and Temel et al.)
- People can express their idealism through building groups, especially by living sustainably. (Mentioned by Lafond at al. and Tummers.)
- Some building groups guarantee their long-term affordability through their ownership structure. (Mentioned by Lafond et al. and McKenzie.)

What is the open city?

This ideal of the open city is an urban translation of Karl Popper’s (1962) ideas about an open society: a society in which the values of individuality, criticism and humanitarianism are so deeply rooted it is immune to totalitarianism. According to Rieniets (2009), an open city is a city “open to be used and shared by all”, and which holds “the capacity to integrate social differences” (p.15). Rieniets lists four threats to the open city:

- Segregation: Mass migration has changed the way cities and citizens work. Cities no longer have an urban culture, but they become nodes in a global network of people, commodities and ideas. Whether such nodal cities are still ‘open’ “depends on the degree to which newcomers gain access to the existing networks and are incorporated in the dominant elites” (Reijndorp 2009, p.93).
- Insecurity: Feelings of insecurity have set off a transformation aimed to make cities safer. There are two approaches for this: redesigning public space for ubiquitous observation rather than a meeting place, or isolating groups with a common interest in their own bunkers. Both of these see an open city, used and shared by all, as a problem.
- Privatization: Today, even middle class people can afford to withdraw into such a bunker. This self-imposed isolation is not just to avoid the dangers of the city. Privatized services also enable them to enjoy the luxury of avoiding contact with the non-privatized ‘open’ city as much as possible.
- Cultural divide: The internet has made maintaining contacts across geographical boundaries effortless. This has enabled people to live part of their life in virtual communities, rather than being part of the locally bound urban life. A city is not open when its residents live parallel lives in virtual communities (Rieniets 2009).

Scheffer (2004) summarizes various kinds of research done on Amsterdam to see to what extent this city is an open society, touching on all the same themes as Rieniets:

- Segregation: Amsterdam is becoming a nodal city. The welfare space has thus far limited the spatial segregation between natives and non-natives. Nonetheless, the Amsterdam ring road is becoming a cultural divider (p.13-15). Though migrants make material progress, both natives and non-natives concentrate their friendships even more on members of their own group, because of increasing segregation (p.20). In this regard, Amsterdam is becoming less open.
Mühlenviertel - Tübingen - Germany

Process diagram for Mühlenviertel. (own image)

Aerial view of Mühlenviertel. (source: Google Earth)

Evaluation of Mühlenviertel. (own image)
Insecurity and privatization
Scheffer recognizes the tendency of the people to withdraw into their own “walled micro welfare and security states” (p. 35-36) for the city of Amsterdam, and regards this as a threat to Amsterdam’s openness. Good fences do not automatically make good neighbors. However, he sees increasing safety by designing defensible spaces which enable ubiquitous observation as a solution to this withdrawal, in contrast to Rieniets, who considers this part of the problem (p. 36).

Cultural divide:
The internet was said to reduce the importance of space, making people ‘footloose’ (p. 34). Scheffer fears the open city is threatened by a cultural schism between an upper class of global citizens and a growing mass of locally bound people who resent mainstream society and proclaim: “first our own!”. The debate on tolerating diversity does nothing to bridge this divide (p. 30-31). Citizenship requires a spatial dimension, a connection between social cohesion and physical space. The example of Amsterdam’s Western Garden Cities shows realizing such a connection remains problematic, even though it was a major concern during the urban redesign (p. 34).

Rieniets and Scheffer discuss largely the same issues when it comes to realizing an open city: Mass migration, insecurity, privatization and a cultural divide. In addition, Scheffer makes clear all of these themes are relevant to the current development of Amsterdam.

Where is the overlap between the ideals of the mixed city and those of building groups?
These same categories can be used to look at building groups. Some of the qualities of building groups can make a city more open, others less open.

Segregation
Because lots for building groups are usually created in new developments, they are typically located in wealthier parts of the city. When building groups use an ownership structure which upholds affordability, they can counteract at least the material aspect of segregation. However, many building groups have an ownership structure in which homes can be resold with very little restrictions.

For a building group to counteract segregation and contribute to the open city, its internal structure should be planned to secure long-term affordability. An example of this could be a building group co-owned by all residents, who pay rent to the cooperation instead of owning their own apartment.

Insecurity and privatization
Living in a community of like minded people, offering certain services for which you would normally need to leave the house, can be seen as a kind of privatization, making cities less open. It depends whether the building groups is seen as a well-protected unit, or if the services they offer are made available to people from the outside. This is especially important when development through building groups is seen as a way to grow the social aspects of a neighborhood organically, instead of providing social services top-down. Building groups can choose to open up communal facilities like a dining hall, laundry room or garden to others. Businesses located inside a building group can also open up a community to the larger world.

Whether the facilities offered by a building group are open to a wider public depends on the building group itself, but also on the urban form. The plot division, building typology, positioning of the garden and the public spaces all determine how visible and accessible a building group can be to outsiders. Security is also an important concern. Crime can dissuade building groups from opening up to the outside world.

Cultural divide
Building groups empower residents to take control over their living environments together, which creates a strong bond between them. A risk associated with building groups is that they gather people with a similar outlook on life, closing them off to the outside world. Building groups tend to be somewhat homogeneous, since joining a building group is an active choice. This is part of the reason why they encourage people to be good neighbors. When this makes people engaged with their direct surroundings rather than global virtual networks, it can be seen to promote the open city.

Whether building groups contribute to a cultural divide also depends on what the residents of a building group have in common. In a typical housing project, homogeneity is caused by people choosing to move there, based upon disposable income and lifestyle. Building groups can form around other things people have in common, like a certain hobby, health condition or ideal. When traditional factors attracting people to a home remain in place, but an extra common interest is added, a more diverse group of residents is sometimes the result. However, strong adherence to one ideal can also make a building group closed off to outsiders. The kind of common ground which binds the residents can make a building group open or closed.

Which building groups are successful in reaching these goals?
This question will be answered by looking at literature on a three neighborhoods developed through housing groups. Each of these will be briefly evaluated on the criteria resulting from the previous paragraph, checking whether this can be seen as a result from the way the development process was structured.
D13 Aspern - Vienna - Austria

Process structured by **municipality** (land owner)

- choosing a plot / marketing
- competition of ideas
- division of the plot
- agreement on internal organization
- agreement on building design
- assessment
- land sale
- construction

- bank
- architect
- developer (optional)
- mediator (optional)
- more residents

**Process diagram for D13 Aspern**.

**Plan view of D13 Aspern**.

**Aerial view of D13 Aspern**. (source: Google Earth)

**Ownership structure secures affordability**

Because of the various kinds of ownership and financing the building groups use, the income variation in D13 is higher than in the rest of the New Town.

**Communal facilities in building groups**

As a pilot project the initial residents were motivated to experiment with sharing facilities with their neighbors. Especially the groups which started as a spin-off from a building group elsewhere in Austria contain many communal facilities.

**Building groups open to non-residents**

The interior of the block is a publicly accessible garden, of which each building group maintains a part. Businesses face the street, and some communal facilities are in freestanding pavilions in the garden, making them open to non-residents as well.

**Conveniently located for services**

Because each building group is a (mostly) freestanding structure facilities can be accessible from the street, the interior garden, or both. However, Aspern is a New Town still in its infancy, so it won’t offer a substantial customer base for services for some time.

**Appeal to different kinds of people**

Though all building groups emphasized they were open to all kinds of people, some of them had a cultural or spiritual affinity, while others were more pragmatic.
Trudeslund
Trudeslund is one of the oldest and best known building groups. It is located in the Danish town of Birkerød, a suburb of Copenhagen. It was initiated by a group of idealistic young families in the seventies. They found a plot designated for development and convinced the municipality to let they develop it as a building group. After a self-organized architectural competition they hired an architecture firm and started into a long process of collaborative design, in which everybody had to agree. The final result was a design with low-rise houses along two pedestrian streets, with a communal house in the center. A large part of the site was intentionally left undeveloped (Durrett and McKamant 2011).

- Ownership structure secures affordability: Because all houses can be sold individually, prices have risen a lot since the completion of the project.
- Communal facilities in building groups: There is a large range of communal facilities, located in a central building separate from the houses, and they are well used.
- Building groups open to non-residents: Although the facilities are located in a separate building they are not used by outsiders. No other building groups are nearby.
- Conveniently located: The building group is located in a suburban location, accessible only through one entrance without being part of the street network.
- Appeal to different sorts of people: The building group started with idealistic young families, but has grown more diverse over the years.

Muehlienviertel
The Muehlienviertel in the German city of Tübingen is a neighborhood developed mostly through building groups. Tübingen is a university town, which has in the last two decades transformed a large former military site in a mixed urban area, almost entirely through building groups. This was the result of a municipal policy, with urban quality as the most important goal. This made it possible to develop the Muehlienviertel within a short time. About half of the site was developed through building groups, the other half consisted of various kinds of assisted living projects (Guetschow and Soehlke 2012).

- Ownership structure secures affordability: The building groups offer a wide range of ownership structures, some of which are aimed at long-term affordability.
- Communal facilities in building groups: Because of the large amount of housing realized through building groups, living together is not a conscious choice for most residents. However, lots were divided through a competition which encouraged communality.
- Building groups open to non-residents: Not known.
- Conveniently located: Conveniently located building groups (alongside the creek and the central square) have business space on the ground floor.
- Appeal to different sorts of people: The residents are representative of the small university town in which it is located.

IbbA Europakwartier
Ik bouw betaalbaar in Almere (IbbA) is an initiative by the municipality of Almere and a housing corporation to enable the creation of affordable owner-occupied housing. They set up an organization which sells lots and provides various services, including partial loans, to people who want to build a house. The program is only open to those within a specific income bracket. One of the projects within this program is IbbA Europakwartier. This proposed housing block consists of small lots for affordable single family housing, with larger lots for building groups on the corners. The housing groups are initiated by the IbbA organization itself, but otherwise use the same financial instruments (Ik bouw betaalbaar in Amere 2012).

- Ownership structure secures affordability: There are little restrictions on selling houses or apartments in IbbA. However, as long as the extra loans are not repaid, the IbbA organization shares in any value increase.
- Communal facilities in building groups: The individual lots are unsuitable for communal facilities, and the preliminary design for the building groups is basic, optimized for affordability, and not expected to contain any shared facilities either.
- Building groups open to non-residents: The building groups are not expected to be open to the public.
- Conveniently located: Because the block is part of the regular urban tissue, it is theoretically well suited to contain businesses and services.
- Appeal to different sorts of people: Because of its affordability and the limited range of option for people who want to build their own house, IbbA Almere attracts various kinds of people, both form Almere and elsewhere.

There is some agreement on the values which are behind the popularity of building groups: Encouraging good relations between neighbors, enabling residents to take control of their own environment, making people express their idealism and guaranteeing long-term affordability. These values partially overlap with those of the ideals of the open city. Combining these criteria can be defined to assess whether a building group contributes to an open city. These criteria are:

- Does the ownership structure of the building group secure affordability?
- Does the building group contain communal facilities?
- Is the building group open to non-residents?
- Is the building group conveniently located for providing services?
- Does the building group appeal to different kinds of people?

When applying these criteria to judge real examples, it is shown that these can help to identify the characteristics which make housing groups and the cities in which they are located more or less open.
IbbA Europakwartier - Almere - Netherlands

Process diagram for IbbA Europakwartier. (own image)

Aerial view of IbbA Europakwartier. (source: Google Earth)

Evaluation of IbbA Europakwartier. (own image)

Ownership structure secures affordability There are little restrictions on selling houses or apartments in IbbA. However, as long as the extra loans are not repaid, the IbbA organization shares in any value increase.

Building groups open to non-residents The building groups are not expected to be open to the public.

Communal facilities in building groups The individual lots are unsuitable for communal facilities, and the preliminary design for the building groups is basic, optimized for affordability, and not expected to contain any shared facilities either.

Conveniently located for services Because the block is part of the regular urban tissue, it is theoretically well suited to contain businesses and services.

Appeal to different kinds of people Because of its affordability and the limited range of option for people who want to build their own house, IbbA Almere attracts various kinds of people, both from Almere and elsewhere.
Conflict of values
An important conflict of values relevant to my project is that of the welfare state, which values economic equality, versus neoliberalism, which values the free market as an organizing principle. Since the aim of my graduation project is providing affordable housing through building groups, it fits better with the welfare state approach. The ideal is that housing in the center of Amsterdam should also be accessible for low income people. This ideal has historically been defended by public authorities, especially in the Labor dominated municipality of Amsterdam, as well as by housing corporations.

However, this ideal is not shared by everybody. In recent years, more people have started to see subsidizing housing as a wasteful use of taxpayer money, distorting the efficient organization which would result from leaving housing to the free market. For example, the high percentage of social housing has been seen as a good thing, but is currently seen as problematic. The graduation project also incorporates some neoliberal values, because it wants to realize its goals through mutually beneficial agreements, mostly between private individuals and companies, and with only limited accommodation by governments and housing associations. The scheme does not choose one extreme, but leans more towards the welfare state approach.

Another conflict of values is between individualism and collectivism. The graduation project promotes a collective way of living. Living collectively is not just a preference, but indicates specific values like cooperation and taking care of each other. Living individually carries specific values with it as well, for example self-sufficiency. The emphasis on collectivism does not appeal to all house seekers, and they have plenty of choice in more individualized housing. However, experiences from other countries show there might well be a hidden market for a more collective way of living.

Building groups as a struggle for power
The design will empower those seeking housing in Amsterdam, especially those with modest incomes. Compared to the current situation revolving around the development of Blok o, the aim is to shift power towards those who will be living in Houthaven.

The people
When building groups are started by residents instead of professionals there can be more diversity regarding design and kinds of ownership. However, this will require a lot of knowledge about development through building groups, which needs to be easily accessible for both professionals and lay people. A building group started by people who share a common interest could facilitate affordable housing much better than the ones currently under development, because these often have a higher degree of communality. This would make it possible to cut various kinds of costs, for example by sharing facilities by letting some people do work themselves instead of hiring a contractor. When people can successfully start their own building group, or choose from a more affordable and diverse range of building groups, that would really be an example of citizen empow-
iment in urbanism.

Public authorities
However, this cannot be done without a change in municipal policy. The development process for Blok o favors business led building groups, but foreign examples show this is not a necessity. Many things can be done to assist individuals in developing a building group. Require building groups to hand in an elaborated idea, rather than a sketch design in order to qualify for a lot, so less professionalism is required in the early phase of forming the building group, like they do in T bingen. Offer lots to the winners of a competition on urban and social qualities rather than dividing them by lottery, encouraging attributes like sustainability and social diversity, like they do in Vienna. Bundle data on building group designs from various architects and construction companies, like they do in Almere. Collect knowledge on building groups and make it available for example by providing building groups with a subsidized building consultant. And finally, by lowering the ground lease a bit, building groups will have more possibilities for come up with designs which are both innovative and economically viable, from which the municipality can pick the best ones.

Some of these measures cost money. On the other hand, when building groups plan and manage part of the physical and social infrastructure of Houthaven, the municipality can save money on that. It is important for the public to check whether the municipality (as well as municipal organizations like project bureau Houthaven) makes deals with building groups which are socially as well as financially advantageous, and whether they can make building groups keep their promises.

Institutions
The extent to which housing corporations can get involved in the development of Houtha- en depends a lot on regulations on a national scale. However, housing corporations and building groups could both benefit from cooperation. By serving as a backup investor who purchases leftover units, building groups can provide corporations with cheaply produced housing. At the same time, the assurance there will be a buyer for all units will limit the financial risks for a building group and benefit them in negotiating a mortgage. Building groups initiated by private developers do not need such a backup, since taking risks is part
What the actors would think if the Haven was developed according to this model.

In this model, building professionals like developers and architects will no longer be the initiators of building groups, but serve them as consultants again. This model should offer opportunities to make money as well, working for a fee instead of as an investor.

Apart from building professionals, the model would also make it easier for other businesses to cooperate with a building group, which shares their purpose and offers opportunities to mix living and working and to do business together. Finally, when development through building groups becomes more common, banks will be more familiar with the idea of having developers, architects, and financiers forming a building group which offers to change the world.

With all these people involved, we can build a new city for the people.

We could get a plan from the government on how to change the world. We would make it cheap for everyone to work and live in a sustainable way. With a new building group, we could make it happen. We won't need to rely on a developer. We can use some money or get a few cheaply produced social housing units.

We could build a new town on the ground floor to encourage experimental plans. We will see if it works. The best plan will win.
with lending to them. With so many parties working together in a building group, it will be easier to convince banks to invest in one.

**redistributing power**
The aim of my graduation theme is empowering house seekers through building groups. This change of power can’t result from the execution of a plan alone. Successful examples from other countries usually require a municipal plan of offering lots to building groups, but they are also the result a culture of development through building group, which offers knowledge, role models and encouragement in the startup phase. This is not something which can be implemented top-down, but it can be encouraged.

To encourage the bottom-up formation of building groups a website could be used to bring people together. Instead of websites which only have the supply of housing, like Woningnet or Funda, it needs to be interactive and show building groups in many different stages of development, from concept to finished apartment. It should show different attributes of a housing group not as static properties but as things which are being debated by prospective residents and other investors, and highlight mutually beneficial deals being made.

At the same time, this kind of development also has urban requirements and challenges. For example, the appropriate size for lots has to be determined, as well as the number of lots which can be developed at one time. Public space has to be flexible because there is a lot less predictability in the locations of services and of parking demand. It is also necessary to rethink how residents of building groups might use the public space in a different way. Can building groups also take over the maintenance of the public domain, and how this should be organized? These questions will need to be answered in the next chapters.
H4: Building group types

A typology of building groups

What kinds of building groups should be taken as the starting point for the design of Houthaven? To answer this question, the first thing to do is look back towards the case studies. Each of these can be seen as a different example of the way in which the built form and the organization of the building groups are related.

All of the chosen building groups strive for affordability in some way. They use three main ways of doing this:

Austerity: Create small, basic and standardized dwellings.

Cut out the middle men: Do as much of the planning and construction yourself, so you are not forced into the role of customer.

Cooperation: By cooperation and volunteering all kinds of facilities can be realized for a reduced price.

All three of these methods are also used in this design. However, these qualities offer few handles for design. As input for design, it is necessary to find the factors which determine how the internal organization of a building group impacts its surroundings. Based upon the case studies, four factors were chosen to classify building groups into typologies. Each of these factors has implications for both the building group itself, and for the neighborhood as a whole. This means organizational issues, which influence affordability but have no impact on the layout of a building group, are not taken into account in this classification. These factors are:

- Height
- Size
- Openness
- Collectivity

When making an urban plan which should be able to accommodate all kinds of proposals for building groups, it is important to have an idea of the kinds of proposals are necessary. To do this, two extremes were taken for each of these four factors, based on the extremes found in the case studies. By combining all possibilities, 16 types of building groups emerge. Each type of these types translates a set of wishes members of a building group can have into a picture, and then from a picture to a set of urban indicators. These types can be used to...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Openness</th>
<th>Collectivity</th>
<th>Open</th>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Collective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High 2-3 floors</td>
<td>Big about 40 families</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Low 4-9 floors</td>
<td>Small about 8 families</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Height, size, openness and collectivity - implications for building group typology (own illustration)**
characterize both existing building groups and proposals for future ones.

The basic idea is to create a plan which is based upon these four factors. Based upon this idea, a first concept drawing was made, in which the neighborhood is characterized by three public spaces:

- A main street, continuing Spaarndammerstraat towards the waterfront.
- A quay, making the edge between the neighborhood to Het IJ accessible for everybody.
- A pocket park, using the small dilapidated harbors to make a small waterfront park, similar to the nearby pier Het Steden Hooft, which will soon undergo transformation.

Building groups with a collective outlook and set aside a lot of space for non-residential program would be clustered around these public space, while exclusively residential building groups are located away from them. By clustering high building groups around the edges of Houthaven, a nuisance resistant wall of buildings would be created. This is especially necessary facing Minervahaven and Spaarndammerdijk/Tasmanstraat, due to noise and pollution resulting from port activities and traffic. Similarly, closed building typologies would be located at the edges of the site, but also around the central main street. Open typologies would create two wedges with a greener character, one continuing from Zonnehoek urban farming allotments in the east, and one from the waterfront pocket park in the west. Finally, the half of the site facing the port would have larger groups, corresponding to the sizes of the boxes of Minervahaven, while the other half would have smaller groups, corresponding more to the rythms found in the facades of nearby Spaarndammerbuurt.

This rest of the plan was developed from this concept. A problem with this one-on-one translation of the four factors into an urban plan was that it could lead
Matrix of 16 building group typologies (own illustration)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Business Model</th>
<th>Programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QUE65 with Bert Pijnse</td>
<td>People in their 50s Ex-hippies</td>
<td>- Self-sustaining</td>
<td>Corporation as an organizational form.</td>
<td>Housing for older people on ground floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>van der Aa</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Intergenerational</td>
<td>Sale-construction agreements between each resident and a construction company.</td>
<td>- Only leftover space shared (roof terrace)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Hoofden 4 by Ferdi Koorneef</td>
<td>Not defined (people wanting to design their own space but can’t afford private commissioning)</td>
<td>- Community in small groups</td>
<td>Archidev bears all costs and profits during the design and construction phase.</td>
<td>- Communal living room - Classroom/workshop room - Workshop - Coffee shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our-Loft by Anton Brink</td>
<td>Starters</td>
<td>- Affordability</td>
<td>As a developing architect, Archidev bears all costs and profits during the design and construction phase.</td>
<td>No shared programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blijf-huis with Cleo</td>
<td>Everybody who want to feel responsible for each other</td>
<td>- Combine regular and assisted living</td>
<td>Many sources of income: social / health care funds - insurance companies - own profits - grants / volunteer work - housing corporation - contributions</td>
<td>- Past groups have chosen: - A theatre - A daycare center - A guest room - Workshop - A restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westermann</td>
<td>Everybody (focus on the self-employed)</td>
<td>- Affordability</td>
<td>Sale-construction agreements between each resident and contractor. Architect gets fee for design and management. Mixed ownership possible.</td>
<td>- Past groups have chosen: - A theatre - A daycare center - A guest room - Workshop - A restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Vrijhaven by Hein de Haan</td>
<td>The young elderly</td>
<td>- Community</td>
<td>Building group will commission a developer.</td>
<td>- Communal room - Communal outdoor space - Studios for visitors - Gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOEK with Vincent Reijnders</td>
<td>Patients with ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis)</td>
<td>- Cultural activities</td>
<td>Non-profit 'De Latei' will find a housing corporation to own and rent out space according to their own statutes</td>
<td>- Excellent sound-proofing - Elevator - Shared garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eureka with Anne Stijnberg</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Shared facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Architect(s)</td>
<td>Plot Size</td>
<td>Floor Space</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUE65</td>
<td>with Bert Pijnse</td>
<td>1200 m²</td>
<td>800 m²</td>
<td>700 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Hoofden 4</td>
<td>by Ferdi Koorneef</td>
<td>1200 m²</td>
<td>1200 m²</td>
<td>1200 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our-Loft</td>
<td>by Anton Brink</td>
<td>1200 m²</td>
<td>1200 m²</td>
<td>1200 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blijf-huis</td>
<td>with Cleo Westermann</td>
<td>4000 m²</td>
<td>7000 m²</td>
<td>6700 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Vrijhaven</td>
<td>by Hein de Haan</td>
<td>2500 m²</td>
<td>5750 m²</td>
<td>5500 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOEK</td>
<td>with Vincent Reijnders</td>
<td>300 m²</td>
<td>500 m²</td>
<td>500 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eureka</td>
<td>with Anne Stijnberg</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Building group typology resulting from the interviews. (own image)
to a plan too prescriptive in determining which type of building group should go where. This could result in a clustering of similar building groups, rather than a situation in which building groups could profit from the proximity of groups with a different profile. Therefore, a more sophisticated way of mixing high and low, small and large groups, open and closed typologies, and collective and privately oriented groups is necessary.

**Interviews with building group initiators**

When talking to building group initiators, the same themes came up as in the case study research. They aim for affordability in multiple ways. On the one hand there is the ‘austerity’ approach. By making small apartments without any frills, they can be affordable even without subsidy. OurLoft is an example of this. Another way to ensure affordability is reducing process costs by cutting out the middle men (developers or housing corporation executives) and building on a large scale. Hein de Haan has demonstrated this approach in a number of projects. A third approach is cutting costs and raising funds through cooperation with others. Cleo Westermann intends to provide housing for a vulnerable group, homeless youth, through revenue generated by their work, the efforts of volunteers and various sources of external funding. This requires a large amount of floorspace.

When talking to the ‘active citizens’ initializing building groups, the depictions of the sixteen types of building groups proved useful when talking to people with little experience in the building sector. For building group professionals it did not seem to have much added value. Just like the cases studies, these building group proposals can also be represented by one of these types.

The theme of the ‘We the People’ studio is democracy. Representative democracy seems to matter less and less. Government itself now states that people should not expect them to solve social issues, it has to be done by ‘active citizens’, in my case, initiators of building groups. To see how this could work in practice the design is not made with the general interest mind, but the interests of a selected group of active citizens.

However, just like the government does when making a bottom-up plan, this group of active citizens was carefully selected. They should each show a different way of realizing affordable housing, and many of them are not driven only by self-interest, but also by a social ideal. As a designer I do not have a politically neutral position, because I have chosen a set of ‘active citizens’ who combine social responsibility with enough entrepreneurial spirit to make this economically viable.
H6: Urban Plan

Turning this research into a design proved difficult. All three strategies building groups have used to create affordable housing have been used, but the typological research only informed one of these: encouraging cooperation.

The basic plan was first of all informed by the principle of austerity. The existing urban plan is costly and to limit the land price, a design is made which does not include a complete tunnel, and neither the creation of artificial islands. The upside of this is better integration between Houthaven and Spaarndammerbuurt, and more opportunities for people not living at the waterfront to enjoy it.

Secondly, the principle of cutting out the middle man is encouraged, but not fully secured. Because the Netherlands has no tradition of developing through building groups yet, each building groups should be able to choose their own organizational structure. Blok o has shown this often means the involvement of a traditional developer. The process design is they in which this is encouraged.

Finally, the principle of affordability through cooperation is mostly realized within each block. To find opportunities for building groups to work together, a ‘federative plan’ upon which all of the buildings groups which make up one city block would have to agree. Therefore the typology of the block has to be able to accommodate different types of building groups.

Sightlines from the neighborhood to the IJ. (own image)

Green zone connecting to urban farming / pocket park. (own image)

Four main public spaces: main road, urban axis and square, IJ quay, and pocket park. (own image)

Height differences protect against high water (schematic) (own image)

Traffic structure (own image)
The basic plan was first of all informed by the principle of austerity. Many people mention the high land price the municipality still charges as one of the main reasons building groups are not yet taking off. However, these high prices are necessary for the municipality to recoup the investments they make to develop the area. The plan for Houthaven is costly not just because of the tunnel and costs of creating land and water. It is also a plan with a low amount of space which can be sold. Because of this, the plan can only profitable as series of exclusive islands, not as a place for everybody.

The school, which is already under construction, is important in structuring the plan. Behind the school building is a central block. On one side of this block is a main pedestrian street, continuing from Spaarnedammerstraat, optimal for functions like shops and restaurants, leading to the new ferry landing. On the other side is the main access for cars. On both the east and west side of the plan, blocks are structured around a two green wedges. One continues from Zonnehoek urban farming allotments in the east, and one from the waterfront pocket park in the west.
The revised plan keeps the current boundary between water and land intact. There is a strong separation between the land side, which connects to the existing Spaarndammerbuurt, and the water side, where an area of aquatic housing can be realized in Houthaven. The quay which separates both areas is an important space which connects the two. The green wedges and the main shopping street offer small vistas of the IJ. The following five public spaces offer are important in offering urban qualities which define the area.

Main axis/car axis
This pedestrian street should connect the Spaarndammerstraat shopping street to the waterfront and ferry landing. The street should enable businesses part of the adjacent building groups to profit from the emerging coffee culture of the area. The central part of the axis is given to be used and maintained by selected building groups located next to it. Because each section of this axis is utilized by a different building group, each section should have a different character and materialization. However, the central space should not have any buildings, be visually open and accessible for everybody. For visual coherence,
they should also accommodate two continuous rows of trees in this space.
In contrast to the other streets, this main axis is raised half a meter, enabling a direct connection between the ground floor and the street, without a difference in height. Both sides of the profile are public space, maintained by the municipality. This pedestrian space accommodates access to facilities located in the ground floor. It can also be used for loading and unloading. A separate bike path is made to keep shoppers and cyclists heading to and from the ferry apart. A building height of five storeys along this axis, equal to 'Amsterdam cake' height, assures the street is recognizable as a continuation of the rest of the city.

In the streets accessible for local car traffic, there is a buffer between the buildings and the public space. The street parking in this area is intended only for visitors, residents park in the garage of their building group. To mitigate flood risks, the buildings are slightly higher than the street, which results in a buffer zone between the ground floor and the public space.

Tasmanstraat/Spaarndammerdijk
The current urban plan calls for a full tunnel underneath Tasmanstraat/Spaarndammerdijk, to ease congestion and limit the noise and air pollution for Houthaven. High land prices are necessary to pay for this tunnel, but are one reason for the current lack of development. A cheaper alternative would be creating a slightly lowered road for through traffic just below the dyke, with a road for local traffic on top of the dyke. The dyke will stay in place, but will be slightly heightened to accommodate three crossings between Spaarndammerbuurt and Houthaven.

The large width of the profile (40 meters) which results from this layout will accommodate two rows of trees: one row next to the existing housing and one row of larger trees in the green slope of the dyke. The large width of the street enables high buildings on the north side, going up to eight storeys. Though the proximity of the ground floor to the road does not allow for living on the ground floor, this space can be used for parking.
storage or as a workshop. The first floor, which is directly connected to the ground level, allows for studios (possibly connected to the ground floor level) or residential space.

Quay
Having a publicly accessible quay should enable the residents of Houthaven, and of Amsterdam West as a whole, to enjoy the waterfront. The quay creates a hard edge between the neighborhood on land, and the part of the neighborhood floating in Houthaven. Having floating piers perpendicular to the quay should not block the views of Amsterdam Noord and the NDSM crane.

The area next to the water is accessible for cars, cyclists and pedestrians. The space next to the building is used and maintained by the building group using it. It should be publicly accessible, but, unlike the central space in the main axis, is doesn’t have to be visually open. People can create barriers to block wind, and plant trees if desired. In planning their space, there is a small
difference in height to protect the buildings during high water. The height difference can be bridged is the design for the privately maintained space.

Open area
The open area is characterized by a central open green space used and maintained by the building groups surrounding it. Only a limited amount of paving is allowed in the central area. There is no building line around these areas, but the blocks open up to this space.

Pier Park
This is a pocket park, using the dilapidated harbors to make a small waterfront park, similar to the nearby pier Het Stenen Hoofd, which will soon undergo transformation.
Section green zone (own image)
H6: Process design

The process design is optimized to give building groups incentives to do the planning themselves, supported by a supervisor appointed by the municipality. A building group which can cut costs when cooperating with a developer, but when they hand over power to them controlling costs will be much harder. The Blok o system of dividing lots seems to favor developer-led groups rather than traditional building groups.

The development process for Houthaven will consist of four phases. In the first phase the development agency will make an urban plan, and announce its intention to develop the site through building groups. This will hopefully inspire the creation of building new proposals for building groups.

In the second phase, building groups are invited to submit proposals for building groups. To keep this part of the process accessible for everybody, only a written proposal is asked, rather than a building design. An advice desk is set up to supply prospective building groups with the information they need, especially about costs.

When judging proposals, building groups with members will be given priority over those who don’t. Also, to foster the kind of neighborhood life which
### Development process phasing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building group creation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lot application</strong></td>
<td><strong>Block negotiations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Building group finalization</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>Location/ design</th>
<th>Development agency action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximate size and list of facilities.</td>
<td>Small number of enthusiastic and committed people.</td>
<td>Estimated budget.</td>
<td>List of requirements for a location.</td>
<td>Make the urban plan and decide on lot prices and requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for a fixed amount of land and floor space, possibly in cooperation with other groups.</td>
<td>Ask people to join the groups, to get a better position in the plot allocation process.</td>
<td>When necessary, get other parties (like housing corporations, health care providers, charities, banks, businesses...) to express interest.</td>
<td>Commitment to one site, express preference for certain blocks.</td>
<td>Choose a plot to be developed and a mix of building group proposals which fits the prescribed program and financial resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor judges if the program is complete in terms of floor space, affordable housing and neighborhood functions. If not, building groups negotiate which group will provide the missing program.</td>
<td>Changes in price and program should be agreed with both building group participants and other groups. Participants should be found for the entire program.</td>
<td>The supervisor proposes a way to divide costs over all building groups by charging different prices for different kinds of land use. This is then open to negotiations.</td>
<td>Location and shape of the plot for each building groups is proposed by the supervisor, negotiated and agreed upon. Agreement on elements shared between building groups (like parking, elevators...)</td>
<td>Propose a plot division and a way to divide costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine-tuning.</td>
<td>Contracts for sale/rent/financial participation signed.</td>
<td>Formal agreement with external financiers.</td>
<td>Definite size and position of each apartment within the building group. Preliminary and final design.</td>
<td>Check whether each building groups confirms to laws and mutual agreements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Process organization (own image)
Building groups express preferences for plots, the supervisor chooses one (own image).
will facilitate cooperation, a certain amount of non-residential space will be required for each block. Both of these things favor traditional building groups. However, by cooperation with building groups in an early stage, professionals like developers, architects, contractors or housing corporations can get into the development process at an early stage anyway.

In the third phase, the precise composition of a block is subject to negotiations, led by a supervisor. This first task of the supervisor, appointed by the development agency, is choosing which block gets developed first and with which building groups. He does this taking into account the wishes of building groups, especially those with active members. Then, to get the density and the non-residential program required for each block, land can be reserved for developer-led groups as needed. When the groups chosen by the supervisor agree to work together to create a block, the supervisor can suggest and facilitate agreements. The goal is to create one plan in which all building groups work together, which Hein de Haan calls a 'federative plan'. Such a plan will include agreement on the urban form, lot division, program and finances.

In the fourth and final phase, building groups can draw up detailed designs, either separately or in cooperation. The development agency checks if each building group follows the agreements. Construction starts at once for all of the building groups in one block, to save costs in creating the foundations. After the block level plan is finished, planning can start over again for the next block, with the groups still on the waiting list.
Block program transformed by cooperation between building groups. (own image)
H7: Block typology

The block typology is mostly aimed at realizing cooperation between building groups. Doing this is about realizing and positioning spaces and facilities in which people can meet. From a standpoint of affordability, this is important for multiple reasons. By working together people need fewer facilities for themselves, and they might be able to live more cheaply by producing things like food or energy together. Meeting their neighbours might also encourage people to do volunteer work for each other. Finally, the new WMO (social support law) requires many people with varying disabilities, who are currently institutionalized, to live more or less independently. Some funding is available for this. Housing these people in a way in which they can still get professional and volunteer support will become an important social issue. However, unless these meeting spaces and facilities are able to generate some rent, much of the cost for them has to be met by the residents.

The federative plan will contain proposals for cooperation, and the urban form should be able to realize those. This will mean that the block typology should be able to contain all of the types of building groups shown in the matrix. To do...
this, a block type was necessary which has a different character on different sides. This setup is similar to the nearby Zaanhof block. This block has an urban outside, 5-6 storeys high, and more village-like buildings on the inside, 2-3 storeys, and a green central space. Depending on the position within the masterplan, each side is open or closed to its environment. The creation of the profiles defined in the master plan requires closed facades alongside the roads and an open edge along the green spaces.

To assure each building group that their building will receive enough light, maximum heights are defined for the various parts of the block. This assures that the street profiles which have been defined will be built, with some options for building on the inside of the blocks. Though this same principle is used in all blocks of Houthaven, in this report it is applied to one bock, located on the main square.

The first proposal for diversing the land and the costs of the block between building groups is made by the supervisor. Then a negotiation process starts. Facilities which require lots of visitors, like a cafe, restaurant or theatre, should be positioned along the public spaces at the edge. If necessary, building groups which desire a lot of space for facilities can rent ground floor space from ‘no-nonsense’ groups. Groups which decide to share each other’s facilities should lie next to each other.

In this example, SOEK and Blijfhuys decide to swap places, to reflect their changing demands for space. Then, some facilities can be shared. Only one workshop is necessary for the block. When sharing stairs and elevators, much less of those are necessary to comply with fire safety regulations. Blijfhuys rents ground floor space from De Hoofden 4, which is conveniently located for running a coffee shop. Then, the supervisor checks if the requirements set by the development agency have been met. When some building groups, like OurLoft, use their ground floor space for studio’s which can house businesses, this number is met. Also, the building groups
Subdivision of the building volume. (own image)

have to agree which building group will supply the missing affordable housing. Finally, the plot boundaries are negotiated, so each group can have their own courtyard.

Finally, the principle of affordability through cooperation is mostly realized within each block. To find opportunities for building groups to work together, a ‘federative plan’ upon which all of the buildings groups which make up one city block would have to agree. Therefore the typology of the block has to be able to accommodate different types of building groups.
Building volumes for all blocks of Houthaven. (own image)
B - Cross section through transverse block

Building volumes - section through transverse block. (own image)

C - Cross section through side block

Building volumes - section through side block. (own image)
Adjustment of places and sizes. (own image)

Sharing facilities. (own image)

Meeting development agency targets. (own image)

Plot boundary negotiations. (own image)
Block impression. (own image)
At the beginning of this report, the question was: “How can affordable housing be provided by development through building groups?” This project proposes a develop strategy for Houthaven which uses a variety of methods support building groups in the creation of affordable housing.

In working on the project, it became apparent that these methods can be classified into three groups: austerity, cutting out the middle men and cooperation. These used simultaneously in various elements of the strategy: in the urban, the process design and the block design. Furthermore, the strategy allows building groups to choose their own methods for creating affordable housing. Answers from the interviews show people want to use similar methods within their building groups.

**Clash of planning systems**
Self-organization is a hotly debated issue at the moment because it seems a new kind of planning regime is emerging. Large scale planning is failing, and small scale planning is taking over. On the one hand, the pervasiveness of information technology is seen as a reason for this. At the same time, the main actors in traditional planning no longer have the financial means for development because of the economic crisis.

However, it is not like a self-organizing planning regime has taken over, or that it is even clear what a fully self-organizing planning regime looks like. Examples of self-organizing urbanism still seem to be he exception rather than the norm. For the foreseeable future, both types of planning will coexist, and successful developments need to take both into account. The large number of reports commissioned on this topic seems to be symptomatic of the way government organizations try to come to grips with self-organization.

**Affordable housing as a test for self-organization**
Is this move towards self-organization in planning a good thing? Central to the methodology of the Design as Politics Studio is taking a clear political stance on your topic. This was difficult for me to do on the topic of self-organization, because it is a word which can mean all things to all people, and because I could see both its positive and negative aspects.

On the one hand, self-organization means giving priority to the small scale: individuals, small collectives, and small scale, often temporary developments. It creates possibilities for development on a human scale, reflecting the personal values of the people involved. This is a welcome change from the large bureaucracies which have dominated Dutch urban planning up to the current crisis: municipal bureaucracies, housing corporations and large developers.

On the other hand, it also means the welfare state values, which have been ingrained into the bureaucratic system, can no longer be taken for granted. The provision of social housing, in cooperation between the municipality and housing corporations, has made Amstel into the mixed city we know today, with limited segregation between neighborhoods. I believe xxx, the former head of the Amsterdam housing corporation Ymere, who says the abolishing the social housing system will result in an affluent city within the Amsterdam ring road and pockets of poverty outside it (reference). If self-organization means abolishing planning regulations leading to laissez-faire capitalism this is not a good thing.

**The role of the urbanist when developing with building groups**
The building groups with whom I have spoken had few opinions about the kind of urban plan their ideal neighborhood should have, or their position in it. Though some people expressed a preference for a location, for example along the waterfront, this was never an important factor. Therefore, making sure the urban plan has a good quality should not be the primary responsibility of the building groups, but can. This should remain the primary responsibility of the urbanist.

For this reason, I decided to design a basic urban structure myself, in a rather traditional way: by starting with the most important public spaces, defining city blocks, designing street profiles, and making building regulations for each block. However, the differentiation between functions is kept at a minimum: only an amount of affordable housing and of non-residential floor space is given at the block level.

The role of the urbanist becomes different from the traditional role when working on the block level. As a block supervisor, a different urbanist picks building groups from a number of proposals. For each block, there has to be a good mix, which is financially solid, offers attractive program to the neighborhood and provides affordable housing. However, rather than specifying what this means himself, the supervisor relies on the ideas of building groups. In this phase, the concepts are given, and the supervisor can pick and match from those.

After doing so, the task of the block supervisor is to make sure all of the chosen building groups are able to go ahead with their plans. This means quickly making a provisional block design, combined with a proposal for splitting costs, including the ground lease. Then the supervisor has to make sure each building group can work with this. If so, the supervisor will provide advice on how organize the groups so financial obligations can be met while compromising the program as little as possible. One way in which this is done, is finding ways for building groups to cooperate to cut costs, for example sharing the use of an elevator. At the same time
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas from building groups</th>
<th>Urban plan</th>
<th>Process design</th>
<th>Block design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austerity</td>
<td>The plan does not require making land/water, or building a full tunnel, so the land price can be cheaper.</td>
<td>Let building groups take care of the maintenance of public space.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut out the middle men</td>
<td>Do everything yourself, without a developer.</td>
<td>Set up a helpdesk for independent building groups and ask lower land prices for building groups creating collective spaces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Financing through a ‘coop’ system, combining general and special needs housing.</td>
<td>Create spaces suitable to run businesses from building groups.</td>
<td>Set targets to be reached by all building groups of a block collectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The block can contain different types of building typologies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the block supervisor has to see to it that the required program is built. Because building groups depend on each other, they have a strong incentive to cooperate. Only the urbanist for the whole of Houthaven can change the required program.

Nudging instead of prescribing
Too simulate this approach for this graduation project, I interviewed seven building group initiators. Like a block supervisor would chose a number of building groups appropriate for the block to be developed, I chose building groups with an idea on the subject of affordability which was relevant to the project. Then I took both their ideas and the program they proposed as the input for design. This way, the simulation of the interaction between building groups will be a lot more realistic than if I had created those myself. Still, because some of the building groups were still in a preliminary phase, and because some building group initiators saw maximizing the potential of the building site as more important than the kind of community which is to be created, I still had to fill in many of the details of the program myself.

A result of this was that the building groups needed rather different building typologies. When building groups are different from each other, it is easier for them to profit from each other’s strengths and weaknesses. However, this meant a block typology had to be designed in which different housing group typologies could coexist. This was mostly and urban and architectural challenge.

The project aimed to give each building group maximum freedom, but still nudge the groups towards providing affordable housing and neighborhood functions. It is possible to do this through cooperation, with limited involvement from developers and housing corporations. However, this means a lot of talks and bureaucracy would be necessary, especially if the project still has to conform to all current building regulations and requirements imposed by banks, on top of the regulations imposed by the development agency.

The project has shows that there are ways for building groups to work together, for example by sharing facilities like elevators, but that these forms of cooperation require a lot of organization. Therefore a high capacity for organization is expended of each building group, which would make it difficult for people with no knowledge of real estate to start a successful group. Though alleviate this, a helpdesk is set up by the municipality, aimed at guiding building groups though this process. However, this is unlikely to solve this issue completely.

Unfortunately, time did not allow for a debriefing of the building group initiators, to see whether they agreed with the characterization I made of their building group proposal, whether they can live with the compromises made, and whether they judge the plan as a whole to be feasible. I hope to be able to do this at a later point in time.

Evaluating self-organization
In this way, the project illustrates the general issue of self-organization in the Netherlands. There are a lot of people with ideas on how to change the world for the better on the small scale. Implementing such ideas is possible, and sometimes even encouraged by the government. However, at the moment these initiatives require an inappropriate amount of organization to get started, due to force of habit, the power large institutions still have, and the regulations better suited to them then to smaller collectives.

Similarly, there are many people with idealistic and practical ideas for providing affordable housing through building groups. These building groups can be combined to form an attractive addition to the city. The amount of organization required in the proposed development process reflects the difficulty of making self-organization acceptable to institutions used to development as a top-down process. This can be expected to change as this kind of planning becomes more common, but in the next few years this is something urbanists have to deal with.

The Amsterdam municipality now offers self-built polts in small amounts, but when possible locations for large-scale development by building groups are added, this can have a real effect on the housing market. (source: Amsterdam municipality)
What can be learned from this exercise is that self-organization through building groups has the possibility to provide affordable housing. However, it is not something which will happen through a government policy document. Self-organization requires thought, experience and time.

A solution for Amsterdam?
At the start of this report, the problem of affordable housing in Amsterdam was considered. Housing cooperation have stopped building new social housing, and building groups might be a way to provide affordable housing through private initiative. When looking at the current map of self-built plots, you see a lot of plans for the medium term. However, these are all small locations, mostly big enough for a few self-built houses, one building group, or at most a small row of building groups. These are good to have, but on this scale building groups will remain a marginal phenomenon.

What is missing are large locations, such as Houthaven, where development could really have an impact on the composition of the housing stock. So far, the municipality has been reluctant to try development through building groups on a large scale, because it is expected to result in a lower and price. However, with land overvalued, and without developers willing to buy it, now would be the perfect time to try it out.

This graduation project has shown that development through building groups can work as a strategy for providing affordable housing. There are many people interested in this kind of development, who have interesting ideas on how building groups can provide affordability and improve the neighborhood around it. It shows development through building groups can work with a traditional urban plan. And it also shows it is possible to design block in which typologically different building groups can be built next to each other, and foster cooperation between them.

However, a problem which remains is that, in the absence of large investors, small changes could more easily derail the process of developing a block. Without guarantees, a few people dropping out can threaten the continuity of a building group. Similarly, the failure of one building block can threaten the construction of a block. In the short term, the only solution to this problem is offering conditions which are favorable enough to ensure that there is enough demand: so that a building group can replace people who drop out and so that the block supervisor can replace failed building groups. For this reason, having a long enough waiting list is essential during a pilot project.

The German experience (Temel et al. 2009) shows that, once such a development project has proven itself, it will become less difficult to organize. With positive Dutch examples, both house-seekers and financiers will be more willing to invest, making the success of a building group less dependent upon the continued involvement of a few people, and the building of a block less on that of one building group.

If successful, Houthaven can serve as such a pilot project, after which the same approach can be used for other proposed development sites around Amsterdam. Then, a system can emerge in which the existing social housing is managed by housing corporations, but new affordable housing is developed by building groups. Over time, building groups become the main source of new affordable housing, which helps to keep Amsterdam a diverse city.


