Housing the social

Investigating the role of
‘commoning’ in the development
of social housing initiatives

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It is stating the obvious a PhD dissertation is a collective work. Although the last 4.5 years I spent a great deal of time on my own at my computer, what kept me going was the work of housing and commons scholars I discovered throughout the research, the people I met during the fieldwork, the collaborations and contacts with colleagues and the support and help of friends and family.

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(EN)

Eroding state support for social welfare, a growing social-spatial divide and increasing problems of affordability in cities have led to new social housing initiatives as alternatives to both privatization and state provision. Their inspiration can be found in a long tradition of housing initiatives that focus on the mobilization of shared resources. In the Brussels Capital Region, historically marked by a weak regulation of the housing market and homeownership support, these initiatives have (re)emerged due to an on-going housing crisis.

This PhD research brings together legal, political-economic and social-spatial perspectives to examine the socially inclusive capacity of such initiatives. It looks at the way social and spatial professionals give shape to these initiatives and projects, and how their diverse characteristics relate to the social inclusion of underprivileged groups. Targeting these issues, this study builds on the notions of ‘the urban commons’ and ‘commoning’. These notions are conceptualized and studied through action research in two case studies in the Brussels Capital Region; a recently established Community Land Trust project and a post-World War II cooperative garden neighbourhood. Their conceptualization allows to give a critical reading of the strategies and measures applied to promote the (re)production and appropriation of dwelling space by underprivileged residents.

The findings reveal that co-productive aspects of commoning, the dynamic interaction between housing and its providers, producers and users, generate benefits that go beyond the housing domain, building social capital and empowerment among deprived groups. The focus on the commons however does not ignore top-down/bottom-up tensions and raises questions about the development of strict design rules for the ‘success’ of the commons within traditional commons literature. Moreover, the research reveals that a focus on differential ways of building commons - safeguarding and expanding collective access and control over housing in varying ways, degrees and extents - might be more pertinent to tackle contemporary urban challenges and to offer meaningful alternatives in the here and now.
Het eroderen van de welvaartstaat, de sociaal-ruimtelijke polarisatie en stijgende problemen van betaalbaarheid in steden hebben geleid tot het ontstaan van nieuwe sociale wooninitiatieven. Ze vinden hun inspiratie in een lange traditie van wooninitiatieven die sterk zijn ingebed in de gemeenschap. In het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, historisch gekenmerkt door een sterke focus op het verwerven van een individuele woning, kent men een heropflakkering van dergelijke initiatieven door een langdurige wooncrisis.

Dit doctoraatsonderzoek combineert juridische, politiek-economische en sociaal-ruimtelijke perspectieven om de sociale inclusiviteit van dergelijke initiatieven te bestuderen. Het ontrafelt hun karakteristieken, kijkt naar wijzen waarop sociale en ruimtelijke professionals vorm geven aan deze karakteristieken en onderzoekt de gevolgen voor kansarme groepen. Het bouwt daarbij op de noties ‘commons’ and ‘commoning’. Deze noties worden geconceptualiseerd en bestudeerd via actie-onderzoek in twee gevalstudies in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest: een recent ontwikkeld CLT project en een naoorlogse coöperatieve tuinwijk. Het onderzoek beoogt hierbij een kritische lezing te geven van gehanteerde strategiëen en maatregelen gericht op het stimuleren van een toe-eigening en (re)productie van de woonruimte door kansarme groepen.

De bevindingen van het onderzoek tonen aan dat het co-productieve aspect van commoning -de dynamische interreactie tussen de woning en het geheel aan betrokken actoren- baten genereert die verder gaan dan het woondomein. Ze vergroten met name de emancipatie en het sociaal kapitaal van kansarme groepen. De focus op commons in het onderzoek heeft evenwel aandacht voor spanningen tussen top-down/bottom-up benaderingen en stelt vragen bij het hanteren van stricte regels voor het slagen van commons in traditionele commons literatuur. Meer bepaald toont het onderzoek aan dat een focus op differentiatie - waarbij men bekijkt hoe men op verschillende wijzen en in verschillende maten de collectieve toegang tot en controle over het woondomein kan vergroten - meer pertinent is om de huidige stedelijke uitdagingen aan te gaan en betekenisvolle alternatieven te creëren in het hier en nu.
The housing question

‘The so-called housing shortage, which plays such a great role in the press nowadays, does not consist in the fact that the working class generally lives in bad, overcrowded and unhealthy dwellings. This shortage is not something peculiar to the present; it is not even one of the sufferings peculiar to the modern proletariat in contradistinction to all earlier oppressed classes. On the contrary, all oppressed classes in all periods suffered more or less uniformly from it.’ (Engels, 1872, p.10)

In 1872, Friedrich Engels wrote a series of polemic articles entitled 'The Housing Question'. Underpinned by his findings of working-class living conditions in England (1845) and Marx' work on the enclosure of the commons under capitalism, the articles scrutinize the so-called 'housing shortage' or 'housing crisis' in the rapidly urbanizing and industrializing German cities at the end of the 19th century. Engels states that the housing shortage, from which the workers and part of the 'petty bourgeoisie' suffer in modern cities, is a direct result of the capitalist mode of production. The rapid and uneven process of urbanization under capitalism would continue to generate housing crises and devastating consequences for the poor classes at different production cycles in time. Only by the solution of the social question – the abolition of the capitalist mode of production – the solution of the housing question would be made possible. Engels dissociates himself from ‘bourgeoisie’ socialists and anarchist discourses on housing. In his articles, he refutes Proudhon's idea that the relationship between tenant and house owner was comparable to those of the wageworker in relation to the capitalist. According to Proudhon, converting tenants' rents into purchase payments on their dwelling on account of the cost of the dwelling itself could outlaw private landlordism. Engels rejects this by stating that working-class house, garden and field ownership would even increase their dependency by loading them down with heavy mortgage debts and chaining them to their creditors and dwelling place. Engels similarly dismisses co-operative self-help proposed by Sax. The English self-help building societies

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Engels was acquainted with were only affordable for people with higher wages such as clerks and shop assistants, who were able to speculate on the real estate by providing their savings with a more profitable mortgage investment. Nor could the housing conditions of workmen be solved by the state as long as ‘the organized collective power of the possessing’ (Engels, 1872, p.10) - such as the owners of the unsound and dilapidated dwellings - remained in place.

In Western Europe, it was not the Marxist solution to the housing question that would be applied after the 19th century. In the course of the 20th century and especially in the immediate post-war period, the state would become strongly involved in the provision of housing for the working class, and the allocation of social and economic security in general. Housing provision proved to be a good redistribution strategy of the welfare state and a boost for the building industry. Two major mechanisms were financially stimulated with this purpose: individual homeownership and social housing governed by municipalities, associations, cooperatives, municipalities, the state or private organisations. Whereas the housing cooperatives were marked by self-help and tenant involvement to a certain extent, municipalities, associations, the state or private organisations mainly concentrated on the provision of housing in the strict sense. As Esping-Andersen illustrates (1990), the type of state intervention strongly differed according to the economic recovery after the war and political power in the different countries. In the social democratic Northern Europe countries, social housing was seen as an important part of the welfare state contract. While countries such as the Netherlands, France and Sweden provided a 'universalist' system, with social housing for all types of households, countries such as the UK, Ireland, Norway, Belgium and West Germany mainly catered for low-income groups (Scanlon et al., 2015). In the southern European countries, policy emphasis was placed upon the stimulation of owner-occupation. Social housing provision remained very low in these countries.

The restructuring of the labour market and the structural crisis that started at the beginning of the 1970s put the welfare state and the interlinked models of housing provision under pressure. These tendencies led to a new cycle of growth within the capitalist economy, based on a flexible organisation of the economy and more insecure working conditions. According to the invaluable analysis of the European housing market of Bill Edgar, Joe Doherty and Henk Meert (2002), this contributed to the commodification of housing. The restructuring of the labour market and the structural crisis went along with a rhetoric that the state should interfere as little as possible in the free market. Whereas the welfare state was based on a dialectic relationship between market exchange, state redistribution and reciprocity, starting from the 1970s, pure market exchange gained increasing importance. Although the effects are dependent on the welfare regime of each European country, the authors specify two important trends:

A first trend is the increase of homeownership. In several countries, the
privatisation or conversion of public rental flats into owner-occupation drastically decreased the amount of public housing, while deregulation through cutbacks on certain rules such as rent control led to a bifurcation of the private housing market.

A second trend is the commercial regeneration of the urban environment, which brought about an eviction of the weakest players in the urban housing market. In former mixed neighbourhoods, hotels, shopping complexes, foreign property investments and office neighbourhoods are increasingly replacing cheap housing and the linked local businesses (Sassen, 2014). This trend goes along with an increasing popularity of central city locations among higher income groups. Their flexible lifestyles and consumption patterns are well accustomed to the presence of transport modes, cultural activities, education and trendy niches of a new economy; ironically articulated by Sharon Zukin as a ‘pacification by cappucino’ (Zukin, 1995, p.28). Such commercial regeneration of the urban environment is reinforced through urban policies. International investment streams led to a strong competition between cities, whereby the ‘territorial attractiveness’ of the city has become an important policy (Moulaert et. al., 2005). The revalorization of neighbourhoods and the attraction of higher income groups are part of this logic, with a potential replacement of low-income groups in the long-term as a perverse side effect. Processes of gentrification are thus not only reproduced by the market, but are also supported by policy makers.

For vulnerable and marginalised groups, the combination of these social-spatial trends and insecure incomes through the restructuring of the labour market has had far-reaching consequences (Edgar et. al., 2002). Just as the late 19th century industrialization and the related housing question stirred the origination of the concept of ‘poverty’, so the reconfiguration of the relationship between market exchange, state redistribution and reciprocity spawned the emergence of the ‘social exclusion’ perspective (Silver, 1995). The post-war social insurance programs with the underlying assumptions of a relatively uniform life-cycle, career pattern and family structure no longer applied for more and more people. New types of social disadvantage had to be addressed, such as unemployment; social isolation; new health problems; individualisation; segregation; and reduction of social support and organized political expression due to declines in trade union power and residential community life (Silver, 1995). The social exclusion perspective looks at the multi-dimensionality and relationality of poverty. It encompasses the lack of access to resources as well as the lack of agency and control over important decisions in life and feelings of alienation and inferiority (Levitas, 1996).

More recently, the major escalation of the US subprime mortgage crisis in 2007 and the worldwide cuts in public spending have reinforced such new types of social disadvantage. The crisis was a corollary of a US federal law designed to help low-income American urban residents get mortgage loans. These mortgage loans appeared to be reckless from the point of view of both the homeowner and the financing agency. Loose underwriting criteria were used and the financing agencies
developed aggressive lending practices. As long as housing prices were rising, homeowners were safe as they were able to resell their houses for higher prices in order to get financial certainty during the employment stagnation and cuts in social security. But as soon as these prices stagnated and the interest consequently increased, the US experienced an escalation of foreclosures. Many of the former homeowners were bound to search overnight in tent cities, while banks that had heavily invested in the assets experienced a liquidity crisis. The consequences of the mortgage crisis in the US had a global scale and hit Europe. While the collapse of large financial institutions was mainly prevented by national governments, stock markets dropped worldwide. In many regions, this had an impact on the housing market, causing foreclosures, evictions and prolonged unemployment. Even in regions less hit by the crisis, crisis policies led to a curtailment of public services such as health, housing, unemployment support and education, while the lack of confidence in the stock market since the crisis led investors to focus on the housing market (Dessouroux et al., 2016). In this respect Hodkinson (2012) notices that liberal policies temporarily questioned during the height of the crisis have been radically imposed and extended.

A return of the housing question

The developments described above put the ‘housing question’ in the limelight again. Although agreement exists about the major tendencies underlying the housing question, as in the late 19th century, the responses and theoretical discourses about alternatives diverge.

Action-oriented responses follow in the footsteps of a long lineage of popular struggles that have attempted to create alternatives to the private market, such as the mass squatting movement of dispossessed peasants during the Enclosures, the garden city vision of Ebenezer Howard and self-help housing in Latin America. In the United States, alternative initiatives are increasingly organised by proactive community plans that ensure a substantial offer of affordable housing on community land (Angotti, 2008). Since the financial crisis in Western Europe there has been a gulf of protest movements that fight against the privatization of public housing. Housing initiatives such as temporary occupations, limited-equity cooperatives and self-help housing have also increased.

According to Silver (1991) an ideological outlook inevitably shapes the values underlying these responses. Without taking into consideration the minor nuances; for those grounded in the socialist tradition, defending and increasing state intervention and public housing should be the main priority. Self-help squatters and settlement movements stress the importance of extending community control over housing. Whereas the first is mostly concerned with a vast improvement of living conditions for underprivileged groups, the second tradition puts the accent on the use-value of the house and sees autonomous housing systems whereby people control the design, construction and management of dwellings as a self-
liberating and empowering activity.

Although socialists and Marxists may support empowerment and self-liberation, they criticize the limited effects of the self-help movement in reconfiguring the housing landscape under capitalism (Hodkinson, 2012). Dyed-in-the-wool Marxists are criticized for discouraging any project aimed at developing alternatives in the here and now since being unable to reconfigure the entire landscape. Midnight Notes Collectives (1990) for instance argues that such thinking tends to exclude the voices and lives of people currently suffering from precarious housing conditions. Furthermore, the labour market restructuring and the decrease of the collective power of the working class that comes along with it might leave us far away from a ‘proletarian revolution’ and thus lead to a dead end. Similarly, Colin Ward (1985) claims that the enduring support for public housing can be questioned as many examples of ‘state housing have proved to be a disempowering and alienating experience for tenants through the paternalistic relationship it has created between provider and client’ (in Hodkinson, 2012, p.435).

In the same spirit, Harloe (1995) suggest that social tenants might be most at risk of social exclusion, as ‘needs based allocations policies have tended to concentrate poorer households in social housing.’ The concentration of poorer households in certain geographies may reinforce difficulties in securing access to employment opportunities and citizenship benefits. People growing up in public housing in turn may oppose this and highlight such experiences cannot be generalized (Massey, 2002). The following statement of Massey (2012, p.55) is emblematic for the tension between the different stances. ‘One of my conversations with Occupy is that they say everything must be bottom-up in the sense that they are anti-State. Whereas I think we need both. Council housing is one of the ways in which we can belong without owning. ‘Occupy’ is another kind of practical example - or squatting. These are all great strategies, but I do not think we can proceed without collectivity in that larger sense.’

Housing and social inclusion

The discourses reveal different stances towards social inclusion. Social inclusion is subject of a widening literature, but is especially applied to how citizens are able to exercise their basic rights, by participating and benefitting from material and immaterial resources available in society. Being one of the most basic and essential foundations of well-being, housing is a typical topic within the social inclusion literature. Originating from its antipode, in housing studies social inclusion is especially applied in discussions on how dynamics of social exclusion could be reversed. It is used to revisit some key debates concerning housing and society (Murie, 1996), for instance on the geography of housing and different tenure models. The critiques on social housing, concentrating poor households in certain neighbourhoods, or on homeownership, chaining underprivileged groups to heavy mortgage debts, certain locations and potentially poor dwelling conditions, can
be linked to these debates. The relationship between housing and social inclusion has been less discussed but might be even more important as ‘to speak in terms of exclusion is to label a phenomenon in purely negative terms, emphasising the lack of something without defining what that thing is or whence it comes.’ (Castel, 1995). To speak of housing in terms of social inclusion thus involves the idea that the current mode of housing production can be acted upon and modified.

When applying the basic understanding of social inclusion to housing, two main key issues can be found. On the level of enabling citizens to benefit from resources, it is evident that the access to affordable and qualitative housing is crucial (Hulse et al., 2011). On the level of enabling citizens to participate in the use of resources, housing processes can play both a direct and indirect role. The above-mentioned housing locations can increase or decrease opportunities for participation in the labour market, social services and community life (Hulse et al., 2011). In a more direct way, the participatory dimension in housing points at the degree in which inhabitants have agency and control over their own dwelling (environment). The capacity of citizens to influence decisions regarding the dwelling environment is crucial in this respect, and empowerment and access to social networks are often necessary conditions for fair and effective processes of civic engagement (Hulse et al., 2011).

These dimensions of social inclusion can be found in the different discourses on the housing question. While the socialist tradition put accent on the material security provided by public housing, anarchists emphasize the empowerment and self-liberation that comes along with self-controlling the dwelling (environment). Marxists advocate the need for a systemic change of the current mode of production in order to enable the ‘oppressed’ classes to exercise their rights.

The different tensions, discrepancies and overlaps across different discourses show the need for a contemporary ‘compass’ in the housing question. How can housing conditions of underprivileged groups be improved, in the here and now? How can their social inclusion be fostered and their rights be exercised in the face of adversity?

A common(s) ground?

The revival of the concept of the ‘commons’ can be seen as an attempt to explore the development of such contemporary compass. ‘Commons’ cover a broad range of institutions, goods and social relationships and are therefore hard to grasp. Originally, the term was used in reference to natural goods such as water, land, natural resources used and sustained by traditional communities. Since the early work of Elinor Ostrom (1990), scientific literature on such natural goods has increasingly been expanding. By learning lessons from a large share of case studies around the world, Ostrom formulated 8 design principles that enable a successful management of shared resources. The design principles point at the institutional and social conditions that enable to create and sustain institutions
based on coproduction. Following the 8 design principles, a substantial body of commons literature is dedicated to the efficiency of the management of common-pool resources; which forms of management work while others do not?

From the perspective of social inclusion in relationship to different forms of disadvantage, recent literature sheds light on the emancipatory and participatory dimension of different aspects of commons. This literature, which mostly focuses on urban contexts and therefore refers to ‘urban commons’, interprets commons as material and immaterial amenities such as public information, public spaces, skills, forms of exchange, workplaces and housing collectively appropriated, produced and organized. What marks the commons, according to Baily (2013), is the production of social relationships based on inclusion, horizontality, forms of sharing and bottom-up participation. De Angelis (2012) describes ‘commons’ as a process that allows people to develop new social relationships and to act together. According to Mattei (2012) commons involve developing a community, based on specific mechanisms of participation and inclusion. Hence, in this interpretation commons create conditions for the empowerment of groups and the development of relationships of reciprocity.

Verlic (2015) has successfully summarized why the latter interpretation has become popular in left discourse. Firstly, it encourages thinking beyond state-market dichotomies, by marking a user-relationship and collective feelings of belonging towards goods, rather than the public or private property of goods. Such focus on the use-value above exchange-value presents an alternative to what Harvey would call the ‘tyranny of property’ (2012). According to Harvey, it breeds social exclusion of ‘the materially deprived and the intellectually and socially alienated’ (Marcuse, 2009, p. 187). Secondly, while embedded in the here and now, commons hold an element of futurity, pointing toward a future beyond the capitalist mode of production. Thirdly, based on Marx’ work, in this interpretation, commons are interconnected with moments of crisis through the ‘enclosure’ or privatization of shared resources. Several scholars have illustrated how such moments of crisis or enclosure offer paths to new forms of inclusion and innovation. Moulaert et al. (2005) and Stavrides (2013) for instance have studied strategies and actions of social organisations, activists, artists and architects in response to the current crisis and deregulation context. By holding and developing goods, resources, forms of exchange, interaction and production in common, civil society members prove to develop efficient mechanisms against social disadvantage. Their mechanisms rely on the creation of a social network amongst citizens that underpin mutual help, sharing, co-creation and collective problem solving. In other words, they reinforce social inclusion in times of hardship by falling back on ‘commons’.

In housing, social ties appear to be more present in community-based housing initiatives (Mullins, 2013); housing initiated by civil society. However, the far-reaching consequences of the deregulation of housing and the labour market since the 1970s demonstrate the importance of public housing for social inclusion in a larger sense. Besides, empirical research has shown that communal ties based
on mutual help, co-creation and collective problem solving can be present in housing projects of public actors as well (De Rijck et al., 2000; De Meulder et al., 1999; Taylor, 1998). Beyond aspects of ownership, authors like De Rijck et al. (2000) and De Meulder et al. (1999) point at the importance of architecture and planning of social housing in reinforcing social networks at a meso- and micro-level.

Questions and objectives

This study is an attempt to investigate the interplay between processes related to the conception of housing and social effects. It starts from a pragmatic approach towards the housing question, that looks at links between alternative housing solutions ‘in the here and now’ and several dimensions of social inclusion. It therefore builds on the premise that dominant social structures can be gradually challenged and the social inclusion of underprivileged groups can be fostered at the level between the individual dwelling (micro) and the neighbourhood (meso). At the centre of this assumption is the question if and to what extent ‘commoning’ dimensions in the design and planning of social housing initiatives can contribute to more inclusive dwelling environments. Emphasis is hereby put on the community within the commons; the people setting up and instigating these initiatives, as well as the people co-producing and inhabiting them.

The study chooses the Brussels Capital Region as the focal research area. This choice is justified by the fact that the Brussels Capital Region is a particularly interesting case to look at the long-term effects of a very weak regulation of the housing market. For several decades, the region has been dealing with severe problems of housing affordability and quality and a clear social-spatial polarization between a wealthier eastern part and a poorer western part. These problems are strongly interrelated with a historical support for homeownership outside the city, a difficult shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy, a strong institutional diversity and attractiveness in terms of employment provider, head capital of Europe and international metropolis (Dessouroux et al., 2016). Due to an on-going housing crisis, a network of organisations has originated in Brussels, focusing on housing activism and alternative housing solutions. As Eric Corijn and Jacqueline Groth bluntly put, ‘there are many examples of urban struggles and resistance in a city basically run by private developers and alien political forces’ (2011, p.149).

The recent implementation of a Community Land Trust in Brussels (CLTB) - the first on the European mainland - is such an example. The implementation is the result of the joint effort of several housing activism organizations and the occasion to customise the research questions. The organization develops collective housing projects for underprivileged groups on community land. At the beginning, it was mainly popular on the American countryside, but it has gained an increasing interest and application in Western Europe since the crisis. This alternative social housing solution in Brussels will be positioned against the housing crisis and social housing provision in Brussels. Particular attention will be paid to the historically
rooted social housing model closest to CLT in terms of philosophy and institutional framework; the rental cooperative.

More concretely, starting from a hypothetic relationship between social inclusion and the collectiveness of social housing initiatives, two basic research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. To what extent are social housing initiatives capable of fostering the social inclusion of underprivileged groups?
2. How do agents such as such as administrators of housing companies, social and cultural workers, architects and urban designers give shape to social housing initiatives with a high degree of collectiveness?

This brings me to the following research objectives:

1. To define the dimensions determining the varying degrees of collectiveness within social housing initiatives through the conceptual lens of the commons;
2. To test this conceptual framework against social housing initiatives implemented in different neighbourhoods in difficulty in the urban landscape in Brussels;
3. To reveal the connection between commons and social inclusion through in-depth qualitative research and action research in social housing initiatives with a high degree of collectiveness; the Vandenpeereboom project of Community Land Trust Brussels and the neighbourhood Destrier of the rental cooperative Comensia.
4. To uncover the role of social professionals and spatial design(ers) in shaping these initiatives.

Data and methodology

This study is a transdisciplinary study. It is not my ambition to make a historical study about degrees of collectiveness within social housing initiatives in Brussels over time. Of course, reference will be made to important data, housing models and texts, but historical research falls outside the scope of this research. The same holds true for legal, political-economic and social theory. The dissertation will borrow specific concepts and search for empirical evidence within the case studies but will not immediately address such theory. If anything, this research must be conceived of as a thematically ordered line of thought which tries to develop a series of answers to the afore-mentioned objectives. The methods of inquiry underlying this research are therefore versatile. Inherent to architecture and urban (planning) research, they range from a literature review over spatial research to in-depth and action research.

Explorative research

The first phase of the study can be seen as an explorative research. In this explorative research, I developed a conceptual framework (1) in which I combined architecture and urban planning literature.
A taxonomy of different social housing initiatives in Brussels enabled me to test this conceptual framework on a regional scale level. I demarcated two perimeters in the Brussels housing landscape with the purpose of identifying the spatial and temporal logics behind the initiatives. These perimeters can be visually interpreted as ‘cut-outs’ traced on a map of the Brussels Capital Region settlement structure. This spatial research method developed by Basilico and Boeri (1997) and further elaborated by De Meulder et al. (2002) allows to systematically research the housing landscape at a regional scale-level. The perimeters were chosen in such way that they cross a range of areas, neighbourhoods in difficulty, municipal and spatial boundaries and diverse social housing initiatives going from the centre of Brussels to the periphery. With ‘social housing initiatives’, I refer to initiatives with similar income limits as the one imposed by the social housing companies. I chose to limit myself to those initiatives that provide the required data on different commons dimensions (among others the spatial configuration) and those that propose structural housing solutions. The first delineation eliminated housing developed by the Brussels social rental agencies, the Brussels Housing Fund and public welfare agencies. These actors were not willing or not allowed to give details about housing locations. As only some municipalities were prepared to give such data, I decided to also eliminate municipal homes from the data set. The second delineation eliminated the temporary occupations and small-scale experiments of social, religious and benefactor instances. The elimination of the above-mentioned initiatives led to a specific focus on social housing developed by social housing companies and Community Land Trust Brussels (CLTB). This limitation happened to be particularly interesting to understand the changing role of the government and publicly sponsored bodies in the provision of collective housing solutions for underprivileged groups. In addition, social housing in Brussels has roots in the cooperative movement in which collective decision-making processes are highly esteemed.

In order to get a full understanding of the social housing initiatives, the spatial research was complemented with desktop literature; publications of social housing companies; literature on social housing in Belgium; and 27 in-depth interviews with professionals of social housing organisations and associations promoting the right to housing and participation1;

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH ADMINISTRATORS

- Société du logement de la Région bruxelloise (SLRB) 2
- Societe de Developpement Pour la Region de Bruxelles-Capitale (Citydev) 1
- Brussels Housing Fund 1
- Social housing companies 7
- Brussels OCMW 1
- Municipalities 3
- Brussels Regional Public Service (BRPS) 2
Case study research

According to poverty specialist Driessen (1998), to understand social in- and exclusion dynamics, it is necessary to acquire insight into the lives of low-income groups and the initiatives that have impact on them on a meso- and micro-level. Therefore, in the second phase of the study I conducted in-depth research on the CLTB project Vandenpeereboom and the neighbourhood Destrier of the rental cooperative Comensia.

The choice for cases developed by a Community Land Trust and a rental cooperative is based on the specific position of the models in the Brussels housing landscape. First, the age difference between the two housing models is almost a century, but the debates preceding their genesis are strikingly comparable. Both were conceived as a reaction to the devastating consequences of speculation for underprivileged groups, and as a way to collectivize land ownership. Nowadays, the rental cooperatives are supervised by the umbrella organization for social housing (BGHM/SLRB), while CLTB struggles to preserve autonomy in the context of government support. Furthermore, CLTB is the first organisation to experiment with the CLT formula on the European mainland and attracted a lot of attention of commons scholars and community-based housing initiatives abroad.

Second, the spatial configuration of their projects highly reflects the time spirit in which they were conceived. CLTB mostly operates in difficult neighbourhoods around the city centre. The projects are mainly located on vacant or obsolete plots within the existing urban fabric. Most rental cooperatives in contrast are built according to the garden city typology in the fringes of the city.

The housing projects Vandenpeereboom and Destrier were selected after the explorative research and meetings with several housing organisations. In the case of CLTB, initially, the aim was to follow the project Transvaal, as it would enable me to give shape to the co-design process from the early beginning of the project. Studying Vandenpeereboom proved to be a viable alternative when Transvaal was put on hold, as it would allow to follow a more advanced stage of the CLT co-design processes. The case of Destrier of the Brussels rental cooperative Comensia was selected after the explorative research. The interviews that took place during this explorative research highlighted the exemplary role of the neighbourhood regarding the different dimensions depicting the collectiveness of housing initiatives. As a form of critical self-reflection, in both cases, the actors...
were keen to learn more about the effects of their policy and daily operations for those for whom they are conceived.

In line with the main topics of the study - commons and social inclusion - for the in-depth research participatory and action research approaches were applied. Both involve stakeholders in different steps of the research to stimulate collective knowledge building. By engaging these actors, the approaches want to meaningfully contribute to their actions and practices, instead of reducing them to objects of investigation. Such contribution can strengthen the capacity of communities to design actions without solely relying on outside experts (Breitbart, 2003). This is in line with ideas of feminist thinkers such as Maquire (1998) that have actively promoted participatory research.

Although action research and participatory research are often equated, I use both terms in order to outline my role as a researcher (Berhold & Thomas, 2012). I apply the term ‘participatory research’ to point at the exchange of information and collaborative development of the research design with the two housing organizations. The term ‘action research’ I employ to depict my own contribution to the development of design workshops (in the first case) and the instigation of a co-design process (in the second case). In these workshops, I immediately engaged and intensively collaborated with (future) inhabitants of the projects.

For the in-depth analysis of the two cases I studied internal documents and used ethnographic research techniques such as participant observations during meetings, festivities, activities and workshops. The participant observations were particularly useful to observe interactions and interrelationships within the groups of (future) residents while they developed. They were not only conducted during meetings but also took place informally by regularly working on-site. For the observations in the Vandenpeereboom co-design process I regularly had lunches and sporadically worked at the offices of the involved associations. In the Destrier project I had my own workspace in the neighbourhood community house. Working in the community house permitted me to discover the neighbourhood from within; by making walks through the neighbourhood, by eating with cultural workers and inhabitants, by hearing latest news and gossips about governance changes in the rental cooperative, by meeting residents that develop activities in the community house and by participating in management committees. A precondition to do this was the attitude of the cultural workers, who gave me the freedom to fully focus on the research. This would have been more difficult in the case of CLTB, which demands strong voluntary engagements of researchers.

To process the literature study, the study of internal documents of the housing organizations and participant observations during activities, meetings and workshops, I grouped and organized the data in an analytical framework. In accordance with this analytical scaffolding, I developed thematic questions for semi-structured interviews with involved actors. The interviews were seen as a constant feedback loop in which findings of one interview generated questions for
further interviews. For the second round of interviews, with inhabitants of Destrier, I adapted the thematic questions of the CLT case according to observations in the community house and specific questions of the administrators and cultural workers. In total, for the case studies I did 49 in-depth interviews and 50 questionnaires (see Annex 1, 2 and 3). Some of these interviews (especially the in-depth interviews with (future) residents) were used as the main interpretative sources to study the relationship between commoning dimensions and social inclusion, while others provided necessary background information. I transcribed all interviews to have the most precise display. The quotes that appear throughout the study represent extracts from these transcriptions;

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<th>INTERVIEWS VP</th>
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<tr>
<td>With professionals before workshops</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>With (future) residents before workshops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With professionals after workshops</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With (future) residents after workshops</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With residents of similar housing initiatives</td>
<td>5 (’Espoir/ in-depth)</td>
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The action research in the cases evolved around the organisation and instigation of spatial design workshops. My primary aim of this action research was to engage with the role of spatial designer within processes of co-production. This involved testing participatory methods, searching for partnerships and co-productions with spatial designers, (future) inhabitants and other stakeholders, scrutinizing bottom-up and top-down dynamics of the process.

In the development of the collective housing project Vandenpeereboom, I contributed to the co-design workshops that took place between September 2014 and March 2015. During these workshops future inhabitants were prepared to evaluate architectural projects submitted through a public tender. While I organized these workshops together with a social worker, my contribution was restricted as the workshops were embedded within an on-going sequence of workshops organised by CLTB. That being the case, the added value of this action research lies in the fact that I was able to experiment with ways of familiarizing laypersons with architectural knowledge and to closely follow the involvement of participants.

In addition to the workshops, I developed visual projects with the artist Sofie van der Linden in order to raise awareness about different dimensions of co-habitation. The visual projects are a result of creative workshops and a series of visits we paid in the current dwellings of the participants. During these visits, I questioned patterns of private and collective appropriation of the dwelling and its
surroundings. I handed over a camera to capture specific places that related to these questions. Sofie van der Linden made her own interpretation of the use of space by making pencil drawings of the structure of the building, places of encounter within the building, the configuration of the dwelling and interior furniture and objects.

In the case of Destrier, my role as a researcher and spatial designer was more prominent, as I instigated a design process to regenerate public space in the neighbourhood. Between October 2015 and May 2016, I organized several meetings and three design workshops together with a group of residents; the urbanists Cecilia Furlan, Koen van den Troost and Yen van der Voort; the landscape designer Bianca Fanta; the urbanist and anthropologist Jeanne Mosseray; and the two cultural workers operating in the community house. During the workshops, we made use of urban design tools such as fieldwork, storytelling, surveys, scenarios and visioning, mapping and drawing. Reflections on the workshops were reproduced through field notes and artefacts such as small notebooks, flyers, posters, pictures and drawings on tracing paper in an on-going relationship with the residents and professionals involved.

**(Structure of the study)**

The study is structured in the following way. The study contains four chapters. Two different types of output can be distinguished in these 4 chapters. The first type of output is composed of articles. The second type of output is composed of an essay and narrative languages other than writing and is printed on coloured paper. It includes mapping exercises, the development of a taxonomy, research-by-design, pictures and drawings related to the dissemination of the action research. Such ‘popular’ dissemination is at the core of action research, which aims at raising awareness among participants and a wider audience on certain issues and to increase their ability to act (Saija, 2015). The second type of output is alternated with the articles. The articles and narratives can be considered as a critical answer.
to the main objectives of the study presented above.

1 - Define the dimensions that determine the collectiveness of social housing initiatives through the conceptual framework of the commons; and
   - Test this conceptual framework against social housing initiatives in the BCR;

2 - Describe the role of social professionals; and
   - Study the benefits of commoning through in-depth qualitative research in the case study Vandenpeereboom

3 - Describe the role of social professionals; and
   - Study the benefits of commoning through in-depth qualitative research in the case study Destrier

4 - Describe the role of spatial design(ers); and
   - Describe interplays between space, spatial design and commoning in both case studies

The first article is an introduction to the contemporary debate on commons, social housing and social inclusion. In this article, I will attempt to show how contemporary debates on the loss of ‘publicness’ in public housing urge us to reconceptualise this concept in light of the commons. I will do this by catching up with debates on profound changes in public housing since the decline of the welfare state and by framing commons as an alternative concept to enhance social inclusion. I then will propose a conceptual framework to analyse public housing models on crucial commons dimensions, and test this framework against public housing models in Brussels. The choice for Brussels will be further justified by the fact that the origins of social housing in Brussels are strongly intertwined with cooperative practices, building on the mobilization of common-pool resources, while the recently established CLTB is sponsored by the Brussels government. In order to develop the conceptual framework, I will use insights of legal, political-economic and social-spatial theory scholars such as Massimo De Angelis, David Harvey, Ugo Mattei, Elinor Ostrom, Peter Marcuse and Stavros Stavrides. The dimensions I will present in this article are ‘ownership’; ‘design and planning participation’; ‘community activity’; and ‘physical configuration’. The examples presented in the article are located in the above-mentioned cut-outs in the Brussels landscape and are exemplary for societal, urban and architectural discourses during the period in which they originated. By applying the commons framework to these public housing models, I will be able to formulate some preliminary findings regarding social housing, commons and social inclusion. Regarding these preliminary findings, the article will highlight the need for further in-depth study to understand the merits and limitations of the commons dimensions within social housing solutions. The taxonomy that supports this article represents a concise contextualisation and documentation of the dimensions mentioned above in different social housing projects in Brussels.

The in-depth study proposed in the first article will be presented in the second and third article. In these articles, I will scrutinize the CLT and the rental cooperative model on the dimensions ‘ownership’, ‘design and planning
participation’, ‘community activity’ and - to a lesser extent - ‘spatial configuration’. I will scrutinize these aspects by further delving in commons literature, and the notion of ‘commoning’ in particular. Authors like Peter Linebaugh, Helfrich and Haas and Massimo De Angelis use the verb ‘commoning’ to point at the practices and processes of producing and reproducing commons. I will start from the premise that this notion is particularly interesting to study how commons work in practice and to understand how commons and social inclusion relate to one another. A twofold reading of ‘commoning’ is at the base of this premise. One reading is related to the institutionalization of collective action. In this process collective goods are recognized, produced and reproduced through appointments and legal arrangements. The second reading focuses on social aspects of ‘commoning’; the set of relationships that are at the base or come along with collectively caring for resources. The empirical evidence of this social account of the commons will be illustrated by quotes from the in-depth interviews with residents, administrators, architects, social and cultural workers.

The second article “Beyond Housing” will scrutinize this twofold reading of ‘commoning’ in the CLT project Vandenpeereboom. The development of Brussels CLT will be framed as a response of community organisations and activists to an on-going housing crisis. Then, I will zoom in on the way coproduction is embedded in the legal structure of the organisation and the development of its projects. In an empirical part, I will reveal the connection between these co-productive aspects and the merits for participants involved, going beyond the sphere of housing. Apart from these merits, the article will consider the share of land that is held in common by CLTB. As the first article suggests, this macro-level of ownership is a crucial dimension of the commons. Due to its recent implementation, on a macro-level, the contribution of CLTB is currently very small. In the last section of this article, I will go into some preconditions and difficulties related to scaling-up CLTB and expanding its practices. I will thereby argue that it is more relevant to focus on the exemplary role of the organisation’s approach to land and citizen involvement than on the quantitative contribution to the housing crisis.

Whereas the second article mostly focuses on participation within the planning process of a housing project, the third article “Reproducing commons” retraces the participatory nature of a rental cooperative in a neighbourhood more than half a century old. The neighbourhood Destrier was erected by the Ligue des Familles and is now inhabited by people of various ages, cultures, religions and employment backgrounds. In this article, I will look at the role of the government in the rental cooperatives in Brussels throughout time, which has changed from a facilitating over a coordinating to a regulating role. Next, I will show how the administration of the rental cooperative manages to reproduce its cooperative nature by turning top-down measures into opportunities to differentiate participation. I will frame these top-down and bottom-up dynamics as an enclosure of the commons, and a mobilization of common-pool resources to respond to this. This framing will show that such increased government involvement does not necessarily lead to a
destruction of the cooperative notion and, under the right conditions, can even allow to accommodate more flexible forms of community participation, in which inhabitants engage with the neighbourhood in various ways and degrees.

The second and third article will go along with a series of micro-stories of participants in the Vandenpeereboom project and inhabitants of Destrier. The micro-stories deal with the relationship between people and their dwelling environment. They go into the way dwelling space is lived and appropriated and shed light on patterns of care, reciprocity and mutual help in the familiar and neighbourly context. The micro stories about the current homes of participants in the Vandenpeereboom project will show the ambiguity of the relationship between space and social encounter. They will identify patterns of individual and collective appropriation in dwelling typologies and ownership structures that do not necessarily anticipate on this. The micro stories about inhabitants of Destrier on the other hand will highlight the social function of the front and back gardens, alleyways and connected parks.

The essay after the third article draws lines between democratic participation, participatory urbanism and commons. It argues that commons can be seen as schools for participatory urbanism in the sense that they create micro-conditions for more direct modes of participation.

This hypothesis is tested in the fourth article “Designing commons”. In this article, the dimension 'spatial configuration' will be explored. In order to go beyond a narrow interpretation of the interrelationship between commons and space, the spatial configuration will be discussed from my own viewpoint as a spatial practitioner, dealing with participatory methodologies, spatial configurations and design institutionalization processes within the two action researches: the collective housing project Vandenpeereboom and the public space regeneration project in Destrier. In this article, I will draw theoretical links between commons, space and spatial practitioners. According to these links I will explain the two action research narratives and draw conclusions related to the used approaches and methodologies.

This article will be joined by visual material related to the output of the two projects. The first is the development of a personalized building sign for the plot on which the Vandenpeereboom project will be built. To make this building sign, children of the participants were invited to draw their future interior, terraces, collective garden and facilities within the building structure of the housing project. During the construction works of the project, the building sign displaying the drawings will give a glimpse inside the children's perception of the project. The second is the action plan made for the Destrier project. This plan is a manual made by and for the inhabitants and cultural workers that will guide them through an incremental regeneration of the site.

In the general conclusion, I will connect the different insights from the articles and dissemination of the action research into a coherent whole. This will result in a set of answers to the general research questions and a 'commons compass.' The
'compass' will go along with housing policy and spatial practice recommendations for the Brussels Capital Region. However, one should not expect an easy answer to the set of questions with regard to the links between social housing and social inclusion. As this dissertation shows, the way commons dimensions are integrated within social housing models and the role of the government, housing actors, spatial practitioners within commoning processes highly depend on the conditions in which and the precise way they are embedded.

Endnotes

1. The following interviews with key respondents have been conducted and transcribed;

SLRB
Interview Xavier Leroy, Architect, Direction Patrimony, Coordinator 'Cocolo', Department Guardianship and Inspection, SLRB. Sint-Gillis, 4 June 2014;
Interview Naima Ghanmi, Coordinator 'Social Action', SLRB. Sint-Gillis, 4 June 2014;

CITYDEV
Interview Nathalie Renneboog and Gert Nys, Director city renewal and Chief executive Citydev. Sint-Jans Molenbeek, 9 September 2014.

BRUSSELS HOUSING FUND

SOCIAL HOUSING COMPANIES
Interview Muriel Vanderghinst, Social Director Schaarbeekse Haard. Schaarbeek, 5 August 2014.
Interview Robert Debruyne, Director Foyer Collectif. Anderlecht, 13 October 2014.
Interview Pierre Hargot, Director former Home Familial Bruxellois. Evere, 21 August 2014.
Interview Mercedes d’Hoop, Social Assistant former Home Familial Bruxellois. Evere, 24 February 2015.

OCMW
Interview Luc Moreels, Department ownership, OCMW (Social welfare center). Brussels, 7 May 2015.

BRUSSELS REGIONAL PUBLIC SERVICE
Interview Sandrine Jacobs, Coordinator Housing information center, Brussel Stedelijke Ontwikkeling, BRPS, Brussels, 3 December 2015.

MUNICIPALITY
Interview Mario de Schepper, Property department, Anderlecht. Anderlecht, 30 July 2014.
Interview Guy van Beeck, Urban department, Anderlecht. Anderlecht, 30 July 2014

CIVIL SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS
Interview Aurelia Van Gucht, Alarm, Buurthuis Bonnevie. Brussels, 10 April 2013 (Conducted by Cécile Louey)
Interview Werner van Mieghem, Brusselse Bond voor het Recht op Wonen, Sint-Jans Molenbeek, 22 August 2014.
Interview Remy Renson, Responsible formations social cohesion projects and tenant boards, Febul. Schaarbeek, 5 August 2014.
Interview Véronique Gerard, Responsible temporary occupations, Febul. Schaarbeek: 3 December 2015.
Interview Amélie de Hemptinne †, Social worker Samenlevingsopbouw at social estate Peterbos. Anderlecht, 28 April 2014.
Interview Manuel Aerden, Social worker housing actions Samenlevingsopbouw. Anderlecht, 18 June 2014.
Interview Geert de Pauw, Coordinator CLTB. Brussels. Anderlecht, 11 September 2013.
Interview Christian Vandermotten, Professor geography ULB. Elsene, 26 May 2014.

2. The following interviews have been conducted and transcribed in the context of the case studies;

VANDENPEEREBOOM
Interview with Aurelia van der Gucht and Geert de Pauw, as described above.
Interview Emily Clissold, Housing service, Ciré. Brussels, 7 April 2015.
Interview Lorella Pazienza, coordinator project Vandenpeereboom, CLTB. Anderlecht, 7 May 2015.
Interview F., inhabitant and trustee l’Espoir, 27 May 2015 (conducted by Karla Celis).
Interview J., inhabitant l’Espoir. Molenbeek, 4 June 2015 (conducted together with Karla Celis).
Interview S., inhabitant l’Espoir. Molenbeek, 4 June 2015 (conducted together with Karla Celis).

A complete list of interviews with participants in the Vandenpeereboom project can be found in chapter 2 of this study

DESTRIER
Interviews with Pierre Hargot and Mercedes d’Hoop, as described above.
Interview Youen Arts and Fabrice Lorne, Cultural workers Destrier. Evere, 12 May 2015.
Interview Pierre Hargot, Vice-Director Comensia (and former director Home Familial Bruxellois). Sint-Jans Molenbeek, 22 Oktober 2015.

A complete list of interviews with residents can be found in chapter 3 of this study.

References

Marcuse, P. (2009). From critical urban theory to the right to the city, City 13(2-3), 185-197.
SINGOCOM report to the EC (FP6). Lille: IFRESI.


1

Housing the social
A taxonomy of subsidized housing schemes in Brussels

This taxonomy broadly categorizes different subsidized housing schemes in the Brussels Capital Region. In order to do so, it builds on the social housing taxonomy of Ryckewaert (1999) and the socio-economic development periods applied by Kesteloot (1994) on the Belgian situation. The latter traces several cycles within the economy, that are marked by the growth of a certain production mode and followed by a crisis. During these cycles, specific spatial forms, notions and understandings of social housing got shape. Ruling social constellations had an impact on international discourses on architecture, urbanity, housing and land tenure. As such they steered the origination of social housing paradigms. The taxonomy of Ryckewaert captures these paradigms. It distinguishes the different social housing typologies in Flanders and Brussels by covering a representative sample of urbanization forms: from the city centre, over the suburbs to the wider periphery.

This taxonomy captures different subsidized housing schemes by scrutinizing two perimeters in the Brussels Capital Region. It adopts keywords of the taxonomy and socio-economic development periods of Ryckewaert and Kesteloot to characterize their space- and time context. It adds new parameters that tell something about the role of residents within these housing schemes, such as the ownership structure, the participation of inhabitants within the design of the housing project and community activity. The article that follows explains the highlighted housing projects in the taxonomy in greater detail for each period, and discusses the various spatial layouts, ownership structures, modes of participation and importance of community activities.
1850 - 1920
Capitalist industrialisation / Worker’s housing

The first housing laws that preceded the development of social housing came as a reaction to social unrests and riots related to the concentration of workmen in poor working and living conditions near the factories. In the Brussels Capital Region, the first housing initiatives were developed by municipal social housing companies.
Fig I.1 (left and back)
Social and slum housing in the BCR, 1850-1920; its vicinity to main arteries and industries; and social housing production in this period
Source data: SLRB, 2007 (see Annex 4); Sint-Lukas Werkgemeenschap, 1985; UrbIS, 2013; Zimmer, 2009 (see Annex 7); Bing Maps, 2014

Fig I.2 (right top)
Spinning mill Société Linéaire, Workers’ housing (photographers unknown)
Source: Dessouroux, 2015

Fig I.3 (right bottom)
Plan Brussels (A. Verwest, 1910)
Source: Dessouroux, 2015
Single family housing in neoclassicist/jugendstil style

Multi-family housing in neoclassicist/jugendstil style

Architectural typology

Ownership structure

Participation

Community activity

Projects social cohesion
Interbellum
Growth taylorism and garden city philosophy / 
Development modernist urban planning

The devastation and great housing need after World War I awakened a sensibility of Belgian politicians and city planners towards the housing question. The garden neighbourhood, a high-quality dwelling environment in the green suburbs, became the promoted social housing model for the workmen. Garden neighbourhoods were both developed by municipalities and rental cooperatives. Tramlines and local railways would make up for the peripheral location.
Fig I.4 (left and back)
Social housing in the BCR developed by municipal social housing companies (CVBA or NV) and rental cooperatives (CVBA), 1921-1950; its vicinity to main arteries; and social housing production in this period
Source data: SLRB, 2007; UrbIS, 2013; Zimmer, 2009; Bing Maps, 2014

Fig I.5 (right top)
Terminus tram line Leuvenestraat (photographer unknown, 1942)
Source: Dessouroux, 2015

Fig I.6 (right middle)
The garden city concept
(Howard, 1898)

Fig I.7 (right bottom)
Plan and picture Moortebeek
Garden neighbourhoods

Multi-family housing in neoclassic/jugendstil style

Perimeter 1
- Social housing by limited liability cooperative company (CVBA)/rent
- Social housing by limited liability company (NV)/rent
- Social housing by rental cooperative (CVBA)/shares+rent
- CLT housing by non-profit organisation (CLTB)/lease+sale
- Housing by municipality/rent
- Housing by public pararegional institution (GOMB)/sale

Perimeter 2

Ownership structure

Participation
- Deliberative voice representative residents in board of directors
- Participation residents in management estate

Community activity
- Projects social cohesion
Postwar period until the end of the 1960s

Fordism / Growth modernism and Suburbanisation

After the congress of the influential platform CIAM that took place in Brussels in 1930, the formula of the free-standing tower in a green environment, to sanitize the existing city or to expand the city in the countryside, would dominate urban thinking in Belgium. Its principles were only applied after World War II, a period of strong economic growth. In this period, the car became the primary vehicle. Secondary roads became the guiding infrastructure of high-rise development.
Fig I.8 (left and back)
Social housing in the Brussels Capital Region, 1951-1970; its vicinity to main arteries and green space; and social housing production in this period
Source data: SLRB, 2007; UrbIS, 2013; Zimmer, 2009; Bing Maps, 2014

Fig I.9 (right)
Plans by Victor Bourgeois to sanitize the city (in response to TBC cases [image bottom]): a modernist neighbourhood in connection to a new international railway station. (V. Bourgeois, 1930)
Source: Archives d'Architecture Moderne/CIVA Foundation
### Multi-family housing in modernist style

- Minimized department buildings and clustered single-family houses
- Suggestion for pedestrian traffic and human scale

### Modernist highrise neighbourhoods
- Sanitization and extension city
- Mix elongated apartment buildings and clustered single family houses
- Attention for pedestrian traffic and human scale

### Dispersed city
- Urban fringe
- Suburb
- 19th C. belt

### Architectural Typology

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<tr>
<td>Social housing by limited liability cooperative company (CVBA)</td>
<td>Social housing by limited liability company (NV)</td>
<td>Social housing by rental cooperative (CVBA)</td>
<td>Social housing by non-profit organization (CLTB)</td>
<td>Housing by municipality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social housing by limited liability cooperative company (CVBA)</td>
<td>Social housing by limited liability company (NV)</td>
<td>Social housing by rental cooperative (CVBA)</td>
<td>Social housing by non-profit organization (CLTB)</td>
<td>Housing by municipality</td>
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### Ownership Structure

- Participation residents in management estate
- Participation residents in board of directors
- Participation residents in design or renovation estate

### Participation

- Projects social cohesion
1971 - 1990
(Oil)crisis / Post-fordism / End of the modernist project

The Belgian government based itself on Keynesian principles to stimulate the economy in the aftermath of the oil crisis. It led to the highest social housing production in a decade. However, the period was marked by the demolition of entire city quarters and savings on the architectural and technical quality of social housing. The construction of ‘inhuman’ dwelling complexes united housing activists in a struggle against the destruction of the traditional city.
Fig I.10 (left and back)
Social housing in the Brussels Capital Region, 1971-1990, its vicinity to main arteries and social housing production in this period
Source data: SLRB, 2007; UrbIS, 2013; Zimmer, 2009; Bing Maps, 2014

Fig I.11 (right top)
Protest march against the demolition of the ‘Marolles’ neighbourhood (1969)
Source: Dessouroux, 2015

Fig I.12 (right bottom)
Poster against ‘Manhattan project’ made by neighbourhood committee
Source: Archives d’Architecture Moderne/CIVA Foundation
Voor (1982)
Weeshuis (1974)

Medium- and highrise neighbourhoods
Elongated appartement buildings

Modernist highrise neighbourhoods
Sanitization and extension city

Projects social cohesion
Participation residents in design or renovation estate

ARCHITECTURAL TYPOLOGY

PERIMETER 1
- Social housing by limited liability cooperative company (CVBA)/rent
- Social housing by limited liability company (NV)/rent
- Social housing by rental cooperative (CVBA)/shares+rent
- CLT housing by non-profit organisation (CLTB)/lease+sale
- Housing by municipality/rent
- Housing by public pararegional institution (GOMB)/sale

CENTRE

PERIMETER 2

OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

PARTICIPATION
- Deliberative voice representative residents in board of directors
- Participation residents in management estate
- Participation residents in design or renovation estate

COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

Projects social cohesion
The regionalization of Belgium led to a strong stagnation in the Brussels social housing production. At the same time, the focus on the technical quality of social housing, the participation of residents and the small-scale rehabilitation of deprived neighbourhoods increased. Also new models of subsidized housing originated in the form of public-private and public-collective partnerships.
Fig I.13 (left and back)
Social housing and new subsidized housing in the Brussels Capital Region, 1991-2015; social and subsidized housing production in this period
Source data: SLRB, 2015 (see Annex 5); www.citydev.brussels (see Annex 6), www.citib.be; Woningfonds, 2015; UrbIS, 2013; Grippa et al., 2015; Zimmer, 2009; Bing Maps, 2014

Fig I.14 (right)
A neighbourhood party organised in the framework of a social cohesion project in the social housing estate Léopold
Source unknown

Fig I.15 (middle)
Workshop in the framework of the neighbourhood contract
Source unknown

Fig I.16 (bottom)
Gentrification at Dansaertstraat
Source unknown
### Architectural Typology

- Partial or entire sanitation housing block
- Apartment buildings, adoption rural style
- Punctual renovation

### Ownership Structure

<table>
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<th>Ownership Structure</th>
<th>Participation Structure</th>
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<td>Social housing by limited liability cooperative company (CVBA)/rent</td>
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<td>Housing by municipality/rent</td>
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<td>Housing by public pararegional institution (GOMB)/sale</td>
<td>Participation by public pararegional institution (GOMB)</td>
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### Community Activity

- Projects social cohesion
- Participation residents in management estate
- Deliberative voice representative residents in board of directors
- Participation residents in design or renovation estate

### Map

- PERIMETER 1
- URBAN FRINGE
- SUBURB
- 19TH C. BELT
- CENTRE
- PERIMETER

- Social housing by limited liability cooperative company (CVBA)/rent
- Social housing by limited liability company (NV)/rent
- Social housing by rental cooperative (CVBA)/shares+rent
- CLT housing by non-profit organisation (CLTB)/lease+sale
- Housing by municipality/rent
- Housing by public pararegional institution (GOMB)/sale
References


Reconceptualizing the ‘publicness’ of public housing

The case of Brussels*

This article brings together various spatial and political theorizations on the commons as a broader project to understand multiple dimensions of the inclusive nature of public housing. By picking up theorizations on the commons, the article feeds the debate on the loss of ‘publicness’ of public housing and removes attention from what is seen as a state related business. Four core-dimensions are identified: ownership, participation, community activity and physical configuration. The article takes a sample of public housing estates in the Brussels Capital Region as case studies to test the capacity of this framework to detect the degree of publicness of various forms of public housing. The preliminary results -based on this limited sample of cases studied through interviews with privileged informers and a literature study- suggest that approaches where individual households are actively involved in the organization of the dwelling environment work best to compensate for the loss of publicness that has occurred since the decline of the welfare state. In that respect, these approaches tie in with some early predecessors of public housing, mainly cooperatively organized garden city developments. Further in-depth case study research should shed more light on the validity of this hypothesis, as well as on the precise mechanisms and features that determine this regained publicness.

1.1 Introduction

Recent literature on public space and public services has developed a discourse on the loss of ‘publicness’. This has been linked to declining public investments since the late 20th century, which have brought about a re-regulation of public spaces and public services. Among other things, the literature focuses on market-driven administrative reforms generalized as ‘New Public Management’ (Haque, 2001), the de-politicization of the public sphere (Garnham, 1990), the substitution of public by private sector ownership (Haque, 1996; Paddison & Sharp, 2007), and the commercialization of public space (Low & Smith, 2006; Sennett, 1977; Zukin, 1995). It does not only highlight the social-economic side effects of
these tendencies for low-income groups, such as a less equitable distribution of resources, but also points at the lack of public debate on the nature of public good itself (Coursey & Bozeman, 1990; Paddison & Sharp, 2007).

Whereas the literature on the decline of publicness in public spaces and services is quite abundant, the loss of publicness in public housing has received less attention. Nonetheless, public housing has also experienced profound changes since the decline of the Welfare state model. Among the most important changes are the privatization of public housing (Forrest & Murie, 1988; Walker, 2001) epitomized by ‘right to buy’ policies that allow tenants to acquire their dwelling; a shift from the provision of public housing by the state to provide support or subsidies for individual households on the private rental market (or from ‘aide à la pièce’ to ‘aide à la personne’) (Kemmeny, 1995); the establishment of public housing programs reserved for middle income groups; and shifts in the social housing system from a ‘general’ or ‘universal’ system to ‘residual’ or ‘safety net’ system (Ghekière, 2007; Kemeny, 1995; Winters & Elsinga 2008).

Some scholars have attempted to explore alternative concepts that enhance publicness (Coursey & Bozeman, 1990; Fraser, 1990; Haque, 2001). One of these approaches is a reorientation towards ‘the commons’ (Bailey, 2013; Kratzwald, 2012; Mattei, 2012; Reid, 2003). A reorientation of publicness towards the commons results from rethinking the meaning of the state/market paradigm in light of an appropriation of public goods by citizens for a common purpose (Bailey, 2013; Harvey, 2012; Mattei, 2012). Indeed, while traditionally, commons were associated with shared environmental resources, increasingly, public goods are being recognized as potential commons (Mattei, 2012; Reid, 2003; Stavrides in An Architektur, 2010). This re-orientation is intertwined with emerging social practices, the so-called ‘commoning’ practices (Linebaugh, 2008) of civil society that address new forms of citizenry, inclusion, co-habitation and co-production.

Although public housing concerns both a service and a space of cohabitation, few attempts have been made to reconceptualise the publicness of public housing in light of the commons. This is striking as many public housing actors have origins in philanthropic or cooperative approaches at the turn of the 19th and 20th century that heavily relied on the mobilization of common property resources. Next, emerging practices point to such reconceptualization, for instance in the appearance of government sponsored community land trust housing schemes. In addition, the history of public housing has not systematically investigated the degree to which common property resources or ‘commoning’ practices have played a role in the establishment of the various forms of public housing that occur throughout Europe and within particular countries.

In order to do this, this article develops a framework to analyse public housing models on crucial dimensions of the commons. To explain the link between publicness and commons and to develop this framework, it builds on commons theory (De Angelis, Stavrides in An Architektur, 2010; Harvey, 2012; Mattei, 2012; Ostrom, 1990) and on planning and architecture literature on commons and shared
space (De Rijck, Guldentops, & Vansteelant, 2000; Loeckx, 1998; Lofland, 1998; Stavrides, 2010). It then takes the Brussels Capital Region as a case study to test this framework because of two reasons. Firstly, as the capital of the first country to be subject to industrialization on the European mainland during the 19th century, the city was very soon confronted with the need to develop adequate housing for the growing number of low income groups that came to settle in the city. This has led to a wide range of approaches and housing models since the late 19th century (De Meulder, 1983; Lagrou & Janssens, 1985; Ryckewaert, 1999; Schoonbrodt, 1979; Smets 1977). Secondly, recent and emerging practices in Brussels exemplify the decline of publicness we identified above, as well as the rethinking of public housing in line with the commons. On the one hand, a new autonomous public real estate agency has started to develop middle income housing since the late 1980s, illustrating both the trend towards ‘New Public Management’ and a reorientation of public housing policy towards middle-income groups. On the other hand, a first step has been taken towards an institutionalized form of housing based on commons principles, with the establishment of Community Land Trust Brussels, the first of such organizations on the European mainland. To conclude, some preliminary findings of the identification on the inclusive nature of various commons aspects in public housing in Brussels will be identified.

1.2 Redefining ‘Publicness’ in Light of the Commons

In the welfare state model, resources such as energy, health care, infrastructure, water supplies, public transportation, housing and public media were assigned to the state. Therefore, the term ‘public’ is intuitively used as something that is provided or owned by the state (Kratzwald, 2012). In contrast, the burgeoning public space and service literature attaches distinct, yet divergent meanings to ‘public’, referring to the ‘public sphere’ as a political concept and the ‘publicness of space’ as a spatial concept (Low & Smith, 2006). According to Habermans (1962), ‘the public sphere mediates between society and state’. It is a social domain in which political participation is enacted by means of public discourse, debate and where possible, a common judgment on matters of mutual interest. ‘Public space’ on the other hand, can absorb meaning from the public sphere, but it can also reaffirm, contradict and channel social and political relations (Heynen & Loeckx, 1998; Low & Smith, 2006).

One main principle behind the commons appearing in the vast amounts of literature that is written on the concept is that society is dependent on natural and cultural resources. These resources are shared and governed for the common benefit, and therefore called commons. Today, academics increasingly complement this resource-based definition by notions of citizenship and inclusion. Ostrom (1990) points at the presence of a ‘community’, small and stable populations with a thick social network and social norms promoting conservation of common property resources. De Angelis (in An Architektur, 2010) describes commons as a process
that enables people to develop new kinds of relationships by acting together. For Mattei (2012) developing commons is about the creation of a community, based on specific mechanisms of participation and inclusion. However, relating commons to groups of similar people bears the danger of the creation of closed communities that exclude others from their privileged commons (Harvey, 2012; Stavrides in An Architektur, 2010). Therefore, some researchers plead for a reorientation of the notion of the common towards the public sphere. According to Harvey, 'public goods and spaces become commons when social forces appropriate, protect and enhance them for a common purpose and a mutual benefit' (Harvey, 2012, p. 73). For Stavrides, commons have to provide ground to build a public realm and give opportunities for discussing what is good for all. Kratzwald (2012) argues that the recognition and creation of common goods is not only related to self-organized social networks of citizens, but can contribute to a participation and empowerment of citizens in the public sector, as such relating to the original meaning of the 'public sphere'.

In order to detect the level of publicness in public housing, we relate these public space, sphere and commons concepts to architecture and planning literature. We propose four core dimensions: ownership, participation, community activity and the spatial structure of the environment.

A first core dimension to interpret publicness is ownership. On a macro-level, ownership refers to the share of housing and land that is held in common. According to Angotti (2008) and Barnes (2006) a trenchant expansion of community land is crucial to counteract price elevations through gentrification and speculation. At the level of the housing project, it refers to the legal status of a place (Marcuse, 2005). In public housing we can identify three sub-dimensions: the legal status of the operator, the type of ownership of the house and the land on which the house is built; the presence and use of public spaces or non-residential functions. For the type of ownership, a distinction can be made between lease, individual purchase, collective purchase, hereditary tenure and the preconditions that go along with this. Preconditions such as income thresholds, regulations on re-sale of owner-occupied housing are important, as they regulate access to several types of public housing. The larger the community or group of communities that benefits from any form of ownership as defined above, the more the place is public.

The second dimension deals with the participation of inhabitants of the housing estate and the neighbourhood in the planning, design and maintenance of their dwelling environment. The greatest degree of publicness is reached in case of co-production (Van den Broeck, Verschure, & Esho, 2004). Co-production means that there is an equitable relationship between communities, professionals, and third parties, bearing in mind existing power relations. It does not imply consulting citizens when developing a project, but an intensive process of co-creation (Marcuse, 2009).
The third dimension that entails publicness is the presence of community activity. According to Putnam, effective participation in local government depends on a tradition of small-scale community activity, strengthening mutual relationships and social cohesion (Punam, 1993; Taylor, 1998). This especially holds true when keeping in mind the underprivileged inhabitants of public housing, for whom the neighbourhood forms an important reference and source of access to contacts (Driessens, 1998; Overbekking et al., 1983). This access is often most easily found by homogeneous groups of neighbours, sharing the same network (Driessens, 1998). For this reason, it is important to have a variety of choices to be involved in community activity. This encouragement of diversity allows the expressing of different and often conflicting benefits and builds on overlapping these communities (Taylor, 1998). As Taylor states, ‘from these diverse activities, the confidence can grow to engage more widely, to find common ground with others’. Community activity proves to be particularly successful when inhabitants receive the means to improve their own environment (Watson, 1994). Given the limited historical data on this topic, the third dimension will not be dealt with systematically in the discussion of the cases that serve as examples of the various Brussels housing models.

The fourth aspect, the physical configuration, refers to the morphology and architecture of the project. Distinction can be made between a place’s macro design -its relationship with the hinterland- and the design of the place itself (Kesteloot et al., 1999; Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). For the macro design, a study of Kesteloot et al. (1999) demonstrates that centrality and connectivity are important dimensions. The two dimensions allude to the presence of commercial or social services in the vicinity and the accessibility of a place by public or private transport (Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). At the level of the dwelling, architectural-ethnographic research has delivered evidence that the quality of the housing environment contributes significantly to the development of social relationships (De Rijck et al., 2000; Loecxx, 1998; Stavrides, 2010). The research illustrates that a gradual transition between public and private, open and closed spaces is significant, as it provides opportunities for informal encounters and freedom of appropriation (De Rijck et al., 2000; Lofland, 1998; Stavrides, 2010). According to Stavrides (2010), such ‘in between zones’ or ‘porous places’ influence informal encounter, creativity and new forms of commonality.

In order to understand the degree of publicness in various approaches to create affordable housing in the Brussels Capital Region, a sample of public housing estates is crossed with the dimensions listed above. Building on former research on public housing and architectural paradigms (Ryckewaert, 1999), the sample covers both a geographical and a temporal spectrum, looking at projects built between the beginning of the 20th century and today, and stretching from the greener edges of the agglomeration to the denser neighbourhoods in de the 19th century belt and the inner city.
1.3 The Publicness of Public Housing in the Brussels Capital Region

Housing the Working-Class

Although in Europe public housing is seen as a product of the welfare state, its seeds go back to the beginning of the 19th century. Demographic changes, industrialization, proletarization and related problems of hygiene and diseases initiated the so-called ‘housing question’ all over Europe. In Belgium, the first housing law was enacted in 1889, as a result of social unrest and riots related to the poor working and living conditions of labourers. At the time, social housing was organized by private housing associations of enlightened entrepreneurs or industrialists with philanthropic ideals, like the Familistères of Godin in Laken and Guise (De Meulder, 1983; Dour, 1890; Lagrou & Janssens, 1985). Assimilated into a liberal tradition in housing policy, the first housing law was based on an indirect government intervention. It supported credit companies and savings banks in granting loans at preferential rates to self-builders and authorized the establishment of local social housing associations (Smets, 1977). The law provided a considerable stimulus for public housing but did not contribute to a fundamental improvement of living conditions of the poor. It mostly benefited individual self-built housing in the sparse space at the border of the city or, supported by cheap railway tickets, in the rural hinterland (De Decker et al., 2005) and loans for such housing were only affordable for the wealthier workmen.

The development of two housing complexes in the Rue Victor Hugo in Schaarbeek, designed in 1902, is a clear result of the first housing laws. The municipal social housing association that was in charge of the project was ‘the result of a difficult compromise’ (Huberty, 1999, p. 36). At the end of the 19th century, social policy was still in its infancy, and although many were convinced that housing workmen deserved specific attention, visions on ownership and architecture were very dependent on different ideologies. While liberals and Christian-democrats of the municipality were convinced that home ownership, preferably of small, clustered housing of one floor outside the physical and moral unhealthy city centre was
most preferential, the socialist fraction was more interested in tenant multi-
family housing close to work and recreation activities. In a discussion among
municipal councillors it was stated: ‘Isn’t it self-evident that collective housing
will facilitate bad habits typical for an agglomeration, on the same place, between
people of the same class? (...) When you only ensure a workman a dwelling under
cheap conditions, without forcing him to save money, you do not do more than
encouraging him to a greater consumption in the bar’ (Simonetti, 1999, p. 28).
In contrast, the socialist founding father of the association, Louis Bertrand, was
convinced that ‘The house should be part of a public service. (...) The task the
socialist municipal government has to fulfil is to make the municipality owner of
the housing stock, to make these houses as healthy as possible and to rent them
for the lowest price’ (Bertrand as cited in Simonetti, 1999, p. 22). While there
was no question of participation of inhabitants in decision-making bodies, the
emancipation of the working class was an important feature for Bertrand. It was
his belief that political power, and as such the emancipation of the proletariat,
could only be conquered through the power of the municipalities, which were able
to exert pressure on the state and central power (Bertrand & Vinck, 1900).

The first constructions of the housing association, ‘Victor Hugo’, designed
by laureates of an architect competition, are exemplifying for this compromise
(Figure 1.1). Nowadays swallowed by the centre of the Brussels Capital Region,
back then the line of owner-occupied row housing and multifamily housing were
built on a piece of land in a neighbourhood in full expansion at the edge of an
agglomeration, where land prices and the connection to the water and sewage
system were not too expensive. In the architecture of both projects, the sense of
community of former workmen’s quarters or philanthropic experiments is hard to
find. The facades line the pavement and are kept neatly to the building line. The
row house is similar to the typology of the bourgeois house, but reduced in size and
refinement, while the multifamily housing is based on the ‘maison de rapport’
(e.g., tenements house), the former speculation housing with four or five levels and
more than two apartments per floor (Smets, 1997). Despite this, the architects
undertook some undeniable efforts in order to pursue variety in the repetition of
blocks. In the lines of row houses, a small niche and a step buffer the door from the
footpath. The elevated first floor enables a visual relationship with the street,
without allowing passers-by to look inside the house. By varying brickwork
colours and patterns, cornices, form and montage of the windows, each house has
its own particularity. The architect of the multifamily apartment blocks played
with these components in the design of the façade as well. The plan of the blocks
is based on the system of ‘double houses’: the hall, which was seen as the extension
of the street, leads visitors to a collective garden on the ground floor and two
individual apartments on each floor upstairs. The heightened roof and the French
and Dutch statements on the facade of the stairwells, supporting the inhabitants to
‘be hardworking, clean and economical for all’, accentuates this communal space
and interestingly reveals how fears of bad behaviour were met.
Similar to the development of the housing association, the publicness of the two housing projects could be defined as a compromise. Although the row of single-family houses was available at an affordable price for working families, the public investment was channelled back to the private market once the project was resold. The in-between spaces are also less pronounced when compared to the multi-family housing. Furthermore, the construction of the projects was not a result of coproduction with future residents or inhabitants of the neighbourhood, but some of the founders of the housing associations hoped for a greater power for municipalities in order to ensure citizen participation.

**Living in Good Spirit with Nature. The Cooperative Garden Neighborhood**

The social and political transformations in the aftermath of World War I paved the way for a new approach towards the housing question. The devastation and great housing need during and after the war awakened a strong social sensibility among Belgian politicians and city planners. The reconstruction congress that was organized in 1920 on the initiative of Union des Villes was a yardstick in this respect. The main targets of the congress were the struggle against private speculation and the connected question of land ownership. Out of the social consequences of speculation building, conference participants Verwilghen and Van den Brempt concluded that the housing problem in large cities could be reduced to questions of land ownership. In order to remediate speculation following post-war austerity, both speakers were convinced that it was desirable ‘to steer a maximum of effort to re-obtain land for the community’ (Van den Brempt as cited in Smets, 1977, p. 106). The plentiful, affordable lands around the city centre were seen as the location and the garden city as the urban model to do this. The ‘garden city’, the brainchild of Ebenezer Howard, was seen as the synthesis between the city and the countryside, a place in which different populations lived together in good contact with nature (De Meulder et al., 1997). The viewpoints reflected at the congress would become the source of inspiration of the National Company of Cheap Housing. The Belgian umbrella organization had been created a year earlier to set up construction programs for social housing companies. The projects realized in its early period clearly pronounce a preference for the, in 1920, proposed garden city, but diverged from the concept of Howard (Smets, 1977).
This is also the case for Moortebeek, a garden neighbourhood of the cooperative ‘Les Foyers Collectifs’ (Figure 1.2). The German garden suburb, rather than the garden city of Howard was the inspiration source for the establishment of a tenant cooperative, an ownership structure in which tenants are shareholders of the organization. The founding member of ‘Les Foyers Collectifs’ got acquainted with the model while living in Germany. In the ‘Maison du Peuple’, where he worked as a jurist, he elaborated the idea to do a similar thing in Brussels and launched a call for different sections of the Belgian labour party to become candidate-member of the cooperative. With the money of the members, the state, the province and the National Company, the Foyer acquired a remote piece of forested land at the confines of three municipalities (Les Foyers Collectifs, 1981). A tramline would make up for this peripheral location. The base lines of the master plan for the piece of land -respect for the topography, the orientation of the streets, the lighting of the houses and parcels and the dimensions of the streets- were largely based on the directives of the National Companies. Next to housing, a centre was to be included with a cooperative grocery store, butcher, shoemaker shop, pharmacy, a meeting and medical consultation centre, an office and residence for the concierge. In order to avoid monotony, for the architecture of each street, the urban planner in charge relied on several teams of architects. Although the cooperative was not involved in the design of the master plan, the administrative council organized a premature form of member participation for the architecture of the buildings. They questioned the 115 members of the cooperative about their wishes regarding the interior spaces. The architects got down to work with the results of the referendum and afterwards discussed their design with the cooperative (Les Foyers Collectifs, 1981).

Nowadays the tramline has been abolished and a highway borders the garden neighbourhood, but the quarter has been able to preserve its specific spatial qualities. A linear park that replaced a former car route and public grass fields offer a great playground for pedestrians. The profile of the streets makes their route even more comfortable: pedestrian paths are divided from car traffic through rows
of grass and trees. The houses are not fenced, but buffered from the pedestrian paths by a ‘front garden’ decorated with a wide range of plants and pottery. Also, the involvement of inhabitants in decision-making processes remains an important feature today. The governing board is still comprised of tenants. They gather yearly with all inhabitants to inform and negotiate about activities and renovation work. In contrast, community activity has diminished. Since the arrival of the car, many people have started to spend their free time abroad. Before, they relied on several sports and cultural activities in the community centre, including horticulture classes, theatre, basketball, football and gymnastics (Figure 1.3). Besides that, the inhabitants’ changing composition of inhabitants due to more strict entrance rules to housing makes it difficult for the aging government board to attract people to their activities. Nevertheless, sports facilities in the community centre and the public parks are still intensively used by inhabitants of the surroundings.

Although the thick social network of former times is not present anymore, the garden suburb has many elements that point to a high degree of publicness: the legal structure of tenant-shareholders; the pedestrian routes, public spaces and community activities that attract inhabitants from outside; and the participation of inhabitants in decision-making processes.

**Housing the Masses. The High-Rise Housing of the Modern Movement**

The end of the 1920s induced a break from the garden city model in Belgium. The autonomy of the tenant cooperatives of the garden neighbourhood, which did not appeal to municipal governments, and the financial limitations imposed on the public sector in light of the economic crisis were decisive in this respect. After the congress of the influential architecture platform CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) that took place in Brussels in 1930, the formula of the free-standing tower in an open park landscape would dominate modernist urban thinking in Belgium (Smets, 1977). In order to guarantee habitability and affordability in this new ideal environment, the boundaries of the minimum dwelling were defined, limiting space to the precise movements and needs of human beings (Mumford, 2002). The maximal functionality and plentiful community services in a healthy green environment would make up for the limited footprint of the individual house (De Meulder et al., 1999). While this modernist ideal found consensus among architecture circles, in Belgium, its principles were only applied after World War II. The serial production, rational land use and functional units were an economic solution for the construction of social tenant housing in the strongly industrialized post-war period (Smets, 1977). In contrast to the cooperative garden city, which was created as an alternative to the existing city, social tenant housing was built as a green field development at the border of the city or in the context of slum clearance programs in the city centre. Nevertheless, in Belgium, high-rise housing projects were not produced on the same scale as in neighbouring countries like the Netherlands and France. Communal services and shops at the ground floor of the
housing estates were projected, but often not built. The historic Catholic hegemony preferring individual houses and family above community life certainly played a role in this respect (De Decker et al., 2005). Housing policy primarily supported access to homeownership, even if the amount of public housing produced reached a peak in this period. The strict regulations for social housing companies played a role as well. They did not allow social housing companies to build anything but housing and the involvement of private partners to include other functions seemed bureaucratically impossible (De Meulder et al., 1999).

The high-rise social tenant neighbourhood of Peterbos illustrates some of these shortcomings (Figure 1.4). The ambitious master plan of the architect to steer the urbanization of a green suburb through the development of a park neighbourhood was bogged down as a result of several limitations (Kesteloot et al., 1999). First, due to the upgrade of the adjacent old boulevard into an intermediary ring, the area was cut off from the old centre of the community. Next, after the construction of the first towers of the projects, the plan to mix high-rise towers with low-rise blocks to respond to the existing fine-meshed fabric of the village of Anderlecht was reduced due to budgetary limitations of one of the two social housing associations in charge. The blocks and towers would be positioned around a central court, on which the main axes of the surrounding street would converge.

This urban logic evaporated to a plantation of north-south and east-west blocks delimiting spaces monopolized by cars. Not only did the typology of the building change but also the circulation inside. In order to reduce conflict a large communal circulation space was divided into several stairwells on each floor. More budgetary limitations scaled down the envisaged articulation of the entrances to these circulation spaces. Next, out of the planned public facilities along the existing road, such as a school, a church and a community centre, only a community centre was built in the basement of a block in the middle of the area. The planned commercial services were also limited to three grocery shops and a laundry store. However, the park landscape offers a creative environment
for children living in and around the estate, who intensively use the seemingly undefined or reduced spaces in the middle of the estate, as well as the sports fields at the border of the estate.

The attenuation of public facilities, of connections to the adjacent neighbourhoods, of intermediary zones between the public areas and the private apartments in the seemingly ad hoc placed blocks and of citizen participation, highly diminishes the level of publicness in Peterbos. However, in one of the following sections, we will see that nowadays attempts are being made to improve participation and community activity to meet this loss.

The Public Housing Sector in Crisis

With the repercussions of the oil crisis in the 1970s and the socio-economic transformations in its aftermath, the role and functions of the state, and likewise the public housing sector, would be redefined. In the first instance, in Belgium, it did not directly lead to a standstill in building activities. On the contrary, as in the post-war period, the Belgian government based itself on Keynesian principles to stimulate the economy. The extra investments in social housing associations created breathing space to take up new activities. In the Brussels Capital Region between 1971 and 1980, 11,203 public dwellings were built (Zimmer, 2009). This corresponds to one fourth of the total amount of public housing in Brussels today and remains the highest number of housing produced in a decade (Zimmer, 2009). However, during this period town rehabilitation reached an apotheosis while modernism seemed to be further stripped of any architectural aspiration (De Meulder et al., 1999).

Exemplary for this period is the housing complex ‘Evenepoel’ and the organizational changes of the municipal social housing association in charge. In order to include more low-income households, the association barred renters with higher incomes from its patrimony. In addition, it established a management committee that gathered monthly to follow up on renters’ files. Residents were however still not included in this new governance set up (Huberty, 1999).

The four high-rise blocks of Evenepoel that were built between 1977 and 1980 are located in a former residential zone, encroached by business developments (Figure 1.5). While their size somehow fits in this area with medium size buildings and the buildings contain high-quality apartments with large terraces, the architecture of the building does not add value to the surrounding urban tissue. A lack of pedestrian connections to commercial and cultural services increases the isolation of the estate. The formation of trees that demarcate the public spaces between the buildings reinforces the green structure of the adjacent sports park, but a physical connection is lacking.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the full brunt of the crisis hit Belgium. The policy measures of the right-wing government in power struck a hard blow against the
existing housing policy. The demolition of entire city quarters and difficult-to-appropriate and ‘inhuman’ dwelling complexes and public space, united housing activists in a struggle against the destruction of the traditional city. Activists, ecologists, youth and women’s movements pleaded for a more human approach to dwelling, with attention for participation and community aspects of cohabitation (De Meulder, 1997). Against this background, the regionalization of Belgium into a federal state with three communities (the Flemish, French and German Community) and three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region) took place. In light of this regionalization, in 1989 the national public housing company was split into three separate and autonomous regional public housing companies. These regional companies became responsible for social municipal housing associations and tenant cooperatives, operating on their respective territories (Zimmer, 2009).

In Brussels, this regionalization coincided with a strong stagnation of the public housing sector. While in Flanders at the beginning of the 1990s operations were set up to increase the share of public housing, in Brussels the yearly production of public housing between 1990 and 2014 decreased to a historically low level. Although the extensive financial debt inherited after the regionalization and the obsolete public housing patrimony are part of the explanation, political choices play an important role as well (Romainville, 2010). Despite an increasing lack of affordable housing, today only 40% of the housing budget is devoted to the maintenance of and support for social rented housing, while the remainder is geared towards the support of homeownership and city renewal programs.

New Public Housing Approaches with Shifting Meanings of publicness in Response to the Housing Crisis

The invigorated support for homeownership since 1989, has among other things been dedicated to the construction of housing for owner occupation, organized by a regional development company (Citydev, the former Gomb). The main goals of the housing program of the company are to attract or keep middleclass families in the
city and to support city rehabilitation. The attraction of middleclass families is often a double gain for the municipalities that they inhabit: it encourages investments in areas mostly left aside by private developers and ensures an increased tax income. For inhabitants of these municipalities who are bound to rent an apartment on the private market, the gains are less clear, as the attraction of people with higher incomes supports gentrification. In advanced stages of gentrification, the influx of higher income groups causes property prices to rise. An additional factor that increases this possibility is that these projects are often acquired as investment property.

Not only the ownership structure, but also the spatial layout of housing projects of Citydev has little to offer in terms of publicness, especially in its early period. This can be verified by looking at one of their city renewal projects containing 4 apartment buildings along two roads (Figure 1.6). The project is located in Kuregem, a central and well-connected neighbourhood at the border of the centre of the city and housing many migrants and low-income families. Two adjacent buildings are located next to a square, but hardly have any involvement beyond the confines of it, nor one another. The outdoor space is entirely subdivided into a patchwork of private gardens. The lifted ground floor elevates the distance between the apartments and the street, while the minimalistic materialization and positioning of the windows of the brick building indicate non-involvement with the public realm. In the more recent building at the other side of the block the ground floor is also elevated, but the entrances lie one step higher, and have a setback with a niche. In contrast to the brick building, the facade is appropriated by the inhabitants of the block. Clotheslines, climbers, plants and flowerpots decorate the facade and give a lively impression to the in-between realm created by entrances, protruding terraces and bay windows.

Despite the serious stagnation in the social housing production in Brussels since 1989, the social housing sector has made progress in its policy. The regional company introduced strict rules for each housing association in its territory concerning the lease of social housing. In a second phase, the region has developed
diverse systems to strengthen existing initiatives provided by public housing agencies, such as a service for social support and an expansion of resources for staff (Zimmer, 2009). Regarding the dimensions of participation and community activity, the regional company has encouraged social cohesion projects in specific housing estates and the establishment of advisory boards in all social housing associations in its territory. The ‘social cohesion projects’ are collaborations between a community development agency and one or more social housing agencies that aim to increase citizen participation and chances for encounter among inhabitants of housing estates with specific social problems. At present, there are twenty social cohesion projects in the Brussels Capital Region. Since 2000, a community development agency has worked on such projects in the aforementioned housing estate of Peterbos. Their work depends on the needs and opportunities they detect: from the support of tenants’ initiatives, to the organization of family excursions, social restaurants, language courses for women, workshops on rational energy use, artistic interventions and yearly fairs. Even if there is still a lot of work to do in terms of physical improvement and collaboration with social organizations working in the neighbourhood, according to the community worker in charge, in 14 years community activity and solidarity among inhabitants have remarkably increased.

Then, in the cooperative limited liability companies -the traditional legal status of housing associations in Brussels-residents are not part of the governing board. This was changed in 2004 in order to create a better relationship and to enhance dialogue between public housing associations and inhabitants of social housing. Nowadays, tenants can elect representatives for a period of three years. In case of maintenance and renovation works in the buildings and public spaces, they are heard by the housing association. Two representatives also have a deliberative voice on the government board. However, the effectiveness of these advisory boards strongly depends on the involvement of housing associations. In the municipal housing associations of the Evenepoel project for example, the advisory board struggles to find sufficient members to represent the 2.250 families of the housing association. Moreover, the representatives encounter difficulties raising their voices in the governance board.

The establishment of a Community Land Trust

In 2010 the specific housing problems of the Brussels Capital Region -the lack of affordable, quality housing on the private rental market and the limited amount of social housing expanding only very slowly, as well as pockets of gentrification in deprived neighbourhoods- urged groups of citizens to seek alternative housing solutions for low-income groups. Among the participating groups were community centres, a refugee and immigrant organization, a cooperative bank, social economy associations and specialists in citizen participation. Two of these organizations, a community centre and the refugee and immigrant organization, were important
agencies steering this network of action. Together they had set up a zero-energy collective housing project for underprivileged households. The search for an adequate legal framework to implement similar kinds of projects raised their interest in the American Community Land Trust model as applied in the US. In 2010 a research consortium conducted a feasibility study on the implementation of the US Community Land Trust model in Brussels. At the end of 2012, the research proposed the establishment of the Brussels CLT (CLTB) as a private trust fund combined with a non-profit organization. This setup was approved by the Brussels Capital Region and became eligible for financial support. Today, the organization is recognized by the Housing Code of Brussels and granted yearly subsidies for the construction of 30 dwellings a year. The recognition by and the (significant) subsidies from the Brussels Capital Region were important conditions to maintain affordability for low-income groups. The subsidies cover the costs of both the land and a portion of the building.

The legal structure of CLTB has a great influence on the ownership structure and on participation. Firstly, one of the main legal principles behind Community Land Trust is a separation between the ownership of the home and the land ownership. The land on which collective housing projects are realized is owned and managed by the foundation of CLTB, while the dwellings are owned by the inhabitants. Inhabitants are thus able to adapt their dwelling and to live in it as long as they want. However, a clause limits the surplus value when the dwelling is sold. In order to make the dwelling affordable for the next candidate-buyer, the inhabitant can only gain 25% of the added value in case of resale. Furthermore, CLTB has a pre-emptive right and a right of priority in cases of resale. This enables the organization to make the house available for a next candidate-buyer. These legal conditions have important implications. On the one hand, inhabitants of the projects become ‘owners’, enabling them to save money, while offering them housing security. On the other hand, CLTB holds the property rights to the land, and has an important degree of control over the property of the dwelling. These mechanisms ensure affordability on a long term.

Secondly, the operational structure of CLTB is a not-for-profit association. The governing board of this association consists of equally three parties. One third of the organization represents the (future) inhabitants of its projects, one third stands for citizens of Brussels and one third is covered by political representatives. Although for candidate-buyers, income thresholds of social rental housing are adopted, CLTB is an open-member association. Everyone is able to become a member and to join the general meetings.

When a new project is launched, candidate-buyers are asked to join a savings group. This group is in turn a factual association. Next to the general meetings and reunions of the elected governing board, architecture workshops are organized to involve this group in the design process of the project. The recommendations of the candidate-buyers are included in the design brief to select the architects and builders for the project. Designers and builders are indeed selected through public
procurement procedure as the Brussels Housing Fund—a limited liability company controlled and supported by the Brussels Capital Region—acts as the prime contractor for CLTB projects. The design workshops and meetings evolve around more informal activities that offer meetings opportunities for future inhabitants and people from the neighbourhood.

As none of the projects is finished yet, it is not possible to discuss the physical configuration of the dwellings. In legal terms, Community Land Trust housing cannot be labelled as ‘public housing’, but referring to the commons framework and the shared ownership, the thoroughly pursued coproduction from the very inception of the project to elaborate community activities, it becomes clear that the initiative scores high on the dimensions of publicness proposed in this article.

1.4 Conclusion

With reduced public-sector investments and an increasing privatization of public spaces, the loss of ‘publicness’ has entered the debate on socio-spatial inclusion. As the term ‘public’ is today often associated with a state related resource, some scholars have started to feed this debate by picking up the classic vocabulary of ‘the commons’. Commons relate to resources that are actively protected and managed by groups of citizens. This article argues that this reorientation of publicness towards the commons is a relevant angle to study the publicness of public housing. A double line of reasoning is followed. On the one hand, several changes in the public housing sector such as the privatization of public housing, the development of public housing programs to create owner-occupied housing for middle-income groups and the shift from a ‘general’ housing system to a ‘safety net’ system, indicate a loss of publicness. On the other hand, emerging practices point at a reconceptualization of the public towards the commons, for instance in the appearance of government sponsored community land trust housing schemes. Such schemes seem to go back to the origins of public housing, as many public housing actors started from philanthropic or cooperative approaches that heavily rely on the mobilization of common property resources.

In order to understand the publicness of public housing starting from the concept of the commons, the article develops a framework to analyse various historical public housing models on crucial dimensions of the commons. Building on commons theory (De Angelis, Stavrides in An Architektur, 2010; Harvey, 2012; Mattei, 2012; Ostrom, 1990), on planning and architecture literature on commons and shared space (De Rijck et al., 2000; Loeckx, 1998; Lofland, 1998; Stavrides, 2010) the article identifies four core dimensions: ownership, co-production, community activity and physical configuration. It then takes different public housing models in the Brussels Capital Region as a case study to test this framework and to identify the inclusive nature of various aspects of publicness under study. For each housing model, preliminary findings can be drawn from the
four dimensions of the framework and the relationship between them.

First of all, for the first core dimension ‘ownership’, in the Brussels Capital Region, the most inclusive situation is reached in case of the cooperative garden city neighbourhood, containing tenant social housing, public spaces and non-residential functions. In this estate, most people benefit from the type of ownership and outsiders are also able to use the public spaces and external functions. The democratic administration of the governing board assures that residents are involved when it comes to decisions about new dwelling projects on the site, while the supervision of the regional housing company ensures the same entrance rules as for other social housing in Brussels. The projects of Citydev, and the owner-occupied pre-war working-class housing are the least public as only the first buyer benefits from the reduced acquisition price.

Secondly, the cases show that the legal status of the operator - i.e., the ‘ownership’ dimension - has a great influence on the participation of inhabitants in the planning, design and maintenance of the building. One third of the governing board of the Community Land Trust organization consists of residents, and one third of inhabitants of the wider Brussels Capital Region. The integration of citizens of Brussels ensures a closed community is not created and allows the neighbourhood to engage with the plans of Community Land Trust. In addition to this, the Community Land Trust scores highest in the dimension of co-production as the organization actively involves future inhabitants in the design of their collective dwelling.

Thirdly, in the framework, centrality and connectivity on a macro level, as well as a gradual transition between public and private, open and closed spaces are described as important features. In the case of Peterbos it has become clear that well-connected spaces sometimes feel isolated as a result of their location between important junctions. On a micro-level, the way the facade regulates the transition between street and house, and the quality of shared circulation spaces, such as stairwells and corridors, plays an important role in the creation of an in-between realm. The elevated entrances with a setback and niche, the protruding terraces and bay windows in one earlier discussed project of Citydev evoke a direct engagement of inhabitants with their environment.

Finally, although community activity is difficult to measure without performing sociologic or ethnographic research, this preliminary study shows that when a physical configuration offers little space for encounter due to a lack of transition zones, as in the case of Peterbos, the organization of community activities by community development agencies becomes important to guide social cohesion between inhabitants.

Strikingly, but not unexpectedly, the types of housing originating from private initiative or by intermediary organizations, such as the housing cooperatives and the CLT scheme, score best on the dimensions of publicness. Picked up by public policy and granted government support, this article points out that these instances of bottom-up institutionalization seem to offer a promising path for the
development of inclusive dwelling environments. Nonetheless, it has to be noted too that the more traditional ‘public’ initiatives that find inspiration from ‘commoning’ practices, such as the set-up of social cohesion projects, offer opportunities to ‘repair’ the publicness in existing housing estates. In that sense, also strategies stemmed from other dimensions, such as the introduction of alternative ownership schemes (representation of residents on governing boards, introduction of long lease schemes as opposed to traditional rental contracts or owner-occupation), the layout of shared spaces, the inclusion of residents in decision-making processes in maintenance works might contribute to more inclusive estates. Further in-depth research involving ethnographic research and spatial analysis could shed light on the specific merits and limitations of housing solutions that incorporate ‘commoning’ dimensions as well as the precise mechanisms and features of the interaction between the different dimensions.

Endnotes


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II

An amalgamation of homes
Microstories Vandenpeereboom*

Since 2012, 23 families from various parts of Brussels, Belgium come together to prepare a housing project in Molenbeek. The families met each other through Community Land Trust Brussels, an organization that develops housing for underprivileged groups. The housing project will contain 32 apartments, public and collective facilities and a shared garden.

In order to get to know more about the meaning of a home for these families, I visited them with the visual artist Sofie van der Linden in their current houses. I interviewed members of the families about their daily routines in the house, the immediate surroundings and the neighbourhood. I left them a disposable camera to take pictures of the places they use the most within and around the dwelling. During the interviews, Sofie Van der Linden captured the interior layout of the houses, the architecture of the buildings as well as decorative and personal objects, by making sketches and notes. She reconstructed these observations in pencil drawings. The interviews, pictures and pencil drawings led to a collection of ‘micro-stories’, representing the way the notion of a home is lived by the families in multiple ways.
I

Mutsaard is a quiet neighbourhood in the northwest of Brussels. A monumental boulevard combining primary and secondary roads, a tramline and a wide range of tree species separates it from the royal palace and park of Laeken. The neighbourhood is characterized by strings of row houses with deep backyards and some large apartment buildings. I lives in one of these buildings with her 2 children and her new husband.

To enter the apartment you take a small elevator that brings you to a long and narrow hallway. The hallway gives access to 6 apartments. I knows all the people living in these apartments. Their children often watch television together. After school and during holidays, they play football in a small park at the corner of the street or on the pavement in front of the block, as they are not allowed to play on the plot of grass that surrounds the apartment block.

I is in close contact with the woman and children living on the opposite side of the hallway. They see each other every two days. After school the woman takes care of her children. In return I often brings groceries for her.

The apartment of I is small, but neat and tidy. The recurring yellow, white and black tones give the apartment a quiet look and highlight a sensitivity for interior decoration.
Squeezed between the Tour and Taxi site, the canal and a railway crossing the west of the Brussels Capital Region, the north of Molenbeek seems to have few in common with the surroundings. The buildings in the neighbourhood however combine different artefacts of these surroundings. One can find stately office buildings, renovated industrial patrimony, subdivided town houses, teahouses, night shops, a mosque, local carpet shops, bars and groceries. Since one year, F lives in one of the subdivided town houses.

F still has to get used to the neighbourhood. The noise and occasional quarrels in the streets make him uneasy. Also his dwelling unit does not satisfy his needs. The single bedroom and poor noise insulation make it far less comfortable than his former house.

Before moving to Molenbeek, F lived in the quiet outskirts of Ottignies, where he shared a detached house with his ex-wife and two girls.

When his two girls visit him, they have to sleep in the living room, which simultaneously serves as a dining room. Neighbourly relationships in the house are rather difficult. The bad insulation and opened letters in the post box fuels suspicion amongst the inhabitants. He therefore perceives the dwelling in the first place as a temporary ‘troubleshooting’.
F

F occupies a house at the other end of Molenbeek. The place is very different from the vibrant centre of the municipality: it concerns the small garden neighbourhood “Diongre”. Conceived by the corresponding architect, the neighbourhood was built in the 1930s and holds many architectural references to the early English garden city experiments. Within a triangle shaped by 3 streets, gardens and inner courtyards, 60 housing accommodate 122 families.

The stairways in the building of F leads to two apartments per floor. An old man occupies the opposite apartment of F. As the man is single and ill, F takes care of him: she collects groceries, prepares food and performs household tasks. She feel its her duty to do this. Despite the salient charm of the neighbourhood, the house is not adapted to the needs of the family of F. Her husband and her share a small bedroom with three girls, while her son occupies another bedroom. The moisture problems reveal the apartment requires extensive renovation. F has regularly asked the social housing company for a new apartment. As the social housing company doesn’t have apartments with 4 bedrooms and regulations prescribe children above 12 should have their own sleeping room, the company is not allowed to grant a bigger apartment to the family.

“To ease her nerves”, F likes to spend time outdoors in the centre of Molenbeek. She regularly goes swimming, studies Arab, visits local shops and goes out with friends she met in a local women’s association.
The house in which R lives is a typical Belgian bel-étage of the 1950s. It used to be a single family house, but is now inhabited by three Syrian households: one on each floor.

A friend of R lives on the upper floor. The two regularly drink coffee together. R met her in a Syrian-orthodox church in the east of Brussels. Over there, she told R that the inhabitant of the first two floors of the house would move out. R was interested, as she searched for a duplex to share with her daughter and family.

In order to make the duplex inhabitable for both households, her son-in-law built a kitchen on the first floor and a bathroom on the ground floor. On the top floor, the family and brother-in-law of her daughter live, while R occupies the ground floor with her youngest daughter and two cats.

Although the two households have their own unit, they spend a lot of time in each others’ dwelling. When her daughter and son-in-law are working, R babysits her grandchild. Her daughter takes care of the household whenever R suffers from rheumatism. In their spare time, the two women like to cook together and to organise barbecues for the entire family in the courtyard.
Together with his family, A lives in a 3-bedroom apartment in a townhouse in Schaarbeek.

Despite the difficult relationship with the owner, the family lives for 12 years in the building. During these 12 years, they occupied the ground floor, the first floor and now the second and third floor. It is the good relationships with their neighbours that kept them in the building. When they occupied the ground floor, they were in close contact with a Guinean family living on the other side of the plot. They were allowed to use their garden and regularly did services for one other. Nowadays, they have a similar relationship with the Moroccan woman and her 7-year old daughter living in the apartment below theirs. Since she was a baby, they frequently take care of the girl and the children leave together to school.

However, the family is looking forward to live in the CLT project. With its 3 bedrooms and 1 bathroom, the apartment is becoming too small for the 8 family members. Also the poor insulation and the bad equipment standards weight heavily on their family life, especially now the children are getting older.
M lives in the centre of Brussels, in between the canal and the Anspachlaan. Together with her three children, she inhabits an apartment in the social housing estate “Papenvest”. The two girls share a bunk bed, and sleep with their brother in the bedroom next to M’s. The packed sleeping rooms are connected to the kitchen and entrance hall through a spacious living room. A large television screen occupies the central space.

From the window of the living room, M has a view on a sports hall and a small basketball court painted on the pavement. Whenever the weather allows, her children go outside to play basketball with the children from the block. M and the other parents keep an eye on them while sitting on a low wall that aligns the pavement.

M used to live in Guinea. Despite the regular contacts at the corridor, the basketball court and the sports hall, the individual way of living in Belgium strongly contrasts to her life in Africa. Most of her daily activities took place outdoors in a collective courtyard. Although M accepts the Belgian lifestyle, she hopes to find “a bit of Guinea” in the housing project she will inhabit in some years.

M knows most of the people living in the building. When meeting them in the corridor or at the letter boxes downstairs, they greet and wish each other a nice day. Visits among them rarely occur, but M has a good relationship with her neighbour living in the apartment below. They regularly chat in front of the door of her apartment. Recently M visited her to give a present for her newborn baby.
Endnotes


The drawings and exhibition pictures were made by Sofie van der Linden. The other pictures were taken by the interviewees.
Beyond housing
On the role of commoning in the establishment of a CLT project*

Urban commons scholars increasingly present Community Land Trusts (CLTs) as a model to manage ‘housing commons’. The collective property framework and institutional design of CLTs offer an innovative yet strenuous approach to facilitate collective access to affordable housing and urban land for underprivileged groups. Although these scholars emphasise the indispensable role of collective action, i.e. ‘commoning’ in the establishment of urban CLTs and their projects, relatively little attention is paid to its implications and consequences for the groups involved. This paper studies the genesis of the first CLT project on the European mainland through the lens of ‘commoning’. It sheds light both on the role of collective action in the institutional design of Community Land Trust Brussels and on the participatory nature of the development of its first project. This reveals not only the empowering potential of commoning practices, but also the challenges related to scaling up such practices.

2.1 Introduction

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) originated in the rural hinterlands of the United States as a mechanism to develop affordable housing on collective land. Since the 1980s, they have enjoyed a steady rise in urban contexts. This is especially the case in the US, but urban CLT movements are recently emerging in Canada, the UK, Belgium, Kenya and New Zealand as well (Bassett, 2005; Bunce, 2015; Davis, 2014; Moore & Mullins, 2013). CLTs can be positioned within community-based housing schemes with a people-centred and a local action-based approach such as self-help housing and limited equity housing co-operatives (Blomley, 2008; Moore & Mullins, 2013). Urban commons scholars regard them as a particular form of collective action institutions, preserving and expanding urban commons (Angotti, 2008; Bunce, 2015). Such ‘urban commons’ are urban resources that are collectively used and maintained through the development of an institutional arrangement. The latter is based on collective control and communal rules, which allow a successful management of the resource. Central to commons-institutions
are two main aspects, which are, according to these scholars, articulated in CLTs: (1) a resource, sustained and managed by a community and (2) ‘commoning’, the process of creating and maintaining this resource (De Angelis, 2007; Linebaugh, 2009).

Historically, the term ‘commons’ refers to natural resources, shared and sustained by traditional communities (Ostrom, 1990). Fuelled by economic and social restructuring processes and their impact on the city, the term is increasingly mentioned in urban contexts. As Midheme and Moulaert (2013, p. 74) state, ‘nowhere is the competition over property more manifest than in the cities, owing to the premium attached to urban land’. Activists and community groups see the collectivisation of urban property as a way to respond to the social–spatial inequalities such competition reproduces. They search for commons institutions with more direct modes of participation over property issues and more accessible communities than the traditional ones (Dzokic & Neelen, 2015). CLTs combine this search for more inclusive decision-making processes with collective urban land tenure.

They mobilise for the collectivisation of urban land, by separating land from its productive use by a community (Midheme & Moulaert, 2013). The land maintained by CLTs is part of a trust, and in most cases used for the development of affordable owner-occupied housing. Such housing can be appropriated and adjusted by different owners, but resale is bound to specific conditions. Gains from resale are limited to a fraction of the increase of the market value of the building and a pre-emption right enables CLTs to transfer the property when owners opt out (Bailey, 2010; Davis, 2014). All these conditions are designed to enable a permanent affordability of the house, while allowing adaptations to the homes by low- or moderate-income households, granting them a modest return on these investments.

Next, as non-profit organisations, CLTs endeavour to establish inclusive decision-making processes in which the neighbourhood, public authorities and (future) inhabitants are involved (Moore & McKee, 2012). The community of the latter is shaped ‘by opportunity’, meaning that the opportunity of affordable housing attracts them to get involved in a housing project. Social workers, activists and civil society often take the role of ‘agents’, responding to problems of housing affordability and establishing CLT institutions (Moore & Mullins, 2013). For instance, housing activism played a major role in the establishment of the East London CLT (Bunce, 2015). The Tanzania-Bondeni CLT in Voi was established as a result of negotiations between residents and the municipality in order to legalise their settlements (Bassett, 2005). In Minneapolis, Minnesota and the Brussels Capital Region (BCR) in Belgium, CLTs were formed through the collaborative efforts of neighbourhood associations and corporations (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2015; Bunce et al., 2013). This origin of CLTs in housing activism highlights the commoning dimension of CLTs.

Commoning refers to the social process of reproducing the commons (De
Angelis, 2007; Linebaugh, 2009). First of all, commoning involves institutional aspects, which are put in place to prevent the privatisation or appropriation of commons by either private or public actors. It requires a collective effort to establish a good set of working rules or contracts fixing the legal relationships between actors (Dzokic & Neelen, 2015; Ostrom, 1990). Second, commoning is a social practice. It is about ‘the set of relationships that are forged among individuals and a resource and individuals with each other’ as a result of collectively appropriating resources (Helfrich & Haas, 2009, p.15). The latter adds the ‘co-productive’ aspect of commoning: the dynamic interaction between ‘appropriators’ and a ‘resource’ (Ostrom, 1990, p.31). Among appropriators, Ostrom identifies ‘providers’, ‘producers’ and ‘users’, which can be the same people. Several positive outcomes are assigned to the interaction between them. Hardt and Negri explain commoning as an act to engender wealth created by social interaction (Hardt & Negri, 2009). Baily (2013), Mattei (2012) and De Angelis (2007) link such wealth to inclusion, empowerment, cooperation, horizontal relationships, sharing and self-regulation. According to Ostrom and Ahn (2007), collective action marked by good working rules enhances the capacity to develop horizontal relationships and social capital. In short, in addition to the institutional dimension embedded in commoning, these authors stress the benefits obtained through the social interaction between the actors and goods involved.

The notion of commoning is particularly interesting in understanding the development of CLT institutions. The commoning practices of housing activists, public and private actors in establishing and institutionalising CLTs – the first aspect – are already quite well researched and documented (Bunce, 2015; Midheme & Moulaert, 2013). However, empirical evidence on the relational nature and its benefits for future inhabitants remains relatively underexposed. This contribution investigates both aspects of commoning in CLTs. Moreover, by building on empirical evidence of the Brussels CLT, we aim to explore how existing debates on urban commons and CLTs are translated into practice. As such, we opt for ‘thicker, more ethnographic’ accounts of the commons (McCay & Jentoft, 1998, p. 1).

Accordingly, we will first focus on the origins of a CLT organisation in Brussels, Belgium. This will show that the establishment of the association by a group of community organisations is directly related to a housing crisis. The housing crisis led to a variety of temporary and substantial housing initiatives, including the establishment of a CLT. These initiatives did not only focus on better living conditions for minorities, but also aimed to give them a voice and a political conscience vis-à-vis their situation. Second, we will shed light on the way Community Land Trust Brussels (CLTB) includes these goals in its project set-up. For developing its projects, a co-production of supervising social organisations, future inhabitants and third parties is strongly promoted. Third, we will focus on the way the supervising organisations and future inhabitants of the collective housing projects meet such participatory trajectories. In this part, we show concrete evidence of how commoning practices in the set-up of CLTB and its first
Finally, we will look toward the future, identifying the challenge of maintaining participatory trajectories during scaling-up processes and of the application of CLT-aspects in other Brussels housing institutions. The study took the form of participatory research during the setting up of the pilot project Vandenpeereboom in Molenbeek. The main author did participant observations during general meetings, co-organised design workshops with social workers and scrutinised the institutional dimension of CLTB in internal documents and policy reports. In different phases of the research, the main author discussed the research design with the employees of the organisation. The participatory research method first allowed grasping the co-productive aspect of commoning, delving into the complexity of the process and ‘[witnessing] connections, correlations, and causes as and how they unfold’ (Adler & Adler, 1994, p.378). Second, it enabled to actively engage with the role of spatial practitioner in the process and to apply spatial knowledge to contribute to the content of the workshops. Furthermore, it stimulated knowledge building between the main author and the actors involved in this relatively new practice, going beyond merely a process of academic verification (Konstantos, Siatitsa, & Vaiou, 2013). To process the data of the literature study, institutional study and participant observations, they were grouped and organised in an analytical framework. In accordance with this analytical framework, thematic questions were developed for semi-structured interviews with 2 supervisors and 14 people of the 23 participating households (Table 2.1). The latter led to a deeper understanding of the effects of commoning for the actors involved.

In order to situate the establishment of CLTB within the broader housing context in the BCR, the embedded research was supplemented with a literature review and 10 semi-structured interviews with important housing actors in the Brussels context: four of these actors are associations striving for the right to

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Table 2.1
List of interviews with participants in the Vandenpeereboom project
housing and six interviews were conducted with administrators of Brussels housing organisations.

2.2 The establishment of a Community Land Trust in Brussels

For several years, a substantial fraction of Brussels’ housing stock is inaccessible to a considerable share of the population. A severe disproportion between the average household income and housing prices is at the core of this problem: for half of the Brussels’ households, the share of the household budget for housing exceeds 40% (Bernard, Zimmer, & Surkin, 2009). Several issues determine what Brussels’ academics and civil society have termed the housing crisis (Bernard & van Mieghem, 2005).

The Brussels housing crisis

Compared to the two other regions in Belgium – Flanders and Wallonia – Brussels has a large share of inhabitants at risk of poverty. The at-risk-of-poverty threshold is defined as 60% of the national median disposable income. More than a quarter of the Brussels population has incomes below this threshold. For Flanders and Wallonia, this number, respectively, amounts to 11.1% and 18.3% (Englert, Luyten, Mazina, & Yannart, 2015).

This population with incomes below the poverty risk limit has a very limited access to social housing. Since its very inception, homeownership is at the core of the Belgian housing policy (De Decker, 2002). When the federal government of Belgium delegated housing policy to the three regions in 1989, this policy did not change fundamentally in Brussels. On the contrary, as the housing budget went primarily to renovating an obsolete social housing stock and paying off high debts, the yearly production of social housing between 1990 and 2015 decreased to a historically low level (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2015). Catch-up operations set up since the beginning of 2000 have had but a limited outcome. The 40% of the housing budget dedicated to social housing companies does not suffice to substantially increase the social rental housing stock (Romainville, 2010). As a result, only 7.6% of the households in the BCR are social renters (De Keersmaecker, 2014). While the demand for social housing is more than double the supply (Englert et al., 2015), since 2013, the Brussels Housing Code allows social housing companies to allocate homes to middle-income households to support social mix. Furthermore, social mix in deprived neighbourhoods is also promoted through the construction of middleclass housing for owner occupation, organised by a regional development company (Citydev). These policy measures reinforce the so-called ‘Matthew Effect’, which points at social benefits favouring the middle class rather than the underprivileged groups for whom they are crucial.

Despite the invigorated support for homeownership, the share of homeowners remains at 44.8%, which is relatively low compared to 77.4% in
Flanders and 72.8% in Wallonia (Winters & Heylen, 2014). The remaining households that rely on the rental market deal with problems of affordability and degradation. If, ideally, the rent should not exceed 1/4 of the household budget, the 60% poorest households have access to only 10% of the private rental housing (De Keersmaecker, 2014). Although the housing standards of the rental market have slightly increased in the last decade, 34% of households consider them average to substandard (De Keersmaecker, 2014).

As affordable and good quality rental housing is scarce, landlords can be selective in their selection of prospective tenants, who are at risk of discrimination. Discrimination towards prospective tenants with a social assistance benefit, disability benefit and/or an ethnic background is a persistent problem in Belgium (Heylen & Van den Broeck, 2015).

In addition, problems of housing affordability even occur in the less wealthy neighbourhoods in Brussels. Historically, the BCR is marked by a strong socio-spatial divide. Problems of degradation especially occur in neighbourhoods that are part of the ‘poor crescent’ (Grippa et al., 2015; Kesteloot, 2000), an area that corresponds to the former nineteenth-century industrial and workers districts around Brussels’ Canal. The municipality of Molenbeek, home to the CLTB project under study in this paper, is part of this ‘poor crescent’. The area faces post-industrial decline since the 1970s, leaving it with a badly equipped housing stock, an impoverished population and transient residents. Declining real estate values initially created opportunities for the lower middle classes to become homeowners in these areas. However, recent gentrification processes indicate that the rent gap is starting to close in this area (Loopmans & Kesteloot, 2009). This is the result of rising residential real estate prices in the rich (south)eastern parts of the BCR. In these parts, international civil servants and other expats push out young highly skilled households with middle incomes who look for cheaper housing in the Canal area (Bernard et al., 2009; Van Criekingen, 2008). Since the early 1990s, this ‘waterfall’ process of residential mobility is strengthened by diverse programmes to revitalise the ‘poor crescent’, including the aforementioned Citydev housing projects, renovation grants for homeowners and the redesign of public spaces as part of the ‘neighbourhood contracts’. Although the latter are marked by an integrated local development approach, combined with other programmes, they contribute to rising housing prices (Van Criekingen, 2008).

‘Do-it-ourselves’ attitudes

Over the years, the absence of a structural answer through Brussels’ housing policy to the housing crisis has led to ‘do-it-ourselves’ attitudes among activists and community organisations confronted with the housing problems of their target groups. They build on former grassroots housing initiatives like the tenant boards in the 1970s, the rental agencies in the 1980s and a Brussels union for the right to housing (BBRoW) in the beginning of the 1990s (De Decker, 2002; Knops,
The CLTB platform was established by a network of 18 associations promoting the right to housing (2016).

Fig 2.1

Source data: UrbIS, 2013; Grippa et al., 2015

The establishment of a ‘ministry of the housing crisis’ (Ministerie van de Wooncrisis) in 2006, a network of organisations that aims to realise the right to housing, is emblematic for this action-based approach. The network organised several activities to claim the right to housing: a temporary occupation of a monastery, debates and symbolic actions. They also promoted the establishment of a broad range of alternative housing initiatives: solidarity housing projects in
temporarily occupied buildings, savings groups, renovation services, an exchange platform for discussing problems of discrimination on the housing market and a collective dwelling project for underprivileged households. The initiatives vary, but share an interest in collective living arrangements for vulnerable people. They thereby aim to actively involve people in the development and management of their dwelling and to make them conscious about their rights. A social worker involved in the exchange platform puts it as follows: ‘Housing is an individual problem, but a collective one as well. (….) To influence the system, it is necessary to collectively organise people, to give them a public platform and thus a political voice’2. The organisation that established the savings groups starts from a similar understanding. The savings group, based on the African tontine system, is a system in which a group collectively saves money to obtain the necessary bank support to buy a house. Their primary aim is not to encourage people to buy a house, according to a social worker: ‘We want to create a political conscience, make people participate that are sometimes very isolated (…) by giving them a voice in the group and by sensitising them vis-à-vis the housing crisis’3.

In 2008, Periferia, a Brussels organisation promoting housing participation, and Bonnevie, the community organisation that developed the collective dwelling project, united in search of a more structural solution for the ad hoc housing interventions. They looked for new forms of ownership to enhance the development of similar collective dwelling projects. During a conference on housing cooperatives (Les coopératives d’habitants en Europe, Lyon, ENTP), they learnt about the CLT model, whereupon they brought together 18 associations in a platform to promote the model in Brussels.

In response to the platform, in 2010, the Brussels Government ordered a feasibility study for the possible implementation of the American CLT model in Brussels. The Brussels green party secretary for housing was supportive of the model, as it fitted well in a policy line on ‘the support for new anti-speculative housing schemes’ that was included in the government agreement (Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, 2009, p. 16). By the end of 2012 the feasibility study was approved, leading to the financial support of the BCR for the creation of a CLT. The platform turned into a non-profit organisation and received a subsidy of 670,000 Euros to purchase and renovate a building in Anderlecht. In addition, the organisation was recognised and integrated in the Brussels Housing Code and inserted in the Housing Alliance, a subsidy plan of the regional government to accelerate the construction of social and moderate housing. This recognition and (significant) subsidisation indicate that public authorities became part of the commoning process in an early stage. As previous experience in the United States has shown, subsidisation is an important precondition to guaranteeing affordability for low-income groups. Moreover, grants to CLTs have to be sizeable enough to not only remove the costs of the land but also to subsidise a portion of the building’s cost (Community Investments, 2008).

At the moment, seven employees are subsidised to work half- to full-time for CLTB: a coordinator, four project leaders, a financial coordinator and
an administrative assistant. Three projects are in the development phase and one project is realised. All are located in the poor crescent. Furthermore, two projects got started in 2016, and three projects are under investigation in neighbourhoods in great and significant difficulty (Figure 2.1).

2.3 Commoning within Community Land Trust Brussels

In the institutional framework and coproduction of the Vandenpeereboom project, a multitude of actors are involved and take different roles at the same time. In its role of funder, the Brussels government can be considered as ‘provider’. CLTB, consisting of a tripartite structure of public authorities, civil society and (future) inhabitants (Figure 2.2), is the main provider, as it has been granted authority to manage the CLT institution. The seven CLTB employees and the construction supervisor of the Vandenpeereboom project are ‘producers’ as they actively steer the process of co-production and mediate between providers and ‘users’. Future inhabitants take both the role of producer and user, as they actively participate in the design process, and will inhabit the dwellings in the future (Figure 2.3).

Institutional dimension

CLTB is a combination of a non-profit organisation and a public utility foundation. The non-profit organisation is responsible for the operational structure, while the public utility foundation owns the land of the projects established with CLTB. The tripartite structure characterising the CLT model is present in the board of directors of both the non-profit organisation and public utility foundation (Figure 2.2). Although the income of future inhabitants cannot exceed the Brussels’ social housing income limit, everyone can become a member of the organisation and join the yearly general meeting.

The associations that were part of the platform are still important actors in this threefold structure. Alongside to their participation in the general meeting and
board of directors, they collaborate in specific projects. In the Vandenpeereboom project, these project-partners are the organisation in charge of the savings groups (CIRÉ), the community centre that developed the collective housing project (Bonnevie) and a housing support organisation (Convivence). The Brussels Housing Fund acts as construction supervisor for the project and grants loans to the participating households. It also purchased the land, from the municipality of Molenbeek, of which CLTB will acquire ownership after the construction of the project. The BCR has granted a subsidy to CLTB for this purpose.

The 23 participating households are all residents of Brussels with non-Belgian origins. Half of this group receives a social integration income. In this case, households already participated in a savings group of CIRÉ prior to the setting up of CLTB, but households with non-Belgian origins also dominate the current CLTB subscription list. Out of the 123 people inscribed in 2015, 113 people have non-Belgian, predominantly African origins. A social worker of one of the supervising associations believes that this is related to the specific system of the savings group, which is well known in Africa, as well as the word-of-mouth advertising: ‘The Guinean community is very strong. Many Guinean families join us (CLTB)’. Pending subscription for a future CLTB project, prospective inhabitants are invited to enter into a collective savings group, retaining the right to either participate in the project that is proposed, to wait for a new initiative or to withdraw their savings and step out of the system.

The savings group of the Vandenpeereboom project, Arc en Ciel, gathers at least once every two months in general meetings and steering groups. The general meeting is open to all members of Arc en Ciel, while the steering group consists of representatives elected by the group. The supervising associations, which include social workers and architects, are responsible for the guidance of households on an individual and collective level. The CLT coordinator of the project is in charge of the contacts with the Housing Fund as the building contractor.
Co-productive dimension

Alongside the general meetings and steering groups, CLTB plans participatory workshops to involve the future inhabitants in the design process of their future dwelling. As the Vandenpeereboom project is subsidised, the Housing Fund was subject to the public tender rule. For this reason, CLTB organised architecture workshops in two phases. In the first phase, six workshops were organised, in which the neighbourhood and its facilities, the individual dwelling, collective housing projects and different aspects of cohabitation were discussed. The recommendations that resulted from these workshops were integrated in the public tender specifications (Figure 2.3). In the second phase, future inhabitants were trained to assess the projects submitted by the teams of architects and contractors through the public tender. The future residents were divided into three groups, each focusing on different themes: ‘cohabitation’, ‘zero-energy standards’, and ‘the integration of the project in the neighbourhood’. Each group had one representative, who reported the findings of the workshops during the general meeting, a supervising architect and a social worker. For the ‘neighbourhood group’, the first author of this article assumed the role of architect. In order to obtain a support base for the project in the neighbourhood and to investigate whether non-residential programmes could be incorporated in the building, the ‘neighbourhood group’ met several associations operating in the neighbourhood of the housing project. At a spatial level, the group learned to read plans and to detect architectural components that trigger a dialogue between the project and its surrounding context. With this system of working groups, the CLTB architect does not only aim to raise awareness about the themes, but also to prepare future inhabitants to cohabit independently: ‘This appointment of representatives can evolve into an enduring responsibility for these themes, once the project is built and inhabited’.

After the preparatory workshops, each working group evaluated the projects of the seven tenders during a second set of workshops. The result of these workshops was discussed during a general meeting and handed over to the Housing Fund. This information is taken into account, but the Housing Fund as the official client has the last word in choosing the project. As the architect of CLTB explains: ‘We are in constant negotiation in order to give a voice to the families. The public tender is not adapted to such participatory trajectories’.

2.4 Benefits of commoning

As the institutional and co-productive dimension in CLTB and its pilot project Vandenpeereboom exemplify, a range of actors are involved that take different roles (provider, producer, user) at the same time. During the second set of participatory workshops and formal and informal meetings, the main author perceived some indications of benefits that commons scholars usually associate with the
crosspollination between them. The qualitative semi-structured interviews after the fieldwork followed a list of themes in relation to an analytical framework that built on the literature study, institutional analysis and participant observations. To minimise the impact of ‘bias’ due to the first author’s engagement with the ‘neighbourhood’ group, they were held with five people of the ‘cohabitation group’, six people of the ‘energy group’ and only three people of the ‘neighbourhood group’. Furthermore, the CLTB project coordinator and a social worker were interviewed. Semi-structuring the interviews allowed reacting to specific aspects that popped up during interviews and taking this information to the next interviews. The registered effects from these interviews were ‘capacity-building’ related to the learning process, ‘empowerment’ and ‘bridging and bonding dynamics’ within the group. These effects were mostly related to the participation at project level.

Capacity-building

Although the participants were enthusiastic about the workshops, the division of workload among supervisors was not equally divided. Coherence in the work of the supervisors leading the workshops was also frequently lacking, leading to tensions between them. Both the future residents and social worker nevertheless agreed on the positive outcomes of the learning process throughout the project. A woman from the ‘energy group’ (R6) testifies, ‘We learnt about energy, insulation, the procedure for having the land, before construction. (…) We didn’t know about all these things, we saw a house, but didn’t know what a person did to arrive there’. Acting together in this learning process was an aspect that was highly welcomed by the future residents.

When the group was not treated as passive beneficiary but actively took part in decisions, they felt involved and appreciated in their participation. One of the social workers explains: ‘In these workshops, we were really able to involve the families. The general meetings are still too much dominated by the partners’. While future residents acknowledged that their voices were heard during all meetings, they felt more involved during the workshops, as they were able to act and to show their competences: ‘We tried to understand why this was put over here, why the architects did that. We were really “in” the project’ (R6). This active participation, in which the future residents were important agents steering the process and in which they were able to anticipate their future dwelling, encouraged them to continue attending the workshops and general meetings. The workshop leaders noticed a high increase of attendance at general meetings after the second round of the participatory workshops. The meetings were also the locus where the progress of the project was disclosed, further encouraging the group to participate. A member of the ‘cohabitation group’ (R4) describes: ‘The gatherings I liked were the ones in which we received news about the project. “Today we have good news, we are going to the Housing Fund to see if we are able to acquire a house.” And also when they said “we are going to the Housing Fund to see the presentations
of the architects (and building contractors that participated in the public tender).”
(…) All this encourages us to come, every time they inform us about things (new milestones in the project) like these ones.

Empowerment

Throughout the years, the future residents learnt how to engage with others and to accept each other’s limitations. As one of them articulates: ‘In the beginning, always the same people had the final say. Now, people are not scared anymore to talk’11. Splitting up the larger groups into smaller groups led to a stronger social cohesion within the smaller groups and less difficulty in voicing their opinions. For some individuals, this newly acquired self-confidence also extended to the general meetings: ‘Now, I’m not afraid to speak anymore, it is between us’ (R6).

The delegation of authority to representatives related to the legal structure of the association resulted in some leaders coming to the fore in the group. In particular, the treasurer and the president valorised their role throughout the process. The president (R7) expresses it as follows: ‘I did an interview for the television and presented the project in a big conference room in Brussels. (…) You start to get used to talking to people.’ A social worker clarifies, ‘I really perceive that the president is much stronger than the others. Also the treasurer made a lot of progress. (…) I think we should try to give everyone such a role at a certain moment’12. The group accepts the leading role of the representatives; they speak of the president as ‘a good friend’, someone they ‘can count on’.

The leaders also encourage others to speak up and to express themselves: ‘We had this meeting with the CPAS (public welfare centre). (…) I told M., “we have to talk for the families, it’s not the CLT workers that will live in the building.” (…) I was impressed afterwards “he talked”! (R5)’ The capabilities of these ‘leaders’ to create horizontal relationships were not limited to the Arc en Ciel group. The project also had a transformative effect on other domains of their lives: ‘At the moment I really needed to talk, to step out of the isolation, (…) I subscribed to Arc en Ciel. From that moment on, I also subscribed for the syndicate, I did activities with my wife to get out, helped people… I really took a big turn, you see? (R7)’

Bonding and bridging

Although members of Arc en Ciel will describe themselves as ‘a group’ or sometimes even ‘as one big family’, they do not have ideal expectations about the collective aspect of the dwelling project, but take a wait-and-see attitude towards it. As one of them explains, ‘Everybody likes each other because we want to reach the same thing, and we do this together. But you never know afterwards. Even in a family, sometimes you don’t get along’ (R2). The fact that the group has gone through a process together is seen as something that can contribute to the sense of solidarity in the future housing project: ‘As we know each other since we started this project,
as we are together the whole time, I think the day we will live together, it will work. At least I hope so’ (R13).

In his contribution to the social capital literature, Putnam (2000) makes the distinction between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’. Bonding is finding place between people who identify with one another, while bridging is connecting people who have a different age, cultural background, age or religion and who do not identify with one another. In Arc en Ciel, examples of both kinds of social capital can be found: members have different backgrounds and origins, but share a common goal, which creates ties between them. The following quote of a Moroccan woman of the ‘neighbourhood’ group (R5) is illustrative for this bonding and bridging dynamic: ‘The African families, I have the impression they like to be among each other. But I like to not stay among the Moroccans, that we mix… we are going to be neighbours. (…) That’s why, the day we will live there, I would like to organise an evening, just among the women that live in the block, make tea, coffee, downstairs in the shared living room.’ According to a social worker, this ‘reciprocal respect’ and ‘solidarity’ within the group are due to the fact that members share the same difficult situation at home and at work and will have to live together in the future13.

As this is a pilot project, in which the role of each partner still needs to be clarified, the project has been delayed on two occasions. All members have difficulties with these delays. Household structures change, and some of them are in great need of decent housing: ‘We are really pressed to have our own apartment. Before, they told me the Housing Fund only grants loans when you’re not older than 45 years. They told me that they would make an exception, but I’m afraid’ (R2). However, setbacks are better absorbed as they are shared by the group; for instance, when the group was told the project would still take 3 years, the group was put under strain, but anyway said ‘we will continue and cross fingers’ (R5).

2.5 The transformative effect of the CLT model

To understand the role of CLTB in expanding the urban commons against the background of a protracted housing crisis, it is necessary to shed light on its role within Brussels housing policy. In the Housing Alliance, a policy programme for the 2014–2018 period, the BCR foresees subsidies for 30 CLT housing units a year. Compared to the ambitions for 3000 new social housing units and 1000 new owner-occupied housing units of the aforementioned Housing Fund, CLTB clearly remains the marginal institution as compared to the social housing companies and Citydev. Moreover, taking the difficult establishment of the projects into account, in which the role of each partner is to be defined, the construction of 30 housing units a year is a challenge. It is therefore less pertinent to focus on CLTB’s quantitative contribution in combating the housing crisis than to focus on its potential transformative capacity.

The platform of CLT and the political climate in which it originated gave a considerable boost to a political debate on alternative housing approaches. At this
moment, housing actors in Brussels, such as the Housing Fund and the regional development company Citydev, are experimenting with the exemplary aspects of the CLTB approach aimed at permanent affordability and a legal separation between land and dwelling. They do this by investigating and experimenting with leasehold and surface rights housing schemes, specifically as an alternative to owner-occupied housing. In the 2013 management plan of Citydev, pilot projects with leasehold housing and CLT schemes are integrated. The spokesman of the Housing Fund recognises ‘the price of the land is indeed a matter of debate. So we were surely inspired, and I think we inspire them, so it is an interaction’\(^{14}\). In Flanders, social housing institutions are investigating whether the CLT model or leasehold systems can replace the subsidised owner-occupied housing they develop. Today, in case of resale, the housing flows back to the private market, and only one household benefits from the original subsidy granted. As the legal expert of CLTB states: ‘A small amount of housing contributes to changing the reflection on how housing should be thought. Separating land from buildings, extracting speculative effects, for me this is what this reflection is about’\(^{15}\).

Also, the participative nature of CLTB is being followed by mainstream housing actors. The Brussels Housing Fund is thinking of including participatory trajectories in setting up projects as a way to reduce stigmas related to the construction of low-income housing. They often experience delays in their operations due to local resistance. The participatory trajectories also fit in the spirit of the Citydev organisation, which increasingly focuses on social sustainability. They have shown interest in working together with CLTB on a new housing development in the north of Brussels. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the organisation will be prepared to involve inhabitants in the decision-making related to its position as owner of the land.

Furthermore, to fully understand the potential of implementing the model into mainstream policy, the subsidy level of CLTB has to be taken into account. In the economic subsidy definition of Haffner (1999, p. 48), subsidies ‘decrease the cost of a housing service as a consequence of a direct or indirect intervention of the government’. To fulfil its activities, CLTB receives subsidies across different levels. For its daily management, it receives subsidies from the region, from three neighbourhood contracts and an ‘employment subsidy’ covering the personnel costs of a half-time employee. For developing its projects, CLTB enjoys regional subsidies covering the cost of the land and a part of the building cost. Indirect subsidies include subsidies granted to partner–organisations collaborating on specific projects and regional subsidies (including fiscal advantages) for the inhabitants’ loans granted by the Housing Fund. Although these subsidies seem substantial, a preliminary comparison of the average subsidy level for the realisation of five CLT projects with one owner-occupied Brussels Housing Fund project (for low-income groups) and two Citydev projects (for middle-income groups) shows CLTB projects ask a similar amount to the first and even less subsidy than Citydev. The (unpublished) comparative study ordered by the BCR also notes that the
effectiveness of this variety of subsidies might increase if subsidies become more structural and if some legal barriers (such as the reduction of added value taxes and registration fees like the two other public utility housing agencies) are overcome. Nonetheless, to avoid the creation of ‘islands’ of social welfare and to further scrutinise the Matthew Effect, we stress the need for a more thorough evaluation of the subsidy distribution among all Brussels housing schemes – including social rental housing – once CLTB has passed its first production cycle. This has not been fully understood as is the case for Flanders and the Netherlands (Heylen & Haffner, 2012).

2.6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have given empirical evidence of commoning practices by (1) pointing at the role of collective action in establishing a CLT, (2) exploring how co-production is enabled in the daily management of CLT and its projects, and by (3) shedding light on the benefits for the future inhabitants involved.

First of all, collective action played a major role in the establishment of a CLT in the Brussels Capital Region. As a result of an inadequate political answer to the housing crisis, community-based housing organisations set up various actions and initiatives. They were marked by a strong will to raise a political awareness among their target groups and to collectively organise them in their search for more adequate housing. Starting from a bottom-up approach while relying on substantial support from public authorities, commoning appears first and foremost as a political process of negotiation, resulting in its institutionalisation. As such, the Brussels case is illustrative for the ‘mixed’ nature of CLTs as being neither exclusively private nor purely public. It arises in the complex interplay or ‘syncretism’ (Midheme & Moulaert, 2013) of various property regimes. It is also exemplary for the importance of public policy support – be it in the form of a legal framework, subsidies or through the participation of public housing associations in setting up umbrella CLTs – in ‘scaling-up’ CLTs and assuring housing affordability (Community Investments, 2008; Moore & Mullins, 2013).

Second, the collective action that preceded the institutionalisation had an important impact on the way the co-productive aspect of commoning is embedded in the daily management of CLTB. As a result of former participatory experiences of the various community-based housing organisations that established the CLT, the tripartite legal structure of CLTB and the development of its projects are tailored to actively involve future users of the projects, stakeholders and Brussels citizens.

Third, in our discussion of the participatory set-up of the CLTB Vandenpeereboom project, we provide empirical evidence that the dynamic interaction between the providers, producers and users of the housing project fosters capacity-building, empowerment and bridging and bonding dynamics.

This evidence on the relational nature of ‘commoning’ and its societal effects shows yet another dimension of CLTs as instances of installing urban commons.
In particular, it shows that the participatory dimension that is part and parcel of the commoning process yields community benefits beyond the sphere of housing. It extends to empowering individuals to take up their voice, increasing chances of integration in the domain of work, or tying bonds within communities across cultural, religious and age differences. Nevertheless, if CLTs are to provide more accessible institutions than traditional commons through government support, we recommend future research on the subsidy levels across different Brussels’ housing schemes to fully understand its inclusionary capacity.

Endnotes


1. This is the number of households that participated in the project during the research. In the beginning of 2016, this number has risen to 27. While four households left the project due to personal reasons, eight new households joined the group.

2. Interview social worker exchange platform. Brussels, 10 April 2013 (conducted by Cécile Louey; all other interviews are conducted by the first author).


4. A public utility foundation is an organisation with a non-profit purpose allowed to make profit when serving the public benefit.

5. The Brussels Housing Fund is a subsidised organisation that offers loans, rental and owner-occupied housing to households with a low and modest income.


7. The public tender refers to the process in which companies do a price and quality bid to provide work or services to public authorities or public bodies.


References


III
An amalgamation of homes
Microstories Destrier

The neighbourhood Destrier was established in 1952 in Evere, a large municipality in the north-east of Brussels. Back then, the neighbourhood was not yet absorbed by the city of Brussels, but surrounded by meadows and pastures. The neighbourhood is led by a rental cooperative and composed of row houses, front and back gardens, alleyways, a few apartment blocks, and small parks. Today it houses 300 families from different backgrounds and ages.

In order to get a better understanding of the use and appropriation of the neighbourhood by its residents, I visited them in their houses. I interviewed them about daily routines and social relationships in the house, the immediate surroundings and the quarter. I asked them to trace their daily and weekly movements on an aerial picture and left them a disposable camera to take pictures of specific places within these routines. I reconstructed the drawings according to the information in the interviews. The interviews, pictures and drawings led to a collection of ‘micro-stories’, representing the way the dwelling (neighbourhood) is lived by the residents in multiple ways.
vers delhaize,
Carrefour,
commerces

manger des frites
avec voisine

2 fois par semaine
vers mari à l'hôpital
de Mi-Bruxelles,
1 fois par semaine
CPAS, église à Saint-Gilles

toujours des problèmes

HOME FAMILIAL
BRUXELLOIS

2 fois par semaine
BUS 351
BUS 358
BUS 318

BUS 21
The neighbourhood of Destrier is mainly composed of semi-detached housing. Only in the north and the south of the neighbourhood you can find apartment blocks. The two apartment blocks in the south-east have been recently renovated, while the ones in the west will be demolished and rebuilt soon.

R and her husband live on the second floor of one of the old apartments. At the moment, R has to manage on her own. Her husband is hospitalized since 6 months.

Although she has difficulty walking due to her knees, she copes well with the situation. She can rely on her 4 friends living in the block. They regularly spend time together: they drink tea and pie, exchange clothes, eat French fries in a snack bar nearby and celebrate their birthdays. Especially the lady on the opposite apartment is very close to her. They met each other while standing on the balcony. The lady is catholic but sometimes joins her to the Evangelist church in the centre of Brussels. There, the lady’s prayers were heard to have a grandchild. The entire community prayed and sacrificed objects and money to help her. In the meantime, she has a granddaughter of 6 years old. Also R has grandchildren. She doesn’t see them often as they are living in the United States, but they call each other several times a day.
K

K occupies an apartment in the recently renovated block in the south-east of Destrier. The large balcony, a result of the renovation works, is his preferred place in the house. From time to time he invites his friends to have a drink together.

K lives in Destrier since he was 12 years old. Together with his brothers and sisters, he was raised by his aunt and her family. They lived in a semi-detached house. In his twenties he lived for some years near the city centre, but returned when he split up with his girlfriend. Now the family has left the house, his aunt occupies the apartment next to his. She often prepares dinner, and takes care of his girl when he is working.

Since the renovation works, K has been developing a project in the community house of the neighbourhood. He makes documentaries for the local Youtube channel of the neighbourhood, “Destrier TV”. The renovation was very tough and demanding for the inhabitants, as they remained in the building during the works. As an inhabitant of the block and as a film maker of weddings and funerals K was the right person to capture the experiences, frustrations and struggles of the people inhabiting the block. Since this video, he regularly makes documentaries about activities within the neighbourhood. The cooperative sometimes pays him to register general meetings or other activities related to the management of the neighbourhood. K hopes this work will generate new commissions in the future.
A linear park in the centre of the neighbourhood connects the apartment blocks in the north and the south, as well as the transversal streets with semi-detached houses. Several times a week or a day, the park becomes a gathering place for boys of all ages. They play football together at the soccer field that occupies a central place in the park. Mostly they play matches among them, but sometimes they are joined by youngsters of social housing estates in proximity. They then play competition between the different estates.

S and his friends regularly participate in the matches. After finishing the homework they usually send each other messages on facebook to meet at the soccer field. For his parents, the abundance of green space was a reason to reject a bigger social house in another estate.

Every week, S and his friends collect rubbish with the “team cleanliness”. This activity was set up in the community house. S is the manager of the team: He reports their work for the tenant board and leads the meetings with the cooperative administration. All inhabitants of the estate pay a small extra fee every month to reward them for this task. The tenant board then checks if the work is well done. The team collects a lot of garbage in the neighbourhood, especially along the alleyways behind the gardens. As the gates between the alleyway and the gardens have been removed, there is very little social control in the alleyways.
23 years ago, R and her four children obtained a house in Destrier. She found herself on the streets after a fire incident. She managed to save her children, but the house was burnt down. All these years, her unemployment benefit enabled her to manage the household on her own. She could benefit from this unemployment benefit by regularly working for the Christian church.

Despite her university degree in communication, R is still not employed, but diverse activities occupy her. Currently R is writing a novel about a mother who looses her child for going to Syria. The novel is loosely based on her own experience. When her son left for working in a bank in the UK, she didn’t hear anything from him for weeks. Here and there, people told her he left to Syria. The incident was based on a misunderstanding, but it made her understand how mothers of Syrian rebels must feel like.

Next to the novel, R writes or edits letters for illiterate people and organises creative ateliers for a small group of women in the neighbourhood. During the ateliers, the women make interior objects out of recuperation materials such as toilet rolls, pine cones, cardboard, dried leaves, etc. They sell them on the market or to the church community, which decorates events and ceremonies with the objects. The limited amount of money the women gain, enables them to buy personal care products such as tampons and deodorant. In several cases, the husband still controls and manages the household budget.

The daughter of R has inherited her creative genes. She is successfully pursuing a career as a singer. Next, she experiments with permaculture gardening. The results of this are visible in the garden, which is fully taken by a vegetable garden, fruit trees and chickens.
vers gare centrale, école petits enfants, méryer, crèche, cours d'alpha

mosquée mari

l'adore le 63, il m'amène un peu partout BUS 63

sœur
beau-frère
amie
A

A few times a day, a group of elderly men crosses the neighbourhood of Destrier. The men are on their way to the mosque at the artery road that borders the neighbourhood. The mosque was established by a few residents, who felt there was a high demand in the neighbourhood to establish a place to collectively pray.

The husband of A is one of them. In 1962, he moved from Morocco to Belgium to work in the sanitary sector. The marriage between both was arranged, but after all those years they are still living together. Before moving to Destrier, the couple and their 6 children lived in social housing near the station south. As they had all they needed in vicinity, they were able to move around by foot. For this reason, in the beginning A had to get used to living in Destrier, which was still surrounded by the countryside by the time.

Despite living in Destrier for 20 years, A still spends a lot of time in her former neighbourhood in the city centre. Twice a week, she gives reading and writing courses to illiterate people. This voluntary work she does for 40 years. She never did any paid work, in order to be able to keep their social housing. Thanks to this social housing, their 6 children were able to study, to have a good job, to start a family and to buy a house on their own. The family is very grateful for that.
petit chemin

visite abeilles mari

sortie chien

sortie chien

voisine

s

presque tous les jours

tricot cartes MAISON DESTRIER

Vendredi mardi

ancien maison

volley

SOLARIUM
Several adults living in Destrier have spent their entire life there. They saw the surroundings changing from a meadow landscape to a residential municipality. They went to the nursery school in the estate, played volleyball at the linear park, jumped over the open gutter, spied people sunbathing at the solarium, met their partner and grew up their children. S is one of them. She lives in Destrier since it was built in 1956, and has moved several times within the estate. Her husband and her now live in their house for 33 years.

According to S, the house is getting too big, now the children have left, but her husband is very attached to it. He built a big pond in the garden where he keeps fishes. Furthermore he uses his garden as a workshop to make outdoor artworks in steel. S is satisfied with the pathways, parks and wide footpaths in the neighbourhood, where she daily walks her dog together with a neighbour. She likes the private garden, but thinks it starts to require too much work.
Fig III.1 (top)
An overlap of the daily and weekly trajectories of 10 passengers

Fig III.2 (bottom)
An overlap of the daily and weekly trajectories of 15 inhabitants of the Destrier neighbourhood
Reproducing housing commons

Government involvement and differentiated forms of commoning in a housing cooperative

Since the late 19th century, reoccurring economic depressions and related housing crises have led to the development of collectively shared and managed housing systems. Nowadays depicted as ‘housing commons,’ these systems are rooted in the early 20th century cooperative garden city housing model. Some of these housing initiatives have been marketed, while others have been scaled-up or co-opted by the state. Through a detailed discussion of changing government involvement in a rental cooperative neighbourhood in the Brussels Capital Region, and an analysis of participative practices, we discuss the relevance of the cooperative model today. Rather than an obsolete system, the paper shows that differential forms of commoning reproduce the cooperative model, resulting in capacity building and increased social capital among participating inhabitants. This sheds a different light on common-pool resource theory, which prescribes strict regulations to prevent free-ridership or enclosure.

3.1 Introduction

In the beginning of the 20th century many countries in Europe adopted the cooperative garden city model of Ebenezer Howard. It combined collective land holding and participatory principles with a housing model that aims to connect qualities of urban and rural living (Smets, 1977). The model was part of the various forms of collective security developed in response to the disruption of the 19th century Industrial Revolution in Europe. Capitalist development and ensuing rural-urban migrations created overpopulation around urban industries, and speculation on basic needs such as housing and food. Howard’s model was rarely applied in its pure form. Most developments were mere garden suburbs that were ultimately swallowed by the city, making them less dependent on local activities and community life. In other cases, only the cooperative dimension was used for distinctly urban neighbourhoods with apartment typologies. The purely cooperative nature of the development was also compromised. As providers of affordable housing, cooperatives often received support by public authorities, in
many cases eventually leading to an increased regulation or co-optation by the state. Simultaneously, some European housing cooperatives underwent deregulation as part of the liberalization of national housing policies. In Vienna, Sweden and the Netherlands for instance, the number of non-profit housing associations has been reduced, while limited-profit companies have become more dominant (Priemus et al., 1999; Hojer Bruun, 2015; Lang & Novy, 2014).

Taking a garden suburb of the rental cooperative Comensia in the Brussels Capital Region (BCR) in Belgium as a case study, this paper traces how the participatory nature of a housing cooperative evolved due to an increased regulation by the state. According to the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), cooperatives are associations of people ‘united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise’ (https://ica.coop/en/what-co-operative). Joint ownership, democratic self-control, self-governance and autonomy are key principles of the cooperative set up. This puts it into a particular relationship to the government, that, in principle is also bound by democratic rules of control. In relation to housing cooperatives we distinguish between two forms of relationship between governments and co-operatives. First of all, (mainly local) governments often played a role in establishing housing co-operatives, as shareholders or as providers of construction land. In this form, (local) governments are a particular shareholder in a multi-stakeholder cooperative, next to individual members or associations such as labour unions and other intermediary, religious, philanthropic or private organisations. Secondly, co-operatives offering affordable housing often do so within the context of government support for affordable housing. This means that in return for subsidies, tax benefits and/or cheap government-backed loans, the co-operatives need to respect the rules and regulations set out by government in order to benefit from these support measures. In both forms, the co-operative principles mentioned above are challenged. This holds true for the rental cooperatives in the Brussels Capital Region, which are social housing companies with the legal status of a non-equity cooperative. As a social housing company, they fall under the rules and financial support of the umbrella organization for social housing. But all residents are shareholders that have a voting right in the general meetings and elect the board of directors, which mostly consists of residents.

Although the rental cooperatives have remained relatively small in Brussels with 9.175 housing units (of a total of 39.523 social housing units), the projects developed in the late 19th and early 20th century were exemplary as they were the first social housing experiments in the country (Smets, 1977). A second wave of rental cooperatives was established 30 years later, as an answer to housing shortage after the Second World War. The cooperatives of both waves still exist today, but are under more stringent control of the Brussels Regional Housing Company (Société du Logement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capital - SLRB), the umbrella organization for social housing companies. As for several decades Brussels deals with a severe housing crisis, priority for social housing is given to more precarious
groups (Kuyken, 2008). Participatory forms of governance including third-sector organizations are nevertheless supported by the SLRB by obliging each social housing company to establish tenant boards and by supporting social cohesion projects in estates with a concentration of social problems. Another important change imposed by the SLRB is the reduction of the number of social housing companies. Social housing companies with less than 2500 housing units are subject to mergers, diminishing the local embeddedness of the estates’ administration.

The analysis of the participative nature of the rental cooperative will be done through the notions of commons and commoning. The garden suburb under study can be considered as a common-pool resource, involving institutional arrangements to collectively use and manage it (Singer, 1996; Ostrom, 1990). It also touches upon the recently debated urban commons, enabling the right to housing and urban land to underprivileged groups (Harvey, 2012; Blomley, 2008). The debate on the urban commons understands basic needs such as housing as a resource that should not be traded but collectively controlled (Hojer Bruun, 2015). Using the notion of commoning, this debate discusses the ties between communities and commons, and analyses the practices of caretaking, managing and (re)producing the commons (Linebaugh, 2009). Commoning allows to study both the actions of the rental cooperative and social dynamics of participation in-depth (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2017).

Before explaining and framing these concepts, this paper will go into the set-up of the case study. This is followed by an identification of the changing degrees of government involvement in the Brussels’ rental cooperatives as a shift from a facilitating over a coordinating to a regulating role for the state. The abovementioned institutional arrangements point at an increasing regulation by the umbrella organization for social housing. This ‘stronger regulation’ must however be weighed against a low social housing provision and an ongoing support for homeownership in the BCR (Romainville, 2010). From there, the article shifts gears to the case study. The impact of these new institutional arrangements on the neighbourhood Destrier of the rental cooperative Comensia (formerly known as Le Home Familial Bruxellois) will be investigated, to understand how they affected its cooperative nature. In this section, it will become clear that these arrangements not necessarily led to an enclosure of the cooperative nature of the neighbourhood. Instead they led to the establishment of more flexible forms of participation in which varying degrees of inhabitant commitment - or differential commoning - reproduce the cooperative nature. Afterwards these forms of differential commoning will be scrutinized; their merits for inhabitants; and spatial and temporal variables that impact them.

3.2 Data and methods

The choice for Destrier as a case study is based on two considerations. First, the neighbourhood is governed by a multi-stakeholder rental cooperative and
combines several institutional arrangements related to the increased government involvement. Le Home Familial, a rental cooperative established by the ‘Ligue des Familles’ (Family League), an intermediary organization of Christian inspiration established the neighbourhood of 300 dwelling units in 1952 to provide affordable housing to large families. The neighbourhood served as the administrative seat of Le Home Familial Bruxellois. Since several years, the neighbourhood has a tenant board and a social cohesion project. As part of merger processes imposed by the SLRB, the former cooperative has recently merged with two other social housing companies and is now active in 17 municipalities in Brussels. Second, based on a survey in a pre-war rental cooperative neighbourhood and qualitative interviews with 10 professionals of social housing companies and housing associations, the neighbourhood is identified as ‘exemplary’ when it comes to resident participation.

Diverse sources of information were collected to uncover the role of commoning within the neighbourhood Destrier. The planning and evolution in management of the rental cooperatives and social housing legislations were found in policy documents, historic publications of social housing companies and reports of social workers. In the context of a wider research on historical and new affordable housing solutions in Brussels, an analytical framework was established that categorizes these initiatives in terms of spatial configuration and participatory dimensions (institutional framework; community building; design and planning). These dimensions are related to various practices of inhabitants to understand if and how these dimensions impact their social inclusion (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were developed to investigate these four dimensions from the perspective of inhabitants (n=20, R1-20) as well as of administrators (n=2) and social workers (n=2) of the Destrier neighbourhood. The sample of inhabitants includes a diversity of profiles, using age, origin, gender, housing typology and community participation as main selection variables (Table 3.1). The quotes that appear throughout this paper are retrieved from transcriptions of these interviews. The sample of inhabitants not regularly taking part in community activity was established via random door-to-door visits, while active participants were contacted through participant observations between July and December 2015 during meetings and activities. Another sample of 30 people were reached through a survey on inhabitant participation developed together with professionals of the community house and the cooperative. Both the participant observations and additional survey aimed to deepen our understanding of the type and extent of community involvement.

The research was developed in a participatory way, involving professionals of the cooperative in different moments in time. The aim of this participatory method was to promote sharing knowledge and to engage with the actions and practices of the different actors involved in the daily management and community work in Destrier. The interviews and participant observations were not structured in different separate phases, but fed into each other. Interviews were adapted according to questions and findings of former interviews, while new literature
was consulted in coherence with considerations that appeared in the field. This working method enabled to not only grasp the organisational aspects, but also the vulnerabilities and potentialities of commoning and the personal narratives and implications for the inhabitants involved.

3.3 Housing Commons as Common-pool Resources in a Quest for the Right to Housing and Urban Land

Common-pool resource theory asserts that commons involve a stewardship of a community co-managing a resource with design rules to weed out free riders, shirkers or vandals. Figurehead of this theory is Elinor Ostrom. With her book ‘Governing the commons’ (1990), she refuted Hardin’s statement that commons will be inevitably destroyed when not turned into private property. According to Hardin, a community cannot exist because as a rational being, each person or ‘herdsman’ is locked into a system that induces him to seek to maximize his gains or ‘increase his herd’. This would eventually lead to an overexploitation of natural resources or ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin, 1968). By studying the working rules of institutions managing natural commons around the world however, Ostrom showed that communities were able to govern resource systems efficiently with variable degrees of success over time (Ostrom, 1999). Among other things, setting clear boundaries and preventing free-ridership were important design rules
to assure the survival of the commons.

Starting from the late 1990s new literature on the commons developed that was not based on natural resource management but new types of commons in danger of privatization and enclosure, such as knowledge commons, social commons, intellectual commons, and urban commons (Bollier, 2003; Harvey, 2012; Blomley, 2008). In this new literature, commons are not only studied in terms of effectiveness but seen in relationship to larger challenges in the world’s political economy, where public goods such as social housing are increasingly put under private market regimes (Bollier, 2003; Harvey, 2012). Analyses of the history of enclosure and Marxist theory make a distinction between the economic logic of use value and exchange value (Linebaugh, 2009; Polanyi, 1957; De Angelis, 2007; Harvey, 2012). Use value refers to the concrete benefits of a resource. The right to use certain resources, such as shelter, is vital for the satisfaction of basic human needs. Exchange value on the other hand points at the price of a product and the profits that can be made upon it. Capitalism is characterized by the dominance of exchange value over use value (Decreus & Callewaert, 2016). The management of vital resources as a common is seen as a way to introduce an economic logic in which the use value and general interest prevail above the exchange value and individual interest. Harvey (2012) applies the concept of the urban commons to describe cities as resources in which people not only have the right to access but ‘a right to change it after their heart’s desire’ as well (Harvey, 2003, p. 939). Above access, the right to the city and urban commons are about securing collective control and use over basic resources and needs such as housing (Susser & Tonnelat, 2013). This discourse emphasizes the right to ‘not be excluded’ from the use of the commons (Blomley, 2008, p. 320). As such housing commons can be considered as a common good that belongs to members of a larger society who have a right of access to affordable housing and the right to participate in the management and production of housing space. Housing commons thus involve a search for more open and accessible institutions than the traditional commons with more direct modes of governance than public services (Dzokic & Neelen, 2015). While the merit of this new body of literature is to develop an emancipatory project of the commons, it tends to abstract the commons by idealizing the notion and by blurring the way it is translated into practice (Hojer Bruun, 2015; Noterman, 2015).

The verb commoning offers a more flexible understanding by focusing on the (inter)action of collectively appropriating, producing and reproducing resources as commons. It firstly refers to institutional aspects or rules put in place to prevent the privatization or appropriation of common resources by either private or public actors (Harvey, 2012). As will be elaborated in the second section, from the beginning public actors facilitated the development of rental cooperatives for developing affordable housing for the working-class. The role of public actors changed over time in a coordinating and regulating role, leading to several institutional - or commoning - actions of cooperative administrations to cope with this.
Second, commoning highlights the co-productive nature of the commons. Harvey notes that ‘commoning is the unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood’ (Harvey, 2012, p. 73). The notion of self-defined group or community is troubling in commons institutions that might have origins within an activist milieu but that have undergone considerable change over time. In this respect, Blomley has addressed the need for ‘more ethnographic accounts’ of the commons, ‘taking into account the plurality of beliefs, norms and interests within a given community’ (Blomley, 2008, p. 320). Similarly, Noterman has developed the notion of ‘differential commoning’ adjusted to the ‘fundamental, practical and often messy details involved in commoning’ (Noterman, 2015, p. 3). According to Noterman, identifying different forms of commoning could ‘reveal possible co-productive frictions and unexpected alternatives that exist amongst normative socio-spatial relations in any community’. Also Sohn et al. (2015, p. 4), note the importance of studying ‘differential’ relations in commons practices ‘rather than attempting to homogenize them under guidelines and rules’, as these relations shape the urban environment. Furthermore, Bunce (2015, p.7) argues that building commons must be considered in terms of nuances and challenges. This paper will stress the challenge of embedding differentiation in commoning - in which individuals participate in various ways and degrees - within commons institutions with an increased government involvement and diversified community.

3.4 Shifting Degrees of Government Involvement

Affordable Housing Solutions Accommodated by National Agencies: the State as Facilitator

The first Belgian housing legislation of 1889 created a legal framework for social housing but was mainly successful in supporting homeownership, by granting cheap loans (De Decker, 2008). This legislation did not improve living conditions for the population for whom homeownership was out of reach. Therefore, new paths were explored after the housing destruction of WWI. The success of the Belgian Socialist Party reinforced new forms of solidarity and concessions to the working-class among politicians and city planners. Under the initiative of the minister of work, a National Company of Cheap Housing (Nationale Maatschappij voor Goedkope Woningen - NMGW) was created in 1919. The NMGW was charged to regroup existing initiatives and to facilitate the development of housing for the working-class. As an expression of a compromise between socialists and catholic parties, both rental cooperatives and municipal housing companies were developed. Next, a National Company for Small Land property (Nationale Maatschappij voor Kleine Landeigendom - NMKL) regrouped private companies that developed owner-occupied housing. Inspired by the reconstruction congress
that was organized a year later, the cooperative garden suburb model was initially favoured in Belgium. During the reconstruction congress, socialist politicians and city planners expressed their concerns for the devastating consequences of land ownership and speculative building in the city centres (Smets, 1977). Speakers were convinced that it was desirable ‘to steer a maximum of effort to re-obtain land for the community’ (Van den Brempt as cited in Smets, 1977, p. 106).

The garden suburbs were proposed as a model combining the advantages of both the city’s economic and social resources and the countryside’s green environment. They were not the autonomous city Ebenezer Howard proposed, but residential quarters with mostly low-rise housing and (vegetable) gardens on cheap terrains in the green urban fringes. Public aid consisted of direct subsidies for the construction of homes, beneficial loans and tax breaks (Kuyken, 2008). From the beginning, the rental cooperatives were thus not entirely self-financed, but autonomous organizations receiving financial government support.

Between September 1921 and August 1922 6 rental cooperatives were created in Brussels by members of syndicalist, mutualist and cooperative groups (Cahiers de la Fonderie, 1993). With the financial contributions of the members, the state, the province and the National Company, they acquired pieces of land in municipalities around Brussels. Next to shelter, the neighbourhoods provided individual and collective facilities such as cooperative shops, community centres and large back gardens for growing vegetables and fruit (Cahiers de la Fonderie, 1993). The amenities served as a safety net for the inhabitants and provided a minimum of self-sufficiency. Although the members of the cooperative did not actively change the design ‘after their heart’s desire,’ in most cooperatives they regularly came together to discuss the plans with the architects and planners of the neighbourhood (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2015).

The National Housing Corporation: The State as Coordinator

A second short-lived moment of social rental cooperative establishments in Brussels happened between 1949 and 1950. The wartime destruction, demographic expansion and immigration following de-colonization gave rise to a great housing need in Western Europe. As the housing urgency in Belgium was less pressing, the Belgian government dominantly organized housing allocation through the market, by stimulating access to homeownership (De Decker, 2008). Accordingly, social housing construction was far less extensive and dense than in neighbouring countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and France (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Next to inner city and peripheral high-rise social housing projects, in Brussels mixed developments were built, combining a garden suburb lay out with apartment blocks. Among these peripheral neighbourhoods, 5 were established by rental cooperatives (Figure 3.1). As in the first period, the cooperatives were autonomous institutions relying on government funding. Due to the expansion of the welfare state where workers saw a considerable improvement of their living conditions,
their ideological and emancipatory nature was less pronounced than during the first wave of cooperatives, but remained nevertheless present in some projects (Cahiers de la Fonderie, 1993). Most cooperatives were established by trade unions and other intermediary organizations from the socialist, liberal and Christian milieu, even if most tenants were predominantly (lower) middle class rather than working-class. The main aim was to develop affordable and customized housing in terms of size and modern facilities.

Some years after the second short peak of cooperatives establishments, the National Housing Corporation replaced the NMGW. From then on, all municipal and cooperative housing initiatives fell under the denominator of ‘social housing’ and their management was coordinated by the National Corporation. With the establishment of the National Corporation, municipal high-rise housing would become the preferred model for social rented housing. This shift is explained by the
cost effectiveness of the high-rise model, as compared to the costly investments in infrastructure and collective equipment of the low-rise garden suburb. Additionally, and maybe more importantly, municipal social housing firmly under the control of local politicians was preferred over the progressively autonomous cooperatives (Hennaut, 1994). Hence, social housing was increasingly conceived with the main aim of affordability in mind, without the cooperative aspirations of earlier years.

Starting from the end of the 1960s the production of social housing was increased, but at the expense of the technical and architectural quality of the housing (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2015). This period went along with massive inner-city sanitations and alienation between inhabitants and the social housing companies’ administrators. In Brussels, this led to a variety of housing activism groups fighting for a more human approach to social housing construction with attention for community participation and cohabitation (Zimmer, 1996).

‘Democratization’ and ‘Rationalization’ of the Social Housing Sector: The State as Regulator

After the establishment of the SLRB in 1985, three important institutional changes occurred that amounted to a relatively strict regulation of the social housing sector, including the rental cooperatives.

First, while the invigorated support for homeownership led to an increasing security of tenure in the first decades after WWII, at the moment the SLRB was established, it faced a huge lack of social housing. This lack was due to a progressive disinvestment in social housing in the wake of the oil crisis of the 1970s, the difficult process of state reform (among other things, housing policy in Belgium was delegated to the three regions, Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia) as well as a sharp rise in prices on the private and owner-occupied market in the Brussels Capital Region (Zimmer, 1996; Noël, 2003). Facing these issues, the SLRB imposed stricter entrance rules for social housing, confirming the role of Brussels social housing serving as a ‘safety net’ instead of a ‘universal’ system (Winters and Elsinga, 2008, p. 3). For rental cooperatives, this meant that they were obliged to abolish the favouritism waiting list for family members of tenant-co-operators. While the latter led to a fairer access to social housing, the measure troubled the participatory nature of the cooperatives. From then on everyone eligible for social housing could register on the regional social housing waiting list and enter a cooperative, while not necessarily choosing for the participative notion, nor understanding the differences with regular social housing companies.

The sixth state reform of 2011 led to the ‘rationalization’ of the Brussels’ housing sector in order to ‘increase efficiency’ of the social housing companies (Osselaer, 2015, p. 3). Social housing companies with less than 2500 housing units were urged to merge in order to reduce the 33 Brussels’ social housing companies to 16. By doing so, the Brussels government hopes to strengthen the capacity of social housing companies to increase the Brussels’ social housing stock while downsizing
administrations. For the cooperative neighbourhoods, which mostly do not include more than 800 dwelling units, this means that the main administration has had to relocate (unless the head seat is in their neighbourhood) and the local administrations have had to slim down.

Thirdly, as a result of the struggles of the housing activist groups a more integrated architecture and stronger involvement of inhabitants were inscribed in the Brussels’ housing code. Over the years, urban revitalization projects, social cohesions projects and tenant boards were established (Zimmer, 2005). The tenant board is a measure enacted in 2004 to encourage tenant participation in social housing companies, that aims at ‘the realization of participation and transparency [which] is in line with a genuine public service that local (social housing) companies have to embody’ (parliamentary session; 1987). At first, the tenant boards had an advisory role: committees were allowed to give advice on certain issues and to submit proposals in the administration council. This evolved into a deliberative role in which tenant boards hold power of decision in the administration council. The social cohesion projects were introduced in 1999 to address social problems in various social housing neighbourhoods. The projects are based on a partnership between an association, a social housing company and in some occasions the municipality.

In contrast to the cooperatives in Vienna and Sweden and housing corporations in the Netherlands, that suffered a drastic reduction of public subsidies and an ongoing process of marketization (Priemus et al., 1999; Czischke, 2009), in Brussels public involvement thus increased after the establishment of the umbrella organization. The organization introduced the so-called ‘democratization’ and ‘rationalization’ of the sector. The democratization inscribes itself in the promotion of participatory forms of governance including third-sector organizations (Lang and Novy, 2014). But, the progressive disinvestment in social housing and the efficiency measures that were created as a result of it, however exemplify that the housing companies are not spared from a market rationale of public governance.

3.5 Local responses to the professionalization of the housing sector

A local management committee to counter top-down regulation

With the rationalization of the housing sector imposed by the SLRB, the former cooperative Le Home Familial Bruxellois merged with another rental cooperative and a social housing company and is now active in 17 municipalities in Brussels (Figure 3.2). By doing so, the cooperative under study succeeded in ‘commoning’ the social housing company by convincing it to turn into a rental cooperative. In this way, a large number of social tenants became cooperative tenants. The new board of directors consists of 9 inhabitants (out of which 2 from the tenant board), 5 representatives with civil society and benefactor backgrounds and 2 representatives of the municipalities (Figure 3.2). According to the director
of the former Le Home Familial Bruxellois (who became deputy director of the new cooperative Comensia), the involvement of board members from non-profit organizations creates an increased awareness of the housing crisis in Brussels, as such addressing the new commons. ‘In our council, there are users of the house, tenants, which are centred around their house, their neighbourhood, life in the neighbourhood... But there are civil society board members as well. They will say “you live in a renovated garden suburb and all is good, but you should know there are many people on the (social housing waiting) list (...) so the cooperative should also reinvest in housing”’.

The executive management of the cooperative feared that the geographic dispersal of the housing stock and the relocation of the administration following the merger, would result in the loss of local political autonomy and of contact with the social realities on the different sites. Therefore, it installed new cooperative devices to preserve local participation. A few days a week, inhabitants can address a local administration, in addition to the executive management in the centre of Brussels. Next, once in two months local management committees are organized, in which all inhabitants can participate (Figure 2). The housing cooperative organized these local committees as a sort of counter-power, hoping it enables inhabitants to exert pressure on the board of directors and its members that are involved in the meetings. During the meetings, issues regarding maintenance works in the dwellings and outdoor spaces, the neighbourhood, cleanliness, communal assistance, associations in the neighbourhood and local training programs can be discussed, as long as they address the community in general. The local management committees are to be implemented in the 4 housing estates of the merged cooperative (Figure 3.2).

Developing Community Work in line with the Cooperative Notion

Next to the new institutional devices put into place to ensure resident participation and monitoring of cooperative policies, the cooperative used the ‘democratization’ regulations to promote resident participation in the neighbourhood. In addition to the 7 inhabitants with a seat in the board of directors, 2 members of the tenant board have a deliberative voice in the board of directors (Figure 3.2). As the deputy director states; ‘the tenant board was a political top-down decision (by the SLRB). We said “ah it’s top-down, let’s d bottom-up. (...) How can we use this law to reinforce collaboration?”’

A similar attitude is taken towards the social cohesion projects supported by the SLRB. The cooperative used the opportunity of this financial support to install a project that matches their management philosophy. ‘The participatory dynamic is inscribed in the legal structure of the cooperative. (...) It inscribes itself because of a supplementary dispositive, which is the tenant board, and also because of the synergy between the social cohesion project and the philosophy of the work of the rental cooperative.’ The social cohesion project has taken base in a community house. The two social workers guiding the project do not create
activities, but support inhabitants in setting up and volunteering in their own projects. Every month, the social workers and inhabitants responsible for the projects gather in a management committee. These inhabitants have a direct say in the management of the community house, as opposed to the general meeting of the cooperative, in which inhabitants elect board members. Over the years, several projects have gained ground: homework classes, a knitting atelier, a world kitchen, film evenings, crafts workshops for children, a local television station to show the activities going on in the estate, a cooperative vegetable garden, a youth project for collecting rubbish in the neighbourhood, a bee house, a compost project and public space regeneration project.

The social workers invite new inhabitants in the community house – that has recently been renamed Maison Cooperative Destrier and explain them what it implies to live in a rental cooperative. The development of local management committees, the social cohesion project and the recent re-adoption of the cooperative notion by using the words ‘cooperative house’ and ‘co-operator-tenant’ highlight their will to safeguard and valorise the participative nature of the rental cooperative under threat due to the merger processes.

3.6 Differentiating Commoning

Re-identifying the cooperative notion

In response to Hardin’s argument on the tragedy of the commons, Ostrom derived a set of design rules that would assure the survival of commons governing natural resources. A key element in these design rules is the institutional set up that prevents free-ridership. In other words, participants that fall within the boundary of the commons are obliged to participate in exchange for the benefits they enjoy of the common-pool resource. In Destrier, in contrast, commoning is not the result of a good set of working rules, but rather a fluctuating process of redefining the meaning and potential of the cooperative notion: between the board of directors and inhabitants, as well as between inhabitants and their living environment. Illustrative for this fluctuation is the varying attendance of formal and informal meetings in the neighbourhood: while a select group of 40 inhabitants regularly participates in the activities in the community house, the organization of it is in hands of only 15 inhabitants. Half of the entire population of the new cooperative were represented during the first general meeting. The three first local management committees attracted around 30 inhabitants in Destrier, while the meetings of the tenant board deal with a decreasing interest. The general waiting lists for social housing and merger processes complicate the residents’ understanding of the meaning and potential of a cooperative.

Many inhabitants are not fully aware they live in a cooperative. A striking example is an inhabitant (R7) stating that she ‘had to pay a rental deposit’ when she entered her apartment instead of acquiring shares in the cooperative. The frequent use of the
expression ‘rental deposit’ implies that inhabitants regard themselves social renters rather than co-operators. With respect to this, an inhabitant and board member (R4) states that ‘I think residents don’t realize they could have more power.’ Indeed, next to the misinterpretation of the cooperative shares, a large number of people doesn’t see the advantage of attending the general meetings and meetings of the tenant board. They are frequently perceived as ‘time-consuming,’ ‘difficult to understand’ or ‘for intellectuals.’ As a woman (R15) describes; ‘we (her husband and she) are not intellectuals, we don’t go to the meetings. They know well how to talk, but most of the people from here don’t understand.’ A father of four children (R1) testifies ‘the general meetings are far away, late, in the night we have our children.’ These expressions underline the fact that inhabitants do not choose to be co-operator, while the different realities on site - income insecurity, physical disabilities, care for children or disabled family members, language, interests, beliefs - complicate their participation in the management of the rental cooperative.

Another complicating factor is the fusion with other housing companies. The fusion is perceived to go against the local orientation of the executive management of the former cooperative, which is clearly appreciated. Especially the deputy director (and former director of Le Home Familial Bruxellois) seems to play an important role in this appreciation. ‘Le Home Familial is really open to everyone, the least problem you have, there is always a solution. In the neighbourhood there are many foreigners, so they receive everyone, really nice. (...) Especially Mr. H. (the deputy director) is really a nice guy’ (R9). Opposing statements highlight the distress and confidence coming along with the merger processes. ‘When a structure enlarges, decisions come from far. Today decisions are taken here. Mr. H., we go to see him, we discuss. (...) Everything that is big, structures, mastodons, it is far away. It’s a bit like the state, the government: far away, long-term... If I have a problem I go to the municipality, but if I would have a problem and I should see the Belgian Prime Minister...’ (R1). In contrast, precisely because of the confidence in the executive management, other residents, such as a member of the tenant board, are more positive about the merger process; ‘if it’s the same team, I’m not afraid’ (R5).

Despite these challenges, the deputy director and social workers seem to convey a more concrete idea of what it means to be a co-operator-tenant by using the cooperative notion explicitly in the meetings of the community house. For many participants, the term co-operator gained a meaning when starting or entering the projects. ‘It’s only when I entered the group (of the community house), I got to know. (...) It’s true we were always invited to go to the meetings once a year, to discuss the balance sheet and so on, but... this didn’t really speak to me. Being a co-operator has a different meaning to me today. I was just someone that rented a dwelling... Now, it has completely entered my mind’ (R16).
Steering benefits beyond the actual resource

Although the number of people actively and passively participating in the cooperative is relatively low, these people derive benefits that go beyond the actual resource (knowledge, social support, self-management) (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2017). The co-productive notion of commoning entails the promotion of capacity building and social capital as well as material commons. As an inhabitant and board member (R4) explains ‘I learnt many things; how the renovation projects function. When you don’t know, you tell yourself “why the company doesn’t do this”, but when you know, they first have to develop a public tender, and then choose the one that is less expensive.’

The learning process steered through participation in the cooperative extends to the development of communication skills and (socio-economic) integration such as education and work (Polanyi, 1967). One of the young people involved in the cleaning project (R18) explains ‘I learnt how to make reports. I’ve never seen this in school. Payment sheets, for me it was for adults. But today, I know how to do it. (...) Last year we went to the office of Mr. H. to sign our contract. Before I was very timid, but now it goes well.’ Stimulated by the social workers, the youngsters integrate their experiences in their curriculum vitae, in order to increase job opportunities. Similarly, the responsible of the local television station of Destrier hopes to become a professional director. Due to the television station, he has been given assignments by the cooperative management for which he earns a modest amount of money.

On those people that suffered social isolation the entrepreneurial spirit in the community house supports building social capital. Entering and organizing projects in the community house has had a transformative effect, processing meaning and purpose in life. ‘When the children left the house, I found myself between four walls. My neighbour asked if I would be interested to go to the community house, to do small activities, making pancakes and so on. There she saw that I liked volunteering and she asked me “why don’t you participate in the tenant board”. And so I engaged myself in the tenant board’ (R4). ‘Before I was here, in the house, I did the housework, I did my cooking, (...) I passed my four roads to go shopping. When I started the activities for the community house I started to have things on my mind, I met people. (...) For me life is richer now than before. Because I meet people, I talk to people, I don’t stay in my own little corner’ (R15).

Spatial and temporal differentiation

Bearing in mind the design rules of Ostrom - which conceive an obliged participation as a way to weed out free riders - in the community house, a different approach rules, in which individual competences are valorised as long as they benefit the wider community. A ‘tragedy’ of the shared resources in the community house is also less likely, as the inhabitants are not immediately dependent on these activities,
even if they steer important individual and collective benefits. This illustrates how the public authority regulations framing the work of the housing cooperative, can play a role in assuring the 'success' of the commons. The issue of time and space are important variables to justify and support such differential commoning.

Regarding the issue of 'space,' inhabitants are aware of their 'privileged' housing condition in the garden suburb and will link it to recreation and meeting opportunities. When asked what they like about their neighbourhood, inhabitants refer to the abundance of green spaces, daily walks and meeting places for children. Even more, participants in the community house are developing a neighbourhood regeneration plan in order to create more meeting places for women and elderly people. 'If we would put some (public space) furniture, women might go outside in summer' (R14). It emphasizes the spatial character of commoning. Encouraging daily encounters and expanding commoning activities demand a need for visibility and porous spaces that allow accommodating commoning. As the responsible of the community garden (R1) illustrates; 'When organizing a picnic at the Mail (a linear public space in the middle of the neighbourhood) last summer, to test the potentials of the space, C. passed by. As he knew A. he took a seat and we talked about our project. It's from that moment he entered the group.'

When it comes to the issue of time, the current unequal participation sometimes leads to disappointment among active participants in the community house who complain that 'always the same people participate.' But the freedom of choice and non-compulsory participation in the community house are generally seen as an advantage. The participants have their own daily occupations, even if they mostly consist of elderly, children and (partly) unemployed people. They enter projects that coincide with their own interests. Like the community garden responsible (R1) expresses, 'I have a girl with the Down syndrome; she demands a lot of care. (...) But in the evening, I have time to take care of the (collective vegetable) garden. Gardening is my passion (...) so this is the activity that convenes the most to me.' The success of the activities at the community house is also due to the presence of people in the neighbourhood that are not yet fully overburdened by the combination of full-time work and family life. A teaching volunteer (R11) illustrates this by stating that 'it's not because I don't work (for a wage) that I don't do anything.'

As this voluntary participation in the community house is generally appreciated, some inhabitants perceive such active engagement as more effective and valuable than the official meetings. 'In my opinion, you really need someone in the spirit of Y. (one social worker), I don't know how he achieves to make people so interested’ (R4). But, there is an awareness that the activities are related to the cooperative structure and spirit of the deputy director, who embraces different kinds of engagement in the tenant cooperative. 'It is everything together. Because we are really sustained by Mr. H’ (R5).
3.7 Conclusion

Rather than arguing that commons will be destroyed or enclosed in case of an increased government involvement (Harvey, 2012) or free-ridership (Ostrom, 1990) this paper shows a differentiated understanding of governance and participation within the commons. Building on the notion of ‘differential commoning’ (Noterman, 2015), this paper sheds light on the way housing commons are reproduced in a rental cooperative in the Brussels Capital Region.

First, the notion of differential commoning is used to point at the way a commons institution has been pursuing to reproduce its cooperative practices, despite the increasingly ‘mixed’ (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2017, p.15) nature of its organisation. Over time the Brussels rental cooperatives have been submitted to the regime of the umbrella organization for social housing. While it could be argued that this led to a destruction of the cooperative nature or a restricted autonomy, this paper also shows specific opportunities that came along with it. On the one hand, mergers and a general waiting list imposed by the umbrella organization resulted in physical distance between the administration and inhabitants, who don’t choose to live in a housing cooperative. On the other hand, the general waiting list and ongoing financial support have been beneficial for securing control and use over housing for those groups that are most in need. The control of the umbrella organisation and the presence of civil society board members thereby create an enhanced awareness of the housing crisis in Brussels, and the need to increase the social housing stock to respond to this. These characteristics catch up with contemporary definitions of the commons, which emphasize ‘the right to not be excluded’ from the use of the commons (Blomley, 2008, p.320). Furthermore, the management of the cooperative creatively used the new institutional arrangements of the umbrella organisation to re-identify the cooperative notion, by turning a regular social housing company into a cooperative, increasing resident involvement in the board of directors and developing social cohesion projects in line with cooperative values. While this confirms Harvey’s statement that it takes ‘political action’ to protect commons for mutual benefit (Harvey, 2012, p. 92), it also shows that established housing providers can develop arrangements akin to the values of housing commons institutions (Czischke, 2017). As such, they can aid at rendering cooperative practices and modes of participation accessible for a wider user-community.

Second, the notion of differential commoning is used to depict the conception of participation in the neighbourhood under study, that embraces varying and differing engagements towards shared resources. Instead of problematizing non-participation, which could be seen as ‘free-riding’ behaviour, this paper shows specific merits of encouraging flexible types of participation. While some people choose to express themselves in the general meetings and local management committees, others like to invest in the daily life of the neighbourhood, by leading and volunteering in housework classes, collective vegetable gardens and
compost projects. Volunteers benefit from different aspects of the commons, such as capacity building, social capital and the self-management of public space in the neighbourhood. The issue of ‘space’ and ‘time’ prove to be important conditions and arguments to support such differential commoning. Activities are especially sustained by elderly, children and partly unemployed who are not overburdened by a full-time job and inflexible working conditions, while the spatial organization of the neighbourhood provides opportunities for different types of projects and collective (re)investment. Such (re)investment reinforces the interdependence between the participatory principles and the spatial organisation of the garden suburb as conceived by Ebenezer Howard.

In addition, the focus on less unequivocal, more fluid types of housing commons also illustrates the link between differentiated forms of governance and participation. Government involvement in housing commons can aid in accommodating flexible forms of participation. This might be important in urban contexts that deal with increasingly globalized social relationships impacting on increasingly diversified and disadvantaged populations. The focus on more fluid types of commons recognizes these ‘larger social relationships’ and aids at ‘transforming [them] in ways that allow those in the community to have more control’ (De Filippis, 2009, 231). It positions housing as a good belonging to members of a larger society that allows –rather than obliges- to participate in the management and production of housing space. The example of the Brussels housing cooperative, suggests that more diverse and plural ways of commoning both in the governance and participation might be more realistic and desirable than a strict commoning project.

Endnotes

* This article was submitted for Housing Studies 14/03/2017, minor revisions requested 23/10/2017. Michael Ryckewaert is the second author of the article.
1. Interview Deputy Director Comensia, Evere, 21 August 2014.

References

Commons, participatory urbanism and democratic participation

Participation is an ambiguous political concept. On the one hand, participation refers to an emancipatory practice through which people are involved in a decision-making process. In such process, people are regarded as free and equal in principle. On the other hand, participation is often (deliberately) confused with consultation. However, consultation does not necessarily presuppose principal freedom and equality. On the contrary, consultation recreates a certain power relation between consulter and consulted.

In our view, participation as a truly emancipatory practice presupposes the access to common resources. These resources can be both material (land, water, infrastructure, pastures...) and immaterial (language, knowledge, information, digital culture, money...); and imply a management at different scale levels. This also holds true for Participatory Urbanism. Participatory Urbanism presupposes an urbanism of the commons as a necessary precondition. In this sense, the question shifts: how can urban commons be (re)developed in order to create participatory urbanism?
In Society of the Spectacle, Guy Debord wrote the following about the modern city:

“But if the history of the city is the history of freedom, it is also the history of tyranny, of state administration that controls the countryside and the city itself. The city could as yet only struggle for historical freedom, but not possess it. The city is the locus of history because it is conscious of the past and also concentrates the social power that makes the historical undertaking possible. The present tendency to liquidate the city is thus merely another expression of the delay in the subordination of the economy to historical consciousness and in the unification of society reassuming the powers that were detached from it.”

It is well worth to examine this passage from Society of the Spectacle, since it still holds some relevant insights with regard to contemporary urban realities. Debord describes the city as a locus of fundamental contradiction. The city represents the history of the struggles for freedom, but at the same time it is the place where power shows itself in its most cruel and tyrannical ways. The city was the place where revolutions were born, but also the place where new modes of repression were experimented with. Barricades and riot cops, community gardens and privatization of public spaces, urban guerrilla and civil war: they all have the city as decorum. In short, the city as a place of contradictions is the same as stating that the city is the preferred locus of (class) struggle. And, from a Marxist perspective, it implies that the city is the place where history itself is created and pushed forward.

However, according to Debord, urbanism under capitalism, represses the creative and revolutionary potential of the city. It ‘freezes’ urban life:

“The capitalist need which is satisfied by urbanism in the form of a visible freezing of life can be expressed in Hegelian terms as the absolute predominance of “the peaceful coexistence of space” over “the restless becoming in the passage of time.”

In other words, capitalism and the urbanism that accompanies with it, kills the historical role of the city, and therefore history itself. Or, to put it in less dramatic terms, it slows down the potential of the city, the creative and social energy that is characteristic of it. We can reformulate this diagnosis in terms of enclosures of the commons. As David Harvey states in Rebel Cities, “capitalist urbanization perpetually tends to destroy the city as a social, political and liveable commons”. It does so by enclosing or appropriating the urban commons in order to turn it into a source of private profit. Paradoxically, in this process capital undermines the vitality of the city, and therefore the very preconditions for profit.

A lot of familiar and well-known examples can be given of this process. Take gentrification. Gentrification typically entails an appropriation of the commons. The fact that a neighborhood is considered to be attractive to live in is the result of the joint collaboration of its inhabitants. Yet, once private investors come into the neighbourhood they try to capitalize this joint effort by investing in property. The latter contributes to higher prices for housing and other services, which in its turn leads to more wealthy people coming into the neighbourhood. As a result, the neighbourhood gradually looses its specific characteristics that made it attractive in the first place.

In this regard, Harvey states, “the better the common qualities a social group creates, the more likely it is to be raided and appropriated by private profit-maximizing interests”. In other words, any process of joint collaboration outside the market will draw attention of investors as soon as it turns out to be successful, efficient or popular. However, this process corresponds to the image of a snake that bites its own tail. Since, the conditions on which profit depends – social collaboration, commons – are undermined as soon as profit-seeking becomes the dominant logic. In this sense, Marx compared capitalism with a vampire at several occasions. In the Grundrisse, for example, he describes capital as “constantly sucking in living labor as its soul, vampire-like” and as “sucking its living soul out of labor”. With regard to the commons capitalism is indeed comparable to a parasite, sucking the live out of
social cooperation, which, as Debord describes it, leaves it “freezing”. As Debord emphasizes, this is not merely a regrettable fact. It is also a political and repressive act. Destroying the restless becoming, which is characteristic for city life, also destroys the potential for alternative types of social organization.

**Participation and democracy**

So far, what we discussed is part of a well-known Marxist perspective on the commons, the urban commons and capital. In this essay, however, we want to look at the role of urban commons and capital from the perspective of the concept of participation. This will allow us to develop some insights with regard to participatory urbanism. But let us first start with delineating the concept and practice of participation.

Participation is a concept that is often misused by being stripped of its radical potential. Therefore, it might be helpful to shed light on the etymology of the word participation. Participation comes from the Latin verb ‘participare’ which literally means being part of taking part in. It is an amalgamation of ‘pars’ (part) and ‘capere’ (to take). Both a soft and a strong interpretation can be attributed to the word participation. It can be understood as merely taking part in an undertaking, a conversation, a project etc. In this sense it is quite similar to ‘being involved’ into something. This soft understanding broadens the meaning of the word participation and, also, depoliticizes the word. Understood as ‘being involved in’ we participate constantly since we are always involved in numerous things at the same time.

There is also a stronger and more delineated sense in which we can use the word participation. Participation also refers to ‘being part of’, in the sense of having a share in something and having something to say. In this meaning, participation has something to do with power positions. It means you have the power to (partly) influence a certain process. This is a political understanding of the concept of participation. In this political meaning, ‘participation’ carries an egalitarian promise in it. To be able to participate in something means having a share of (more or less) equal power. Participation is quite unthinkable if the different participants do not have more or less equal power positions. Hence, the difference between consultation and participation. Consultation is asking for someone’s view or opinion without a power being attached to it. It is the absolutist king who consults his advisers or who wants to know what the people, however as a king he still decides in a sovereign way. One cannot say that the advisers, let alone the people, truly participate in politics of the king.

Participation belongs the democratic imaginary. Stating that the people rule, or should rule, is the same as stating that every member should have an equal share in political power. In this sense it should not come as a surprise that inventors of the word democracy, the ancient Greeks, favored a strong participatory democracy, at least for those who were considered to be free citizens. In contrast to contemporary understandings of democracy, the ancient Greeks did not consider elections to be the most important feature of democracy. For Aristotle, elections were characteristic for an aristocratic regime. A true democracy did not elect its leaders, but selected its leaders through lottery. Those who were appointed randomly to take up leading functions only did so for a short period of time in order to prevent corruption and concentration of power.

Whether lottery is a better selection mechanism than elections, is not the topic of this essay. Nor will we focus on the obvious shortcomings of Greek democracy (such as the existence of slavery and the exclusion from the political process of those who were considered non-citizens). What interests us here is that democracy has always been conceptually linked to political participation. In fact, for most political thinkers, going from Aristotle and Plato to Rousseau and Montesquieu, the concept of participatory democracy would have been tautological. Democracy was by its very nature participatory. Aristotle simply stated: “In democracies, everyone has a share in everything”.

As such, democracy and participation presuppose
equality, not only political equality but also social and economic equality. It cannot be considered a coincidence that Athenian democracy kicked off after a cancellation of debt and debt slavery, and a redistribution of land. In the sixth century BC Attica (the area around the city state of Athens) suffered from a severe social and economic crisis. The demand for agricultural products declined and farmers ended up in forms of debt slavery because they lent money with their own body as pledge. As a result social tensions rose and political reforms became necessary. It was Solon who cancelled debt slavery and who proposed the first democratic reforms by allowing more citizens to have a say in the political process.

The important lesson to be learned from this historical episode is that participatory democracy presupposes forms of social and economic equality, or at least no big differences between rich and poor. It was a device well known by Aristotle. There is clearly a class dimension in Aristotle conception of democracy. For example, he states that “Democracy is when those who do not own much property, but are poor, have authority in the system of government”. Or: “Democracy is when there is a majority of free, poor men who have authority to rule, while oligarchy is when it is in the hands of the wealthy and well-born, who are a minority”.

It was Karl Marx who re-emphasized this class dimension in democratic thinking in mid-nineteenth century Europe. What Marx painfully pointed at was that the poor men were not free under capitalism, that they did not have the authority to rule when power was indeed in hand of a wealthy and well-born minority. As such, bourgeois democracy was a farce since the majority was excluded from any kind of political participation. The basis for this political exclusion, however, was material in nature and had to do with the new economic organization called capitalism. One of the crucial problems with capitalism, according to Marx, was its tendency to destroy people’s autonomy. By privatizing the means of production, people lost their capacity to reproduce their own material resources. They had to go out and sell their labor power in order to get a wage that enabled them to buy things.

This fundamental critique can easily be reframed with regard to the commons. Where Marx points at is that the commons are enclosed and privatized under capitalism. The means of production, which enabled people to live relatively independent from both market and state, are no longer accessible. It follows that people become totally dependent of market and state for their own material reproduction. This, Marx claims, introduces a new type of slavery, a type of slavery that cannot be reconciled with the democratic ideal of citizens who participate in decision-making processes. Participation without a certain degree of material autonomy and freedom – which are provided by different types of commons – leads to a form of powerless consultation.

The welfare state was the historical answer to the problem of capitalism. It provided a certain degree of autonomy to its citizens by means of welfare redistribution and public institutions. However, since the late seventies we witness a growing disintegration of the welfare state, which results in growing inequality and poverty. With it, the quality of democracy diminished. The representative democracies we live in, have turned elections into processes of mere consultation and participation mechanisms such as trade unions, action groups and movements no longer have the power to really influence policy-making. Furthermore, a bunch of supranational institutions came into existence, which do not even pretend to be democratic. The IMF, the European Central Bank or the European Commission, none of them have directly elected representatives. They do not even consult. As such, participation or participatory democracy is as good as dead today.

The commons: reinventing participation?

When we look at the level of the city to this process, we witness similar tendencies. There is steady decline in participation in the sense that capital structures the urban reality and political decision making takes place in the backrooms of power, where politics and capital meet. Within the urban context the disintegration of the welfare state is highly visible: more and more groups are excluded from social and political rights, which
results in a sharp contrast between rich and poor. As a consequence, rising tensions and manifestations of general despair can be witnessed in urban contexts. Think in this regard of the violent outbursts in the suburbs of London and Paris, or simply the rise of homeless people in the streets. The renewed interest in the commons is an answer to the failing and disintegrating welfare state and the urban realities we live in. It serves as a contemporary, post-welfare state answer to the problem that capitalism poses. According to Michael Hardt, the logic of the commons neither responds to the logic of capitalism, nor to the one of socialism (in the broad sense). The (re)turn to the commons is an exploration of a third possibility: “We need to explore another possibility: neither the private property of capitalism nor the public property of socialism but the common in communism”. Massimo De Angelis adds: “Commons are a means of establishing a new political discourse that builds on and helps to articulate the many existing, often minor struggles, and recognizes their power to overcome capitalist society.

But how must this notion of the commons be defined and understood? Most authors agree that commons refer to any social configuration in which resources are shared, beyond market or state relationships. These resources can be both material (land, water, air, food, etc.) and/or immaterial (information, software-codes, art, etc.). This sharing of resources always presupposes some kind of community and acts within that community that reproduces the conditions under which resources can be shared. To the extent that a community shares its resources and must reproduce the conditions under which resources can be shared, the commons must be linked to participatory politics. Helfrich and Haas conclude:

“When we reflect on the commons, it expands the classic dichotomies of the haves and the have-nots, of owners and non-owners, of public and private to include the missing third element: the participants, co-owners and citizens within their communities. Awareness of co-ownership – as a relation of responsibility and participation by everyone – contrasts with the fundamental (social) division into owners and non-owners.”

In this quote, Helfrich and Haas connect commons and commonging with a political notion of participation. Indeed, sharing resources among the members of a community always involves a participatory process; otherwise the idea of sharing resources becomes unthinkable. To the extent that commons refer to types of collective management and the sharing of resources they presupposes a participatory way of acting among the commoners. As such, commons themselves depend on a form of internal participation and micro-politics. Urban commons create the conditions for participatory urbanism on a more, specific micro-level. The experience that commoners have with participatory and democratic practices trains them in developing a political and democratic attitude. Commons can thus be regarded as schools for a new participatory urbanism and the establishments of such commons should be stimulated.

If we want to transform the city (again) into a place where freedom is recreated, than the idea of the commons must be taken seriously. Not just as a social answer towards the declining welfare state but also, and maybe above all, as a means to recreate a tradition of participatory democracy. The kind of participatory democracy present in urban commons might also be a way in which participatory urbanism can be reinvented.
Endnotes

* This essay is written with Thomas Decreus and published in MONU magazine (Aernouts, N. & Decreus, T. (2015). Commons, Participatory Urbanism and Democratic Participation. MONU, (23), 72-75)
The images were drawn by Gerardo Cornejo during the general meeting of Community Land Trust Brussels that took place 4 March 2015 in the contemporary museum of modern art ‘Bozar’ during the event ‘We Traders’.

References

4

‘Designing’ commons
Exploring interplays with spatial design practice

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the commons debate engaging with space and spatial design by describing my own experiences in community-based design processes in two housing commons institutions in Brussels. Based on a literature review and an action research in a Community Land Trust housing project and a public space regeneration project in a housing cooperative, I argue that spatial designers can play an important role in commoning by mediating between urban inhabitants, civil society and institutions and by spatially articulating the social, cultural and environmental role of dwelling space. However, there is need for public support and flexibility in the institutional frameworks of spatial design execution in order to create room for such engagement.

4.1 Introduction

In addition to the legal framework and institutional design that underpin the production and reproduction of the commons, ‘space’ is conquering a position in the commons debate. Renowned commons scholars mentioning the role of space in developing and sustaining commons are significant in this respect. In a lecture series on urban commons, De Schutter, notable legal commons scholar, emphasized ‘it is necessary to grant spaces to people, in which people are motivated to invest themselves’ (Brussels Academy, May 2016). In her extensive list of new commons, including neighbourhood commons, Hess (2008, p.16) raises ‘the goldmine of new commons issues’ in the growing numbers of works on shared spaces. Bauwens, pioneer of the peer-to-peer economy, progressively addressing urbanism is another writing on the wall (Die ‘Commons’ Stadt: lasst uns das Prinzip ‘Gemeingut’ auf die Stadtplanung übertragen!, Berliner Gazette, June 2013).

Not surprisingly, architecture and planning researchers and professionals are also increasingly interested in the commons (Marcuse, 2009a; Stavrides, 2012 in An Architektur; Petcou & Petrescu, 2015). Commonly used and managed spaces beyond market or state relationships speak to their imagination of a ‘direct democracy’. The reasoning is that they hold the promise to shift control of spatial
production away from capital and state towards urban inhabitants. This is in line with the meaning of the Lefebvrian ‘right to the city’; the right of urban inhabitants to participate in the production and appropriation of space (Marcuse, 2009b; Purcell, 2002). Diverse labels have been created for the variety of self-organized initiatives and resistance strategies that shape these spaces, including insurgent practices, bottom-up planning, DIY architecture and commons urbanism. Examples can range from co-productive planning of neighbourhoods, the temporary occupation of abandoned buildings, collective water management systems and community gardens to co-operative dwelling forms.

Notwithstanding, within architecture and planning research both the relationship between spatial design and housing commons and its translation into practice remain obscured. There is lack of a coherent insight in the characteristics and preconditions that are supporting such relationship, while the role of spatial designers within commoning processes remains underdeveloped. The latter is particularly important, as in-depth knowledge on the context and preconditions of these processes can positively inspire other cases (Saija, 2014). Moreover, it can form ‘an opportunity to reformulate’, and ‘resuscitate’ spatial ‘practice’ (Till, 2005, p.21). This paper is an effort to contribute to this by shedding light on action research within 2 cohabitation projects. It therefore builds on (1) a literature review on congruencies between commoning and the sociology of space and spatial design theory; and (2) my own experiences in the design process in two forms of housing commons in the Brussels Capital Region (BCR). One experience is the co-design process of a Community Land Trust (CLT) housing project in Molenbeek, while the other is a public space regeneration process in a cooperative garden suburb in Evere.

In the following section I will theoretically approach congruencies between ‘commoning’, space and spatial designers. Three main issues will come to the fore: the political role of the spatial designer, an engagement with the social, cultural and environmental role of space and a focus on processes. After discussing the research context and methods in the third section, I will describe the two cases in the fourth section according to the three main issues in order to raise important questions and practical considerations about the role and methodologies of spatial designers in shaping housing commons. I will situate these cases within and outside various discourses on commons and spatial design, and explore following questions: In what ways were these three issues addressed? Which methods and tools were used?

4.2 Commons and spatial design

Commons are resources subject to collective control regarding access and use. For governing the use and disposition of these resources, arrangements are made. This implies that people have to organize themselves to reclaim resources as commons, and to negotiate their rules of access and use, assign responsibilities, make certain agreements and legal appointments to effectively manage the resource together. The
latter incorporates a process of ‘commoning’: practices of mutual help, collective trust, reciprocity and co-operation. Commoning, a term coined by Peter Linebaugh (2008), is thus the binding component that forges the social relationships between members of a community and the resources they share and manage. Building on the sociology of space, commons and architecture and planning theory, I define three main interplays between commoning, space and spatial design.

First, negotiating rules of access and use, assigning responsibilities and making agreements presuppose a participatory way of acting among commoners (Boillier, 2016). According to Helfrich and Haas (2009, p.15) this implies ‘expanding the dichotomy of the haves and have-nots, owners and non-owners, public and private to include the missing third element: the participants, co-owners and citizens within their communities’. Throughout spatial design history, a rich variety of methods and tools have been deployed to involve inhabitants in the conception of their living environment. They evolved from an ‘advocating’ role of spatial professionals - advocating the interests of a community - to a ‘consulting’ role of spatial professionals, in which the community is conferred into a more passive role. Participatory ways of acting in architecture and planning disciplines are currently regaining momentum (Krivy & Kaminer, 2013). Their planning origins can be traced back in advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965) and transactive planning (Friedman, 1973), which then evolved under different forms such as collaborative planning (Healey, 1997), justice planning (Fainstein, 2010), co-production planning (Watson, 2014) and empowerment planning (Saija, 2014). Architecture and theory on participation is less firmly rooted, including the civic survey of Patrick Geddes, the new social building typologies of the union of contemporary architects (OSA) of 1925 and community architecture in the US of the 1960s (Cooper & Sarkissian, 1986). Later examples range from the critique on the role of property in architectural production of Anarchitecture in 1971, claims for a more user-oriented urbanism of Giancarlo de Carlo (1992) and cooperative design in Scandinavia (Bodker, 1987). Although in many Western countries, the participatory stance has been inserted into the protocols of planning bureaucracy - for instance through the ‘neighbourhood contracts’ in Brussels and France and the ‘development advisory boards’ in Berlin - a more radical form of participation outside formal public consultation platforms has been advocated. Despite their ambitions and merits, participatory protocols have been scrutinized for depoliticizing conflict (Purcell, 2009) and facilitating pro-market developments (Swyngedouw et al., 2010). In the worst scenario, public participation has been applied to ‘increase the acceptability of the designer’ (Watts and Hirst, 1982, p.17 in Till, 2005), or ‘to persuade accepting decisions that have already been made’ (Pateman, 1970, p.68 in Till, 2005).

The explicit demands for more legitimate forms of democracy beyond state and market have led to the re-exploration of self-organizational spatial initiatives and resistance strategies. This coincides with the aggregation ‘spatial agency’ which is gaining ground in architectural theory (Doucet and Cupers, 2009). Spatial agency stands for a (revived) political engagement of spatial professionals. Such
professionals search for bonds with civil society, set up initiatives for claiming the right to the city, provide tools for action, initiate projects on abandoned sites or create bonds with specific communities. Instead of working for public authorities or private entities, they deploy their knowledge of architectural processes to empower people to take control over the spaces they inhabit (Schneider & Till, 2009). Promising as it may seem, while promoting equality, Swyngedouw (2005) and Uitermark (Sociale Vraagstukken, De gevaarlijke belofte van burgerschap 2.0, October 2012) have emphasized the reverse side of such intentions. Under the guise of strengthening citizenship, DIY initiatives and strategies are often promoted to hide the austerity policies, shrinking public services and more prominent role for the market that underlie it. Furthermore, initiatives deriving from the ‘creative class’ tend to impose cultural values and assumptions that do not necessarily meaningfully engage with the communities living in such neighbourhoods. As such, transferring goods and services to self-organized citizen initiatives may reproduce the inequality and segregation they fight against (Swyngedouw, 2005). From a commons perspective, spatial designers might therefore recognize the limits of their actions and question whether they disrupt or reinforce inequalities, effectively developing a participatory way of acting.

Second, if commoning is perceived as a social practice of a community in the course of (re)producing shared resources, spatial professionals engaging with commons should recognize the relation between space and social interactions. Considering the social role of space, means taking into account the diverse ‘patterns of use, appropriation, perception and significance’ of the physical infrastructure of space (Ryckewaert & Landuydt, 2007, p.9). These patterns are prominent issues in the social dynamics of commoning, and might be in conflict with the legal interpretation of ownership (Marx, 1867). According to Remy (2016), there is no unambiguous relationship between the physical infrastructure of space and patterns of individual and collective appropriation. ‘The social’, he argues, ‘acquires spatiality in the sense that it unfolds in space. In return, such unfolding marks social relationships and stabilizes them throughout time’ (Blanc, 2012, p.17). Once passive, as a reflector of social structures, once active, as a resource of in- or exclusion, several authors agree with this ‘inherent’ role of space, which is secondary to social behaviour but which is marked by unpredictability (Loeckx & Heynen, 2013; Ryckewaert & Landuydt, 2007).

The passive role of space on the one hand refers to the way social, political and cultural tendencies are translated in urban space. For instance, the different models of public housing throughout history are emblematic for their reflection of reigning existing social and political opinions (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2015). The active role of space on the other hand points at the way in which space can be used as a resource for developing new social or political relationships, bringing about tendencies of in- or exclusion. Public housing models such as the modernist grand ensembles can be perceived as ‘resources’ that determined self-representations and
sometimes actively created social-spatial fracture lines in the city. Similarly, certain spaces can serve as playing grounds for social innovation and community building. Architectural-ethnographic research has delivered evidence that certain spaces act as resources for fostering social interaction:

1. Public and community facilities such as community gardens, buses, sport fields and schools are important meeting places. The occasional meetings taking place in these spaces can facilitate dynamics of reciprocity and a culture of collective action (Remy, 2016; Hess, 2008; Linn, 2007);

2. Public spaces, places marked by flexibility and freedom of appropriation are equally important in this respect. According to Rémy (2016) these spaces have an undetermined sociability and accessibility. They can give a sense of a ‘home’ for surrounding residents, while creating a hospitable environment for passengers;

3. Interstitial spaces, created by blurred lines between open and closed, public and private, can provide opportunities for informal encounters. By using the metaphor of the seam – ‘we are not anymore in the forest, nor in the fields’ - Rémy (2016, p.32) links such spaces to productive uses. Stavrides (2010) calls such spaces ‘in-between’ or ‘porous’ spaces. Porous places, according to him, provide opportunities for informal encounter, creativity and new forms of collectivity, as such immediately linking space to processes of commoning;

4. Finally, ‘secondary spaces’ involve a form of sociability in the sense that they promote social transactions that involve subtle interplays of trust and defiance, solidarity and conflict (Remy, 2016). Their spatial composition evokes a game of ‘the hidden and shown’, ‘opacity and transparency’ and a sense of being elsewhere. Secondary spaces offer the possibility to take distance or escape from ordinary daily life and to do something ‘else’.

Commoning as a practice in which people come together to strengthen, manage, preserve or protect resources has a particular cultural and environmental implication. Treating the territory as a resource for commoning means to seek direct control over spheres of life such as the city, neighbourhoods, food, water and land. Beyond the spatial arrangements that facilitate such collective control, there are the cultural values related to the appropriation of the territory as a resource. As Boillier states, ‘whatever the shortcomings of any individual natural resource commons, its participants realize that they must work with them, not against them. Unlike markets, commoners do not treat the environment as an object or commodity, but as a dynamic living system that frames their lives’ (2016, 18). This logic nourishes personal and collective experiences that offer possibilities of entitlement and responsibility that go beyond market consumer logics (Petrescu, 2005). Similarly, the architect Vittorio Gregotti called on his colleagues to engage with the territory by ‘modifying, redoubling, measuring, situating and utilizing’ the territory (2012, p.341). Although ambiguous, herewith he promoted an architectural approach with great respect for the territory, including both natural and cultural components. Spatial designers engaging with commons might nourish such logic while ‘[resisting] the environmentally damaging and socially destructive aspects of capitalist development’ (Charley, 2008, p.160).
Third, claiming, producing, managing, sharing resources and reproducing commons are in the first place on-going processes of negotiation. Linebaugh turned the noun ‘commons’ into a verb to emphasize the fact that (re)producing the commons is an incessant activity and not an end product. In spatial design practice, this demands a shift from focusing ‘on designing objects to designing processes’ (Dzokic & Neelen, 2003, http://www.stealth.ultd.net/stealth/06_processmatter.html). Beyond the actual design, such shift implies imagining the different actors involved, the strategies, processes and events further down the line on which designers might only have a limited impact (Schneider & Till, 2009).

In what follows I will describe and explain the research in two community-based cohabitation projects. Throughout this narrative, I will elaborate on the different methods that were used to engage in housing commons as a spatial designer, drawing on the theoretical links between spatial design and commoning presented above.

4.3 Research context and methods

The first action research concerns the design process of ‘Vandenpeerenboom’, a collective housing project of 32 dwelling units and a neighbourhood facility on a vacant plot in Molenbeek (Figure 4.1). The plot used to accommodate a house and workshop. Its surrounding streets are bordered by a residential neighbourhood and a vacant strip along the little used Brussels’ west railway. The housing project is the pilot project of CLTB. Engaging with a non-speculative form of housing production by holding the building land in a trust and limiting resale rights for residents, CLTB can be considered as an institution managing housing commons. From the beginning, it has been supported by the BCR for this purpose, and subsidized in order to keep the dwellings affordable for low-income groups. Nonetheless, the organization is strongly committed to involve households in the design of their future dwelling. During the course of developing a housing project, it brings together future inhabitants and stakeholders to discuss and reflect on the design of the housing project.

In Vandenpeerenboom, CLTB organized these reflections and discussions around several types of meetings: design workshops, general meetings and advisory boards. Next to CLTB, social workers and architects of local associations are involved in the project in order to co-organize these meetings and to support each of the participating future inhabitants in their trajectory. The Housing Fund - an organization that facilitates the right to housing in Brussels - is another important stakeholder in the project as it grants loans to the households and acts as a building contractor. Subsidized by the Brussels Government, it was bound to the rules of the public tender to select a design-and-build team. The future architect did thus not take part in the reflections and discussions during the design workshops. Instead, architects of the associations worked as ‘intermediaries’ to co-develop a list of recommendations with future inhabitants for the public tender specification sheet.
They did this during 5 design workshops in which they were assisted by master students in sociology and architecture as part of their research. A second set of workshops was held after the public tender in order to evaluate the proposals of the different design-and-build teams. For this set of workshops, the future inhabitants were split up in 3 groups to evaluate the projects. Guided by a social worker and architect, each group focused on one theme in the evaluation: 'zero-energy standards,' 'cohabitation' and 'urban design.'

As a researcher and architect, I studied the internal documents of the first architecture workshops and co-organized the evaluation workshops between October 2014 and March 2015, dedicated to 'urban design.' Although I actively contributed to the content of the workshops, my participation was also a learning process in which I came into contact and practiced participatory tools and methods. In order to delve a bit deeper in the link between space and social relationships, I subsequently visited the inhabitants in their current house together with the graphic artist Sofie van der Linden. While interviewing the families on neighbourly relationships and patterns of private, collective and public appropriation in their current dwelling (environment), the graphic artist made sketches of the interior layout of the buildings, the architecture of the buildings, the decoration and personal objects in the room. She reconstructed these observations in pencil drawings. The inhabitants were given a disposable camera in order to take pictures of meetings places and places in and around the dwelling they most intensively use. To make future inhabitants aware about the patterns of collectivity within their current dwelling situation, the result of this research material was shown during a neighbourhood exhibition on the plot of the project.

The second action research concerns the development of a community-based public space rehabilitation process in an older form of housing commons: a post-war garden suburb in Evere, Brussels (Figure 4.1). In contrast to the CLT project that was granted financial support from the beginning, the rehabilitation process was marked by a bottom-up approach towards neighbourhood regeneration.

The approximately 300 households of the neighbourhood are social tenants as well as co-operators, meaning their neighbourhood is managed by a rental cooperative that is subject to the Brussels social housing legislation. Residents have a voice in the governing board and the general meetings of the rental cooperative. Despite some apartment blocks marking the Northern and Southern part, the neighbourhood consists of single-family houses with individual front and back gardens, alleyways and a longitudinal park, 'Le Mail de la Hacquenée,' that crosses the neighbourhood. As highlighted by these physical components and governance model, the neighbourhood is clearly inspired by the pre-WW2 garden suburbs built in the urban fringe of Brussels. This model is based on principles of shared land ownership, community life and tenant participation. Next to housing, the neighbourhood includes a kindergarten and community house. In the community house, residents are supported by 2 cultural workers to develop neighbourhood
activities such as homework classes, a knitting atelier, an exchange project with a local cooperative in Morocco, a world kitchen, creative workshops for children, a world kitchen, weekly clean-up actions by youngsters, beekeeping, vegetable gardening and composting. The latter activities are sustained by ‘Uni-Vert’, a group of inhabitants reuniting around ‘green’ projects.

Faced with security problems in the neighbourhood, since several years this group is sustained by the cultural workers and cooperative to develop a plan for neighbourhood regeneration. Although neighbourly relationships are relatively good, the area deals with typical problems such as a run-down outdoor space and certain ‘hotspots’ for illicit businesses and intergenerational conflicts. Above this, the longitudinal park includes some diseased trees, which have to be replaced. To recharge the park, they organized events such as picnics, drawing ateliers, petanque, a cabin for children. However, they lacked the spatial knowledge to take these activities to a next level.

In this action research, I took a more prominent role. I first did a similar exercise with the inhabitants like in the CLT research: they were interviewed about social relationships within the neighbourhood, asked to reconstruct their daily and weekly movements, and handed over a disposable camera. Then, together with spatial designers and an anthropologist I ‘initiated’ and ‘steered’ a co-design process with the cultural workers and Uni-Vert. Between October 2015 and June 2016, we organized workshops, assemblies, informal meetings and activities in order to structure the design trajectory. The workshops were organized during three weekends: one weekend, a collective analysis was made. This was followed by a second weekend in which the main guidelines of the plan were developed. The third workshop was dedicated to shaping the guidelines into a number of actions.

4.4 Empirical evidence

‘Organizing’ participation?

Both projects opted for the method of the workshop in order to involve (future) residents in the design of their dwelling space and living environment. This is in contrast to a body of self-organized initiatives in participatory urbanism that advocate a direct-action approach. These initiatives denounce the design workshop as an expert-driven, value-laden process that creates inequalities between designers and communities. Brooke (2013, p.25) for instance states that the design workshop ‘does not meet our present definition of participatory urbanism, in which incremental, tangible, immediate actions are paramount over (en)visioning and conceptual speculation’. In contrast, in the context of these two projects, workshops were important moments in the design trajectory to ‘organize’ the participatory design.

First, it was in line with the participatory governance culture of both cases, which reunite stakeholders around organized general meetings, events
and management committees. For the development of the CLT project, the non-profit organization ‘Arc en Ciel’ was established, with the related general meetings, consultation meetings and follow-up committees specific to such organization. In the Destrier project ‘joint venture’ was the name that emerged to underline the fact that we wished to move away from the traditional delineation of ‘architect’ and ‘client’.

Second, the inequalities related to different professional backgrounds and cultures were taken as a starting point and regarded as an added value. During the workshops, smaller groups composed of (future) residents, social workers and architects worked together in order to each bring in information from a different perspective. This work was followed by a restitution moment with the entire group to exchange the ideas that were expressed. Working in smaller groups stimulated mutual help and trust, and allowed the participants to speak up and share conflicting visions. The latter were alternated with joint visions at particular moments in time.

In the Destrier project, the mutual trust gained throughout the sequence of workshops and informal meetings was important for us as designers, in order to avoid the feeling of being ‘intruders’ in the neighbourhood. During these workshops and meetings, we shared informal breakfasts, lunches, dinners and a film screening during which we had ‘ordinary conversations’ (Figures 4.2). These conversations around the table uncovered personal stories and neighbourly relationships within the neighbourhood, while positioning equality between the residents, cultural workers and us. As Ross states, they ‘presume in its interlocutor an equality of intelligence rather than an inequality of knowledge’ (Ross, 1991). Similarly, for Rancière (2010, p.22 in Boano & Kelling, 2013, p.45), equality is about listening to the voices of ‘the oppressed’ as equals; it is ‘not an end-state but a starting point that requires a constant verification in an open and experimental logic operating from the outside-in’. Although we were not constantly present in the neighbourhood, we had our temporary office in the community house, slept in one of the social housing during the weekends and spent a lot of time in the neighbourhood. At the same time, we also familiarized inhabitants with our profession, by learning them certain spatial design methods and tools. We deemed it necessary for them to understand the way a spatial design process takes shape and plans are being made. Inhabitants were supported to take notes and pictures, to draw on tracing paper, to read aerial pictures, to build a scenario and develop a vision. They were also actively stimulated to take up their voice and explain the project to other stakeholders such as the aldermen of the municipality and the director of the cooperative.

Also in the CLT project, future inhabitants learned to speak out, to read plans, to detect different functions, to read minimal dimensions of dwelling spaces, to scrutinize the spatiality of certain configurations and to understand the different steps involved in the building process. Teaching these architectural tools seemed self-evident. They would be involved in assessing all projects submitted by the public tender and were confronted with the complexity of the building process at several moments in time.
Informal meetings and conversations were of major importance during both co-design processes in order to socialize and to build mutual trust. During the participatory workshops, (future) inhabitants were familiarized with urban design tools. By working in smaller groups, the participants (architects, social workers and (future) inhabitants) were supported to speak up and to express conflicting visions.
Finally, the format of the workshop proved to be a suitable way to reunite the diverse group of designers, social workers, (future) residents, neighbourhood inhabitants and institutions who do not necessarily have links with activist environments and who are only able to dedicate a limited amount of time in the projects. In line with Stavrides (2012, p.16 in An Architektur) in both projects ‘the exclusionary gesture to understand space as belonging to one community’ was rejected. In the Destrier project on the one hand, the group of active participants (Uni-Vert) is relatively small in comparison with all stakeholders. In order to legitimize our actions, during the workshops we created low-threshold participation opportunities for anyone who was interested. The workshops consisted of design studios and open meetings. The design studios were dedicated to those that were willing to actively contribute to the project, while the open meetings offered occasions for other residents to see and to react upon the work we were developing. In order to ensure visibility, the latter were organized outside in le Mail, the longitudinal park cutting through the neighbourhood. Publicity for these events was made by developing playful flyers, a newspaper and posters and through digital communication platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and email (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). The format of the design studios and open meetings were particularly successful in forging connections and collaborations between these different participants. Moreover, they stimulated new intergenerational and intercultural contacts among neighbourhood inhabitants and officials, which even surprised the cultural workers.
The CLTB workshops on the other hand, which deal with the co-design of a housing project for a defined group, predominantly involved future inhabitants. Nonetheless, the institutional set-up of CLTB envisages a participation of non-inhabitants as well. For a limited yearly fee, everyone can become a member of CLTB and consequently join and vote in the general meetings. Next, for each project the organization tries to integrate non-residential functions in collaboration with neighbourhood associations. In the case of the Vandenpeerenboom project, local associations were regularly consulted to discuss this issue.

In short, in the two projects the ‘weaknesses’ of the workshop were taken into account and turned into an opportunity, forging connection between different types of stakeholders, involving participants in the set-up of the workshops through formal and informal meetings between and during the workshops, creating awareness of the tools and methods everyone could bring in, and involving both (future) residents and outsiders.

Addressing the social, cultural and environmental role of space

In both the collective housing and public space regeneration workshops, space was seen as a resource for facilitating social encounters and sustainable practices, albeit with different accents.

As the Vandenpeerenboom building concerns a newly built project, it was not possible to address existing patterns of use or appropriation. However, in the workshops preceding the public tender of the CLT project, sensibilities and preferences regarding public, collective and private spaces were discussed. During the first workshop, Arc en Ciel visited the neighbourhood of the project site. In small groups, they discovered the architecture of the neighbourhood, the public and green spaces, social services, schools, cultural and commercial spaces and sports facilities. Each group was equipped with a plan of the neighbourhood, a notebook and a camera. The strengths and weaknesses for each theme were written down and photographed and presented by the ‘reporters’ of each group at the end of the day. During two other workshops, in which collective housing projects were presented and visited, the architecture of collective facilities, the impact of the dwelling within the neighbourhood and the organization of the house and meeting
points were dealt with. The last workshop was entirely dedicated to synthesizing specificities and preferences regarding cohabitation (Figures 4.5).

The resulting recommendations show an intention to provide ground for neighbourhood encounters, to speak a similar architectural language like the houses in the street and to develop environmental activities. For instance, the recommendation to have ‘a set-back of the facade and an enlargement of the street’ (Licata et al., 2013, p.15) can be interpreted as a desire to create a buffer zone or ‘in-between’ realm puncturing the strict division between the street and the private dwelling units. Together with the ‘facility for the neighbourhood’ (p.35) and the ‘meeting room’ both ‘[consolidating] and [reinforcing] relationships’ between the inhabitants and ‘[permitting] to develop neighbourhood activities’ (p.15), the emphasis on porous boundaries show how the future residents conceive their community in close relationship with the neighbourhood. However, the document remains quite general at that point. A reflection on the current dwellings of the households, their inscription in the neighbourhood and patterns of individual and collective appropriation, could have possibly led to more specific guidelines. The interviews and pictures taken by different interviewees revealed a rich variety of gradations of contact points between public, collective and private spaces: paved paths to apartment blocks, bordered grass patches, entrance doors, the letter box, the bay next to the elevator, the rug in front of the entrance door where neighbours chat while wiping their feet, blinded rooms (Figures 4.6). On the other hand, several households hold very intensive contacts with their neighbours - by babysitting, by doing groceries for one another, by caring for ill neighbours and through chats in front of their doors - in places that do not necessarily anticipate on this. This highlights the relative importance of more specific guidelines for spatial configurations engaging with future social relationships. In this perspective, being the most obvious source of information for the participants, the pictures of their current dwelling situations could have been used as a tool to discuss the strengths and limits of living arrangements and shared spaces rather than evidence to strictly interpret.

Remarkably, the fact that the list of recommendations addresses social relationships beyond the housing project seems to be an opportunistic choice as well. The list states that ‘knowing each other’ could reduce ‘feelings of insecurity’, in the same way collective infrastructure such as internet, television, water and low-energy construction techniques should ‘reduce economic expenses’ (p.35). Ideas for ‘environmental actions’ such as rubbish cleaning in the street, a ‘collective vegetable garden’ and ‘rainwater recuperation’, nevertheless express a commitment to develop small-scale quotidian practices contributing to a more sustainable and sociable living environment. It’s important to notice that such commitment could be biased through the influence of the social workers and architects. Indeed, the list of recommendations is in the first place the result of a collective work, with cross-pollination between all actors.
Fig 4.5
Recapitulation Vandenpeereboom workshops (see Annex 8):
1. ‘Decouverte du quartier’;
2. ‘Initiation à l’architecture’;
3. ‘Visites de projets construits’;
4. ‘Logement ideal’;
5. ‘Vivre ensemble’
Taking place in an existing context, another approach was used for the public space regeneration project in Destrier. The abundance of green spaces, such as alleyways, a longitudinal green strip and a park offer a pleasant environment for children plays, daily walks and sports activities. The community house and the children football pitch provide important infrastructures for encounter. While adults, elderly and children mainly sustain the activities in the community house, the football pitch works as a magnet for youngsters. At the football pitch, they do small exercises and play matches with friends or youngsters from social estates nearby. Furthermore, the gardens of the houses have a particular importance for the cooperative residents. They do not own their house, but have a strong freedom in the design of their outdoor space. Some inhabitants have a modest oversized terrace or lawn, while others created a fishpond, hold chicken, invested in rainwater recuperation and developed permaculture gardens (Figures 4.7). The different patterns of use, appropriation, perception and significance of the dwelling environment were important lines of enquiry during the first workshop in which...
a collective diagnosis of the site was made. During this workshop, personal and collective narratives within the neighbourhood were unfolded. The first evening was dedicated to grasp some first impressions and immediate needs of residents, by asking them the simple question: ‘What do you like’ and ‘What do you dislike’? This helped to perceive some issues the users of the outdoor space in the neighbourhood are dealing with.

During the design studio of the second day, three groups consisting of both residents, cultural workers and spatial designers discussed the themes property, identity and landscape. With the theme property, we wanted to explore the conflicting relationship between ‘the legal and perceived ownership’ of a place (Walker, 1994, p.83). The theme identity scrutinized historical and cultural representations of certain spaces within the neighbourhood, while the theme landscape was dedicated to understanding its productive and natural characteristics. The themes were investigated by collectively visiting, discussing, photographing and tracing specific locations that related to the theme according to each member (Figures 4.8,
The resulting conversations and drawings revealed some important landscape structures and reference points, while uncovering similar or conflicting interests in different spaces. For instance, a cultural worker part of the ‘ownership’ group took the rest of the group to the alleyways, explaining that for him, these alleyways opened up opportunities for more creative ways of wandering through the area. A woman responded that, although one alleyway was located behind her garden and provided a welcome variation to her daily walk with the dog, it made her feel uncomfortable as it served as a route of escape for thieves. Hereupon a youngster described how he used to follow the pathway as a teenager when he once stole someone’s purse. The bushes allowed to change clothes and to hide the purse, while hindering access by police cars. By explaining this practice that he had carried out several times, the others started to perceive the act of stealing as a rascal trick, rather than a crime. Sharing this information to one another and hearing the positive and negative connotations related to the themes helped to overcome prejudices about a space and the quotidian practices that shape it.

The following day of the workshop was dedicated to future projections and scenarios. We did this by inviting the workshop participants to imagine a new future of the neighbourhood, first by exploring their personal vision for the neighbourhood on a limited piece of paper, then by developing 2 possible scenarios for the neighbourhood. Keeping in mind the themes and issues we touched upon the former day, we asked the two opposing questions ‘what if Destrier would become a more isolated neighbourhood’ and ‘what if Destrier would be more strongly connected to the surrounding urban tissue’? While not necessarily agreeing, two teams were invited to invent arguments to highlight the potentials of each question. Afterwards both groups defended their arguments for a ‘tribunal’. By searching for arguments for both seemingly simple questions, the groups were forced to think beyond their own prejudices and representations of the neighbourhood. It allowed new stories and future uses to be imagined and projecting their spatial consequences, which helped to develop a vision with relevance to a wider user.
community.

Between the first and second workshops, both Uni-Vert and us got down to work. While the members of Uni-Vert did a survey on site, we developed a macro analysis, scrutinizing the landscape, historic geography and mobility (Figures 4.10). The macro-analysis uncovered the ‘central location’ of the area, along a historically developed ribbon development and in-between the expansion of the centre of Brussels and a small hamlet. Due to this central location, people live in walking distance from schools, commerce, social services and public transport. The green space in the neighbourhood, notably the mail, is part of a green promenade that surrounds Brussels, which combines regional parks, a bicycle network, neighbourhood parks and semi-public lawns. These semi-public lawns are part of homogeneous post-war developments composed of row houses and apartment blocks that filled in the gaps between the historic urbanization. To the south of the ribbon development, workshops and small factories do the same.

The guidelines of the masterplan developed during the second workshop
Destrier is located between the 19th century city expansion of Brussels, the hamlet Paduwa and, a little bit further the municipality of Evere. Many commercial activities soon found their way to the secondary road that connects the city centre and Paduwa. The public transport is organised according to the triangle created by the 3 centres. Today, the former meadows are mainly occupied by SMEs, offices (between the secondary road and artery road) and relatively homogeneous and green residential neighbourhoods. Destrier is part of a sequence of such neighbourhoods, which are connected by local streets and pathways.
include the valorisation of a bicycle network and some important nodes in the north, south and middle of the estate. These nodes are located at the intersection of the Mail and the roads and pathways that prolong the streets in the neighbourhood. For the more frequently used nodes in the north and south of the estate, the guidelines project a better connection to adjacent bus stops and the rehabilitation of a football field in order to relieve pressure from the football pitch. Between the less frequently used nodes and next to the alleyway between the backyards of residents and neighbours, the guidelines mark spaces for collective investment. In these spaces the ‘intermediate’ and ‘secondary’, as theorized by Remy (2016), seem to coincide. While they offer an important ‘counterspace’ for youngsters to escape from everyday life, due to a blurred legal status and spatial components such as a badly implemented football pitch, bushes and hedges they provoke social transactions of defiance and conflict rather than solidarity and trust. However, due to their dimensions, non-functionality and ‘in-between’ status - between forest and field, between pathway and park - they also allow for new spatial articulations that rebalance the social transactions. These new spatial articulations build on the productive uses of the private garden, the creative workshops for young children and the environmental activities promoted in the community house. Caring for the vegetable gardens, beehives and compost offers important individual and collective benefits such as meeting opportunities, entitlement, and leisure. The tangible results create a great sense of motivation and devotion. Dedicating spaces to similar activities can allow to multiply the use of these spaces and to actively encourage others to appropriate the space.

The issue of time

The participatory trajectories of the two projects under study here were carried out during a long time-span. In order to monitor the outcome of the design process, both dealt with a form of institutionalization.

Regarding the CLT project, the integration of the recommendations in the public tender could be perceived as an institutionalization of the participatory design process. Indeed, several aspects were included in the tender specifications. Among the most notable were the collective garden, ‘which should maintain and strengthen contact between residents, and more specifically between children and adults, and which should include rest and meeting zones’ (Fonds du Logement, 2014, p.16). The collective circulation spaces had to ‘improve the quality of life of the future residents and stimulate contacts between residents, without serving as a source of conflict due to noise nuisances’ (p.14).

Notwithstanding, the tender also had serious limitations. First, there were no clear agreements about the impact of the evaluation of Arc en Ciel for the criterion ‘urban design and architecture’. This criterion forms one of the 5 evaluation criteria used by the building contractor, with an equivalence of 40%. In this case, problems did not arise, as the evaluation made by both Arc en Ciel
and the Housing Fund led to the selection of 1 design-and-build team. However, if this would not have been the case, the legitimacy of the outcome could have been questioned.

Second, some concerns expressed in the list of recommendations made by Arc en Ciel were not included in the tender specifications. One of them is the image of the building in the street and the neighbourhood. As some future residents stated during the evaluation workshops, the facade of the winning project ‘looks like a prison’. While indicated in the list that there should be a dialogue with the street and the neighbourhood, the two opposing volumes of the winning project are not particularly successful in creating an interface with the street. Except for outdoor circulation corridors on different levels, the facade has little architectural refinement and doesn’t refer to the historical context of the site or the 19th century town houses in the streets. At street level, passengers don’t get a glimpse of what is happening inside the building core. Other projects were more interesting in this respect (Figures 4.11, 4.12). By creating vertical segments in the facade and softly varying the colours, one project gives the impression of consisting of several analogous houses. The slightly cantilevered terraces in these vertical strips refer to the balconies of the town houses. In contrast to the upper floors, the entrance at street level gives a more collective face to the building, due to two large cut-outs with collective functions along it that arrive in the inner courtyard. Both cantilevered terraces and cut-outs puncture the boundaries of the facade, creating porosity. This inner courtyard is yet less spacious than the one of the winning project, which has the largest surface and which is illuminated by the meandering white brick facades. The individual apartments of the winning project are also better organized. For future inhabitants, especially the separation between the kitchen and the living room of the winning project is an added value. This preference was however not included in the project brief of the Housing Fund. Arguably, a more detailed summary of the workshops or the inclusion of the list of recommendations
as an annex to the tender specifications could have led to project proposals that addressed these criteria more adequately.

In the Destrier project—which relies on research funding and voluntary efforts and not on immediate government support—as spatial designers we had to imagine events further down the line on which we will just have a limited impact. For this reason, we came up with an action plan instead of a fixed masterplan for the site. For each action, we developed a fiche with guidelines for the interventions. These guidelines include images on the concept and potential elaboration of the interventions, the different actors that should be contacted, the estimated cost of the intervention and the different steps to take. Structuring the design into a number of actions allows incrementally investing the public space: residents can do small-scale interventions with small grants from the region, while larger investments can be undertaken with the support of the municipality, the housing cooperative or the region. In order to give force to this action plan, during the last workshop several actions were 'activated'. Horses were placed on the 'Mail de la Hacquenée' (literately translated: public promenade of the amble horse), to refer to the name of the linear park; signs were added under the names of the street to highlight the origins of the quarter, a shooting range; on one of the nodes, temporary street furniture was created with wooden pallets. These temporary interventions were particularly successful in attracting passengers and outsiders. Several people asked about our activities and proposed to lend a hand.

By involving the municipal, cooperative and regional stakeholders in each stage of the project and inviting them for each workshop, we ensured a continuous feedback on the project and tried to develop a support base for continuing the project in the future. The larger investments that need their support will however be subject to the public tender rule as well. It remains to be seen whether the action plan and its designers will be involved once such public tender would be organized. Either way, the smaller interventions are embedded within the community house organization and will be discussed and organized during the monthly management committees. As architects, we will be less involved, but still be present during these meetings to support the decisions that are made and to help to design certain actions.

Such continuous, intensive and often voluntary engagement of spatial designers, researchers and social workers shows another important process-related aspect. It was a subsidized community centre that employs architects and social workers and relies on voluntary efforts of students that developed the CLT model and initiated the Vandenpeerenboom project. In the Destrier project, the regeneration project was enabled through the involvement of cultural workers of the community centre and voluntary efforts of an anthropologist and spatial designers keen to learn more on this matter. I was able to contribute to both projects within the framework of my action research. The collaboration between universities, interested spatial professionals and community centres brings back memories of the community design centres of the 1960s, linking architectural education with
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community building. In line with the ‘living lab’ approach, such centres could create environments to practice knowledge building and to experiment with and strengthen commoning practices.

4.5 Conclusion

I started this paper by pointing at the increasing links that are drawn between the theory of the commons and spatial research and practice, which remain blurred in academic publications and architectural essays. This paper is an attempt to bring both together by delving into scientific literature on commoning and spatial practice and by presenting an action research within two types of housing commons: a Community Land Trust project and a public space regeneration project in a rental cooperative neighbourhood. This action research draws on my own experiences as a spatial professional. Within scientific literature, I found 3 main themes linking commoning and spatial practice: (1) a participatory way of acting; (2) reinforcing the social, cultural and environmental role of space and (3) focusing on processes. Within the course of the action research, I tested different methodologies and tools that address these themes, leading to three main findings.

First, making agreements about the use of aspects of the environment as a collectively shared and used resource - commoning - presupposes a participatory way of acting. In my practical experience in housing commons, spatial designers can contribute to commoning by treating all actors as equal participants (Boillier, 2016), each providing relevant knowledge in the course of the design process. Important to stress is that ‘equal’ in this case, means an equality of ‘intelligence’ rather than an equality of ‘knowledge’. Only by recognizing differences between the knowledge of spatial professionals, communities and other stakeholders an imposition of false equality might be overcome. Naturally, the participation of powerless communities not automatically implies equal decision-making processes (Saija, 2014). In the two projects, therefore, as spatial professionals we actively encouraged (future) inhabitants to take initiative and give their opinion during workshops and feedback moments with other stakeholders. In order to enable them to do this, we made them familiar with spatial design, the tools that are used and the processes it involves. In this respect, commoning within spatial design practice seems most related to ‘empowerment planning’, in which people’s capacity of acting outside the influence of dominant discourses is strengthened (Saija, 2014).

Second, during the course of the design process, (future) inhabitants on their part can bring in relevant knowledge notably on the second and third theme: the social, cultural and environmental role of space. Regarding this, Remy (2016) mentions the ambiguous relationship between space and patterns of individual and collective appropriation, but does recognize that space can function as a resource for in- and exclusion. In a commons perspective, relationships between people and spaces that enforce social capital and entitlement can be perceived as resources for inclusion. In the Destrier regeneration project, we could grasp such
relationships through our long-during presence on site, by discussing them during workshop exercises, over the course of informal meetings and by co-developing interventions on site. In order to get more in-depth information on expectations and preferences regarding their future dwelling, in the newly built CLT project, participants’ neighbourly relationships, volunteering activities and hobbies in their current habitat could have been explicitly articulated during the workshops.

Third, Linebaugh developed the term ‘commoning’ in order to emphasize that developing and reproducing commons is an on-going activity. In spatial design practice, it implies taking into account the events further down the line after the participatory design process. While empowering participants was a key aspect in order to ensure a good continuation of both projects, there is need for adapted legal design frameworks and structural institutional and spatial support as well. When governments are involved through (necessary) subsidies, an adaptation of the public tender - in which inhabitants are recognized as an official evaluator - proves to be necessary in order to legitimize the intensive participatory process that precedes it. Another precondition is the on-going support of the institutions and places in which such projects takes place. The institutional structure of the two projects enabled to embed the design process in the existing participatory governance culture, while the flexibility and resilience of the existing spatial layout of the regeneration project still allows inhabitants to do interventions and activities on their own. These characteristics of housing commons serve as important learning schools for spatial designers dealing with co-design processes (Aernouts & Decreus, 2015).

Finally, both projects nevertheless proved that such co-design processes require a demanding and long-term engagement of all stakeholders and spatial professionals. Regarding this on-going engagement, the university could take up a notable role. For instance, higher education programs such as architecture and urbanism have a long tradition on ‘embedded research’, through the organization of design workshops or design studios that deal with urban or rural issues. Such workshops and studios tend to involve policy-makers, specialists, investors and civil stakeholders in their process, in order to have an impact on their agenda (Cox, 2014). In a context in which practices beyond state- and market gain importance, action research and workshops within existing community struggles can offer a valuable research methodology to study, engage with and empower such practices. Similar to the community design centres, social and spatial science education programs could combine research, teaching and training with a service to the wider community, familiarizing students with their political position from an early stage in their career. However, recalling Swyngedouw (2005) and Uitermark (2012), in order to not reproduce the inequalities they are fighting against, such collaborations should not be promoted at the expense of but rather reclaim the need of public support.
References

IBGE. Le Maillage Vert. Bruxelles-Capitale: IBGE.


Here we build a collective housing project
Building sign Vandenpeereboom

15 March 2017, the members of Arc en Ciel presented the building sign of their collective housing project in the presence of the eldersmen of Molenbeek. The presentation took place during a neighbourhood party at the Vandenpeereboom parcel. The building sign is the result of a creative atelier I organised together with Sofie van der Linden for the children of Arc en Ciel, the future inhabitants of the Vandenpeereboom project. More than showing their representation of the different appartments, interiors and terraces, the building sign reveals their aspirations and expectations towards living within the collective housing project.
Ici se construit le projet Arc-en-Ciel qui prévoit :

- 32 LOGEMENTS
- JARDIN COLLECTIF
- LOCAL ASSOCIATIF POUR VIE FÉMININE

Le projet est basé sur le principe de Community Land Trust.
Le Community Land Trust Bruxelles est une asbl qui œuvre pour une ville plus équitable en donnant la possibilité à des familles à faible revenu d’acquérir des logements abordables. En séparant la propriété du sol de la propriété du bâti, il est possible de vendre le logement à un prix plus bas.

Différents partenaires travaillent main dans la main pour réaliser ce projet : le groupe Arc-en-Ciel, composé des familles qui vont venir habiter ici, Vie Féminine, le Community Land Trust Bruxelles, le Fonds du Logement, l’asbl Bonnevie, le CIRE et l’asbl Convivence.

"NOUS CONSTRUISONS UN PROJET COMMUN POUR DES LOGEMENTS QUI NOUS CORRESPONDENT, QUI RÉPONDENT VRAIMENT AUX BESOINS DES FAMILLES. MAIS Ç’EST UN PROJET COMMUNAUTAIRE, NOUS SOMMES ENSEMBLE POUR UN MEME PROJET."

Pour plus d’info : www.cltr.br

Hier bouwen we aan het project Arc-en-Ciel, dat zijn :

- 32 WONINGEN
- EEN GEMEENSCHAPPelijke Binnenstad
- EEN VERENIGINGSLOKAAL VOOR DE VZW VIE FÉMININE

Het project is gebaseerd op het Community Land Trust principe.

Een Community Land Trust is een vereniging die werkt aan een rechtvaardige stad, door gezinnen met een laag inkomen de kans te geven een betaalbare woning te kopen. Door de eigendom van de grond te splitsen van de eigendom van de woning wordt het mogelijk om de woningen aan een lagere prijs te verkopen. Zo werken we ook aan een betere buurt.

Verschillende partners werken hand in hand samen om dit project te realiseren: de groep Arc-en-Ciel, samengesteld uit de families die hier zullen komen wonen, Vie Féminine, Community Land Trust Brussel, het Woningfonds van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, Buurthuis Bonnevie, CIRE en Convivence/Samenleven.

"WE WERKEN SAMEN AAN EEN PROJECT VOOR WONINGEN DIE BIJ ONZER PASSEN. WE BEANTWOORDEN AAN DE NODEN VAN ONZE GEZINNEN. MAAR HET IS EEN GEMEENSCHAPPELIJK PROJECT, WE WOONEN SAMEN AAN EEN PROJECT."

Meer info : www.cltr.br
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Pour plus d’info:

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Het project is gebaseerd op het Community Land Trust principe. Een Community Land Trust is een vereniging die werkt aan een rechtvaardige stad, door gezinnen met een laag inkomen de kans te geven een betaalbare woning te kopen. Door de eigendom van de grond te splitsen van de eigendom van de woning wordt het mogelijk om de woningen aan een lagere prijs te verkopen. Zo werken we ook aan een betere buurt.

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Meer info:
Endnotes

* This essay is written with Thomas Decreus and published in MONU magazine (Aernouts, N. & Decreus, T. (2015). Commons, Participatory Urbanism and Democratic Participation. MONU, (23), 72-75)
The images of the drawing workshop, the drawings and poster were created by Sofie van der Linden. The images of the neighbourhood party were taken by Soussi Driss of Arc en Ciel.
How do you imagine your neighbourhood?

Action plan Mail de la Hacquénée / Destrier

Between October 2015 and June 2016, I joint forces with a collective of residents (Uni-vert), cultural workers and spatial designers (Buro Brak (Jeanne Mosseray, Bianca Fanta, Koen van den Troost, Cecilia Furlan and Yen van der Voort)) to develop a plan for revitalizing the public space of the neighbourhood Destrier. The plan was conceived to take the efforts and actions of residents and cultural workers to revalorize the outdoor space, notably le Mail de la Hacquénée, to a next (spatial) level. Le Mail de la Hacquénée is a pedestrian thoroughfare that crosses the neighbourhood. Located between dead-end roads, for several years the thoroughfare has been associated with illicit traffics and sentiments of insecurity.

During workshops, assemblies, informal meetings and brainstorm sessions, an ‘action plan’ originated. This ‘action plan’ is conceived as an instrument to guide the revitalization through a number of small, medium and large actions (see Annex 10 for the full version).
Comment imaginez-vous
LE MAIL DE LA HACQUÉNÉE?

LIVRET DU MASTER PLAN
«ESPACES PUBLICS DESTRIER»

ASSOCIATION MOMENTANÉE:
UNI-VERT, BURO BRAK ET PARTENAIRES

VERSION 03 / 07-09-2016
1. Ce livre est l’aboutissement de plusieurs mois de travail de l’association momentanée Burobrak et Linsert. Ce livre est pour vous, l’architecte et le citoyen, et peut vous servir de guide pour la recherche de votre lieu dans le futur.

L’idée de l’association momentanée est née de la volonté de travailler ensemble, de réaliser un projet qui pourrait prendre racine dans le quartier et être le reflet des ambitions de son territoire. Ce projet a été conçu comme un lieu de débat, d’échange, de rencontre, de réflexion, de partage et d’action. Il a permis de mobiliser des acteurs, des professionnels, des citoyens, des habitants, de créer un espace de dialogue, de construire un projet collectif.

2. Ce projet a pour objectif de rédiger un texte qui visera à diffuser l’idée de l’association momentanée et de la sensibiliser auprès des habitants. Ce livre sera dédié à la recherche de l’association momentanée et de son rôle dans le développement du quartier. Il sera une introduction à la recherche de l’association momentanée et de son rôle dans le développement du quartier.

3. Ce livre a pour but de sensibiliser les habitants à l’importance de la coopération et de l’échange dans le quartier. Il sera un outil pour développer des projets collectifs et pour encourager la participation des habitants.

4. Ce livre a pour objectif de sensibiliser les habitants à l’importance de l’association momentanée et de leur montre qu’elle peut être un véritable outil pour le développement du quartier.
TRADUCTION DES INTENTIONS:
UNE ILLUSTRATION

Ce plan masse représente une illustration de la manière dont l’association réunifiée Uni
Vert/Brak envisage/imagine la traduction des intentions en réalité action.

Ces propositions pourraient être amendées à changer avec le temps et en fonction des nouvelles opportunités d’investissement ou de développement des coopérateurs du quartier, de la Commune d’Evere, et de la société Comensia.

Au jour d’aujourd’hui, c’est de cette manière que nous traduisons au mieux les volontés et intentions du travail qui a été réalisé au cours des 3 week-end de coproduction.

Ce livret se voulant être adaptatif et valable dans le temps, ce master plan (illustration ci-contre) devra/pourra être remis en question, alors que le plan précédent (plan d’intentions) reprenait des options plus générales et est immuable.
LA COMMUNE D’EVERE:
Via le service de Développement durable, la commune soutient l’Uni-Vert et le projet Mail. Via le service d’urbanisme une proposition d’aménagement a déjà été faite. Cette proposition est étudiée par les habitants de Destrier, et servira de support aux premiers débats et dessins.
Personne de contact: <smaury@evere.irisnet.be>, <achabbi@evere.irisnet.be>

COMENSIA/HOME FAMILIAL BRUXELLOIS (COGELO):
Le Home Familial soutient la démarche des locataires-coopérateurs et freine les ambitions et projets pour le Mail émanant d’initiatives extérieurs aux locataires-coopérateurs. Il souhaiterait que ce soit les habitants qui soient à la manœuvre du projet.
Personne de contact: Fabrice Lorne <fabrice.mqdestrier@gmail.com>, Pierre Hargot <Pierre.Hargot@homefambxl.be>, Mercedes D’Hoop <Mercedes.D hoop@homefambxl.be>

SLRB
Le SLRB doit soutenir tous les travaux d’architecture et d’infrastructure qui sont exécutés à Destrier, il est important de les inclure dans cette démarche.
Personne de contact: Lasri Salma <slasri@slrb.irisnet.be>

PCS:
Accompagne l’Uni-Vert dans toutes les démarches liées à l’organisation des réunions, les animations, les activités, l’administration et les dossiers BXL environnement.
Personne de contact: Youen Arts <pcsevere.mqdestrier@gmail.com>

LA TEAM PROPRETÉ 1140:
La Team Propreté, est composée de jeunes habitants du quartier, elle s’occupe des dépôts clandestins dans le quartier. Chaque mercredi, elle ramasse les déchets. La proposition a été faite par la Côte. Le travail réalisé par les habitants a été apprécié par les habitants de Destrier et servira de support aux premiers débats et dessins. La Team Propreté a également réalisé un nouveau plan d’implantation de poubelles, ainsi que la pose de petites barrières de chantier le long de la route de l’Optimisme. Personnes de contact: Jawad et Soufiane <teamproprete2manager@gmail.com>

LES HABITANTS DE DESTRIER:
Dans ce processus de coproduction, une collaboration avec les autres habitants de la cité est primordiale. Dans toute les phases du projet, il y a un retour vers les habitants sur les propositions et le bon déroulement du projet.

CENTRE CULTUREL D’EVERE L’ENTRELA:
Expérimenté à la participation citoyenne, le Centre Culturel d’Evere et les artistes résidant à Destrier ont montré un intérêt de participer au projet, mais les différents agendas n’ont pas permis de réellement collaborer jusqu’à présent.
Personne de contact: Iona Anghel <ionaanghel@lentrela.be>

BURO BRAK:
Buro Braak est un collectif d’urbanistes interdisciplinaire, comptant cinq membres de spécialités différentes. Nele Aernouts et Costas Farah ont fait un doctorat en urbanisme. Le travail de Nele se concentre sur les immeubles de logement à caractère social et le lien avec la résilience des habitants. Comme anthropologue, Jeanne Mosseray a fait un master en urbanisme. Elle travaille actuellement dans un bureau d’architectes qui a travaillé sur plusieurs projets de logement social. Elle est également assistante dans un design studio (climat) de Master Iverson. Elle travaille sur les logements sociaux, vivant un des mieux travaille comme urbaniste et paysagiste dans l’extension de la Côte à l’avant de la bibliothèque. Personne de contact: Nele Aernouts <nele.aernouts@vub.ac.be>, Mosseray Jeanne <jeannemosseray@gmail.com>

COSMOPOLIS, CENTRE FOR URBAN RESEARCH:
La collaboration entre Nele Aernouts et ses collègues Uni-Vert s’encadrera par sa recherche sur la coopérative de Comensia pour Cosmopolis, dirigée par le collectif Braak.
La voie interne de l’Avenue de l’Optimisme est dans une situation optimale pour imaginer un espace partagé pour voiture - cycliste - piéton. Plus besoin de dos d’âne, la rue n’est plus prioritaire voiture.

B.4. ENTREES NORD

- Quantité
- P/U
- TOTAL

B.2. TERRAIN DE SPORT

- Quantité
- P/U
- TOTAL

A.6 PASSAGE À CLARIFIER

- • Le parc est à une certaine distance des habitations, et en-
- • Confirmer l’accord de principe avec la commune et Co-
- • Ce nouvel espace dégagé et accessible pourrait devenir
- • Contacter le commune pour lui soumettre le projet • Clarifier le projet: Réorganiser la circulation automobile

Avenue de l’Optimisme est déjà identifiée comme par-

Chemin d’accès le long du par

ESTIMATIF: PARC DUNANT

• Posé et fourniture de bancs pc 5
• Arbres (sapins) à abattre pc 10 135 1.350€
• Pose et fourniture de terre arable H=30c

C.3. TRAVERSEE PIETONN

- • Valoriser ce lieu comme extension du Mail et plus
- • Escaliers: lieu de point 
- • de vue et lieu d’où être
- • Escaliers: lieu de point
- • de vue et lieu d’où être

PRÉALABLES

• Le quartier Destrier est assez refermé sur lui-même, dans
- • la mesure où il existe peu d’entrées lisibles à partir des voiries aux alentours du quartier. Plusieurs fiches pro-
- • posent de clarifier certains points de vue sur le quartier et points d’entrées du quartier peu o

C.2. OUVRIR LES HAIES LE LONG DE AV. DE L’OPTIMISME

- • Il est proposé de déplacer les bulles à verre pour per-
- • rier le déplacement d’un passage
- • Il est proposé de déplacer les bulles à verre pour per-
- • rier le déplacement d’un passage

PARTENAIRES

• Un terrain de football/basket dans une revêtement
- • Les budgets sont donnés à titre indicatif, ils sont
- • correspondant au prix en marché public

*Les budgets sont donnés à titre indicatif, ils sont
In the introduction of this study, I addressed ‘a return of the housing question’. Throughout history, the archetypical property form of individual tenure under capitalism and its devastating outcomes for underprivileged groups have brought about various discourses about alternatives. The series of crises we are facing today and the cuts in public expenses put such alternatives on the urban agenda again. I claimed that the commons could serve as a contemporary compass in the housing question. In order to serve as a contemporary compass, I stated that macro- and micro aspects of social inclusion should be addressed. Several authors have mentioned such aspects in contemporary commons debate. This study can be seen as an effort to pick up this debate by translating the concept to the housing question and related macro- and micro aspects of social inclusion.

In this study, I especially focused on social inclusion on a meso- and micro-level, and its link with commons characteristics in alternative housing practices. Next to issues of ownership, I studied design and planning processes of housing estates. I argued one cannot understand such processes, and their consequences for communities in-depth, without positioning oneself within these practices. Such outside-in positioning, required to develop an intensive long-term research composed of participatory and action research techniques within the limited sample of two case studies. The case studies were based on participatory research ethics in order to stimulate knowledge building and to increase the ability of housing organizations and inhabitants to act. As such, going beyond alternative housing practices, this study addressed the role of research in strengthening such practices. The output of participatory research does not only include formal research results, such as articles, but also narratives other than scientific writing, such as essays, posters, maps, drawings etc.

In this conclusion, these different outputs will be brought together in order to tell something about commons and inclusion at different scale levels. Before developing general conclusions that could work as a ‘compass’ for future housing developments for underprivileged groups, let me first recapitulate the main
research questions and conclusions of this study that were dealt with in the four chapters. Starting from the assumption that a high degree of collectiveness in social housing initiatives contribute to the social inclusion of underprivileged groups, I questioned whether such link exists and how such link looks like. Then, I questioned how professionals and spatial designers give shape to housing initiatives with a high degree of collectiveness. The research questions put emphasis on the way communities interact with commons; how the relationship between people and between people and their (future) living environment are translated into practice. The chapters are an elaboration of the objectives that were defined in order to answer the research questions. As public housing is seen as a strategy for what I termed a 'large-scale social inclusion' of underprivileged groups, in the first chapter I explored public housing through the conceptual framework of the commons. For this framework, I dived into commons, architecture and planning literature to define several dimensions that determine degrees of collectiveness within housing projects. In the second and third chapter I investigated two housing initiatives with a high degree of collectiveness in order to get to know more about the link between different dimensions of commons and social inclusion. These initiatives are the Vandenpeereboom project of Community Land Trust Brussels (CLTB) and the Destrier neighbourhood of the rental cooperative Comensia. I especially investigated the dimension of ownership, co-production and community building and zoomed in on the process and role of different actors steering the respective production and reproduction of housing commons. In the fourth chapter, I focused on the dimension of space and spatial design in commoning processes. Rather than researching the link between social inclusion and space, I targeted the role of spatial designers instigating and steering commoning processes.

Chapter conclusions

As I mentioned in the introduction, the commons have resurfaced in the academic debate due to the increasing importance of market exchange after the restructuring of the labour market and the structural crisis that started at the beginning of the 1970s. Amongst others, within the housing domain, this led to the curtailment and shifting meanings of ‘public’ housing in terms of social service and spatial conception. I described this dynamic as a ‘loss of publicness’. While public or social housing cannot be aligned with a strict definition of the commons, in the first chapter I argued that due to the loss of publicness in public housing, it is valuable to catch up with the notion of the commons. A similar point of view has been expressed by commons scholars such as Brigitte Kratzwald (2012), David Harvey (2012) and Dardot & Laval (2014). David Harvey for instance states that ‘there is always a struggle over how the production of and access to public space and public goods is to be regulated, by whom, and in whose interests. The struggle to appropriate the public spaces and public goods in the city for a common purpose is ongoing. But in order to protect the common it is often vital to protect the flow of public
goods that underpin the qualities of the common’ (Harvey, 2012, p.). According to Kratzwald, the idea of recognizing and producing commons goes beyond the collective management of resources through self-organized social networks and citizens. Rather than a static end-condition, in these views commons become a lens through which existing housing practices can be looked at or a spectrum for ‘rethinking politics of an anti-capitalist transition’ (Harvey, 2012, p.87)

In order to better understand the potential of this idea in terms of housing, I developed a framework to analyse public housing through the conceptual lens of the commons. In the first article and the accompanying taxonomy I identified 4 core dimensions. The first dimension is ‘ownership’. Within the commons framework, from a macro-perspective, ownership refers to the share of housing and land held in common. At the level of a housing project, it refers to the legal status of a place. Such legal status can be interpreted as the legal status of the housing organisation; the type of ownership of the dwelling and the land; and the presence and use of public spaces or non-residential functions. The vaster the amount of property and housing held in common and the more accessible the surrounding space, the more inclusive the legal status. The second dimension deals with the ‘participation’ of inhabitants in the planning, design and maintenance of their dwelling environment. The most ideal situation is reached in case of co-production, which points at an intensive process of co-creation between communities, professionals and third parties. The third dimension deals with community activity. An active participation in the neighbourhood is strongly intertwined with small-scale community activities. Such community activity is especially interesting when diversity is encouraged and people get the opportunity to actively improve their dwelling environment. The fourth dimension, ‘physical configuration’ can be interpreted as a place’s macro-design -the relationship between the dwelling place and the hinterland- and the design of a place in itself. While at a macro-level, centrality and connectivity are important parameters; the design of the dwelling (environment) can significantly contribute to the development of social relationships at a micro-level. In this design, a gradual transition between public and private, open and closed spaces is important.

Applying these dimensions to social housing in Brussels Capital Region reveals that instances of bottom-up institutionalization such as rental cooperatives and Community Land Trust have most to offer in terms of social inclusion. In these organizations, inhabitants are represented in decision-making bodies and allowed to adapt their dwelling to their needs; diverse activities reinforce community building; and the spatial layout pays attention to transition zones and meeting opportunities. Additionally, the rental cooperatives touch upon the question of housing provision at a larger scale level, as they considerably contributed to increasing the social housing stock at the times they were developed.

In contrast, post-war large-scale social estates show a mismatch between macro- and meso aspects of social inclusion. The number of social cohesion projects in neighbourhoods consisting of high-rise towers and a weak resident participation
is telling for the relationship between this spatial model and a lack of community feeling. In line with Colin Ward’s critiques on the bureaucratic management and spatial design of public housing (1985), this evidence undermines modernist discourses, that believed that new building techniques and a good connection to arterial roads would allow for a grander social inclusion, as one could build more with less means. The example of the social cohesion projects, which have been implemented with varying success in different social estates, is an example of repairing the lack of collectiveness in social estates. In the same sense, strategies that stem from other commons dimensions, such as alternative ownership schemes, an increased tenant control, an intensive involvement of inhabitants in the regeneration of social estates and a layout of shared spaces might contribute to more inclusive housing schemes.

In the second and third article, I went deeper into this issue. I tried to dismantle the abstract character of the framework by looking at the way the commons dimensions are implemented in practice and by tracing their link with social inclusion. While taking into account the spatial dimension, I especially focused on the dimensions ‘ownership’, ‘co-production’ and ‘community activity’. Choosing a new and old housing commons enabled me to study social inclusion in communities of opportunity that do not necessarily identify with the communal notion of housing commons. The verb ‘commoning’, theorized by commons scholars such as Linebaugh and De Angelis, helped me to develop such ‘ethnographic’ account of the commons (Blomley, 2008). With ‘commoning’ I firstly pointed at the process in which collective goods are recognized, produced and reproduced through institutional arrangements and collective appointments. Secondly, building on Ostrom (1990), De Angelis (2012) and Mattei (2012), I described commoning as a dynamic relationship between providers, producers and users that comes along with co-producing goods together.

Regarding the process of commoning, the second and third article showed the importance of regulatory frameworks and financial support of public authorities in order to develop housing for underprivileged groups. They highlight the ‘rich mixture of public and private instrumentalities’ (Ostrom, 1990) characteristic for governing the commons, but also shed light on the potential of organising housing commons at the level of the region. In both cases, the operation at this scale level allows giving equal access to such initiatives to a regional user community. However, both examples also exemplify that government involvement will always go along with a potential enclosure and necessary processes of commoning to respond to this. From an optimist perspective, such process can be seen as a continuing negotiation and affirmation of what it means to develop alternative housing practices. But it also makes them particularly vulnerable for political changes. In the case of the rental cooperative, the extension of the regulatory framework of social housing in Brussels led to mergers of rental cooperatives, challenging the embeddedness of the cooperative management in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, it also led
to measures allowing for a different type of participation than the classic mode of representation in the rental cooperative.

Regarding the dynamic relationship going along with the process of commoning, in both cases the crosspollination between providers, producers and users led to benefits that go beyond the housing domain. They show that co-production and community activity create conditions in which underprivileged groups escape isolation, take initiative and voice their opinion. The different nature of the cases allowed to highlight different aspects of commoning. While in the CLT project, the benefits of 'commoning' were mostly related to an intensive process of co-creation, within the neighbourhood of Destrier commoning is a process in which residents can participate in varying degrees, ways and extents on a voluntary basis. Within this process they are made aware about their power to actively contribute to the management of the neighbourhood and their immediate living environment. Such differential commoning is important within a cooperative neighbourhood that is difficult to pin down to a generic definition of the commons. Its institutional complexity and residents that do not necessarily identify with the housing model they live in, exemplify such importance. However, one should be aware that such type of participation is only possible due to substantial government support.

The second and third article were joined by 'micro-stories' of participants in the Vandenpeereboom project and inhabitants of Destrier. These micro-stories explored the relationship between the 'physical configuration' of the dwelling environment and patterns of individual and collective use, reciprocity, appropriation and self-expression.

The micro-stories highlighted an ambiguous relationship between space, ownership and practices of reciprocity and self-organization. Several participants of the Vandenpeereboom project renting subdivided townhouses and apartments hold very intensive contacts with their neighbours, by looking after each other's children, doing groceries, by caring for ill neighbours and by lending their car. Especially women maintain such neighbourly relationships and practices of mutual help, particularly with people inhabiting apartments on the same floor or in the vicinity. Such relationships are more difficult when the housing units have a bad acoustic insulation and inferior architectural quality. In many cases, this leads to feelings of distrust and displeasure towards neighbours. Casual encounters mostly take place in 'in-between spaces'; at the hallway, the letterbox, in front of the elevator door and grass patches in front of the building. Outdoors, seating places and sports fields close to the house are popular meetings places for parents.

The people inhabiting row houses in Destrier do not easily pay a visit to each other. They tend to spend more time outdoors with their neighbours. The various green spaces offer a pleasant environment for such out-door activities. The places welcome people walking their dog, joining each other for activities in the centre, eating their lunch or doing workouts. A characteristic example is the daily walks of a group of elderly men. Several times a day, the men walk
together to the mosque established by a neighbourhood inhabitant. Within the
eighbourhood, the community house, the offices of the rental cooperative and
the children agora are important meeting places. The individual gardens of the
houses, in contrast, are places of withdrawal and self-development. As they can be
freely structured and designed, they give a strong sense of ownership. On a macro-
level, the neighbourhood is central and well-connected. The inhabitants of the
neighbourhood very frequently visit the shops and services of the local centre of
Paduwa and the extra-local shops of the artery road bordering the neighbourhood.
The public transport connections to the centre of Brussels are intensively used as
well.

The essay that followed the second and third article was an identification of how
the vocabulary of the commons and commoning processes possibly contribute
to participatory practices in spatial design disciplines. In this exploration, we
scrutinized the term ‘participation’ and its relationship to urbanism. We stated
that participation is only possible when members have an equal share in political
power. This implies people need to have a certain degree of material autonomy
and freedom in order to be allowed to participate. Such material autonomy was
partly provided by the welfare state, through social benefits. Institutions such as
trade unions, umbrella organizations and social movements were able to impact on
decisions as they were less dependent on European or global politics and economics.
Reiterating the introduction, this autonomy and freedom changed from the crisis
of the 1970s onwards. The fading power of the nation state and the crumbling of
the welfare state therefore did not only lead to an increasing social polarization but
to a diminished quality of democracy as well.

In the essay, we foregrounded ‘commons’ as places or occasions where
new forms of democracy can be experimented with. They involve sharing material
and immaterial resources and participatory processes to make agreements about
sharing resources. Commons can thus be seen as schools in which new forms of
democracy can be experimented with. We concluded that they recreate a tradition
of participatory democracy and, by doing so, hold the possibility to reinvent
participation in urbanism.

The fourth article combined insights of the articles, the micro-stories and the essay and
was entirely dedicated to the ‘physical configuration’ and role of spatial design(ers)
within commoning processes. The development of the Vandenpeereboom project
and the public space regeneration project in the Destrier neighbourhood were the
focus of the article. Alongside with a participatory way of acting, I stated that the
social and environmental role of space, and experimentation with different forms
of institutionalisation and dissemination are important when considering links
between spatial design (practice) and commoning. I then zoomed in on potential
urban design methodologies to take these links into account.

Regarding the participatory way of acting, I highlighted that the
involvement of residents in participatory processes does not automatically imply their participation in the project. In order to increase the power of residents in the design both residents and urban designers should share each other’s knowledge. As an urban designer, it is not only important to get to know the site and its inhabitants, but also to make inhabitants familiar with urban design tools, in order to increase their ability to act. Working inside the neighbourhood or on the building plot, mixing formal and informal meetings can support such outside-in perspective of both parties.

The social and environmental role of space relates to the impact of the design of a place on social relationships and senses of belonging. Space doesn’t steer such social ties, but works as a medium in which these aspects unfold. This is difficult to fully grasp without doing a long-term ethnographic and sociologic research. However, urban designers can still address this knowledge by capturing micro-stories of residents and by integrating lines of enquiry about the patterns of use, appropriation, perception and significance during design activities. Uncovering micro-stories and addressing such aspects during design activities through collective storytelling can reveal unexpected personal experiences and confrontations between different users of the space.

The experimentation with different forms of institutionalisation and dissemination are important in order to maximize the impact of the very demanding and long-term engagements of all stakeholders. On the one hand, in order to legitimize the long and time-consuming engagement of inhabitants and urban designers, these actors should be involved in a more direct way in legal procedures such as planning and public tendering. Structural intellectual and practical support on the other hand could be provided by researchers and universities. Besides the service to communities, education programs could be highly rewarded by the combination of research, training and teaching. In addition, students can profit from a raised awareness of their ethical and political position in an early stage of their career.

Housing the social: a common(s) compass

At this point, I treated the research questions and objectives I started with in the introduction. I explored the different dimensions that should be taken into account for discussing housing in relationship to commons and social inclusion. Furthermore, I fine-tuned these dimensions through empirical evidence, by highlighting how the appropriation and (re)production of housing space – commoning – is translated into practice. I showed how it steers capacity building, social capital and empowerment, and highlighted the role of professionals and spatial designers within this process. As a consequence, I now have the necessary information to link this study again to the housing question and to draw up a contemporary compass for future housing developments through housing commons. I will first concisely stress the underlying assumptions of this compass,
and then zoom in on its different dimensions. Being the focus of this study; I will use the example of the Brussels Capital Region to further elaborate on the commons compass.

In order to tackle the housing question, the compass must be seen as an alternative way to organize housing in response to increasing problems of housing affordability and deprivation for underprivileged groups under capitalism. The compass deliberately de-emphasizes ‘strict’ definitions of the commons, rules for enhancing their efficiency and necessary behaviour of communities within the commons - present in common-pool resource research - to focus on how the understanding of the commons and commoning might contribute to social inclusion. As such the commons compass becomes a dynamic compass, ‘generative of opportunities’ (Mattei & Qarta, 2015, p.324). This focus is related to practical observations in the urban context of Brussels. ‘New’ housing commons especially concern meaningful, albeit small-scale initiatives. They seldom operate outside state or market. When entirely managed collectively by contractual communities without government support, they often do not offer structural housing solutions for the urban poor. In addition, the idea of static self-defined homogeneous communities and institutions might smooth over their complexities, diverse interests and problems within localized contexts. Above that, to think of housing commons as bounded entities, belonging to a self-defined community, risks to reduce them to ‘islands of social welfare’ and sources of exclusion rather than inclusion.

How does the understanding of the commons and commoning then relate to social inclusion? The commons involve a crucial political and ethical mentality, expressed in contemporary urban commons debate. They challenge traditional binaries of public and private space, to focus on the use value of resources, rather than the exchange value. The process of recognizing and appropriating resources for their use value, especially when threatened by privatization or enclosure, builds on a language of care, entitlements and rights. Rather than ‘[thinking] of the interests of the poor through a Dickensian frame of welfare and charity and [considering] the prevention of displacement and homelessness as a ‘good’ thing to do’ (Blomley, 2008, p.325), the notion of the commons creates conditions in which people are entitled to use resources to cover their daily needs. The dynamics that come along with this recognition and appropriation creates merits that go beyond the housing domain, empowering underprivileged groups to voice their opinions, steering learning processes and creating bonds across different cultural and social divides.

In short, the commons compass aims to reframe the right to housing as a right that both affects housing affordability and deprivation of underprivileged groups. The first aspect deals with the realization of a large-scale access to affordable housing. The second aspect deals with the impact of participation and self-organization on deprivation. It is about granting the autonomy to individuals and collectives to
self-organize the dwelling (environment). Although intertwined, the dimensions presented throughout the dissertation can be analytically subdivided under these two rights. The notion of commoning underlines the dynamic character of the compass, by urging to focus on the way the different dimensions can be enacted and valorized:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1. RIGHT TO ACCESS AFFORDABLE DWELLING (ENVIRONMENTS)</th>
<th>COMMONING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Institutional-legal dimension: Limit ownership rights</td>
<td>as a process of collective action, negotiation, institutionalization</td>
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<tr>
<th>2. RIGHT TO SELF-ORGANIZE DWELLING (ENVIRONMENTS)</th>
<th>COMMONING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Institutional-legal dimension: management participation</td>
<td>as a process of empowerment, of building capacities, social capital</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Community activity: neighbourhood participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Design and planning: co-production</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Spatial dimension: centrality and connectivity, in-between spaces</td>
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In order to realize the right to affordable dwelling (1), the legal dimension of housing and urban land in general should be radically rethought. The legal dimension does not only encompass the property laws that ensure a vast amount of land and housing held in common, but also recognise the use value of space. The latter is about recognising the long-lasting relationship and perceived ownership of urban dwellers of dwelling space and the street, local square, district or neighbourhood in which their dwelling is embedded.

The right to self-organize housing (2) implies that residents have to be able to participate in the production of dwelling space. Such participation can be related to the management of the dwelling, to individual and community activities and to the design of the dwelling (environment).

A real participation demands handing over the power to make immediate contributions to the dwelling environment. Only when residents are involved as both producer and user in the co-production process, we can speak of participation. In order to be involved as both producer and user in co-production processes, residents should understand some preliminary tools related to dwelling production. Agents such as social workers, housing professionals, artists, cultural workers, urban designers and architects can play a significant role in transferring such knowledge. Similarly, such agents should acknowledge the capacities and site-specific expertise of residents. The cross-fertilization between both demands an outside-in perspective, which can only be reached by a full engagement of both.

Co-production is difficult to pin down to ‘standardized, participatory’ moments. Ideally, it evolves in an ongoing dialogue between dwelling providers, producers and users. For instance, although the involvement of residents in institutionalized decision-making, such as general meetings, tenant boards and boards of directors is indispensable to enable people to exercise their rights, the active contribution of citizens, through individual or collective activities and co-design has a more direct impact on their daily life. Citizens do not immediately
identify with such institutional aspects and find a greater self-expression when contributing to their own house and neighbourhood according to their own interests and capacities.

Enacting the right to self-organize the dwelling environment is not the same as ‘imposing’ participation. The dwelling environment is part of a spatial framework which has a significant impact on senses of security and self-control. On a macro-level, the centrality and connectivity of the dwelling contribute to the participation of citizens in social, cultural and professional life, while the spatial configuration of dwelling space plays an important role at the meso- and micro-level. Practices of individual and collective appropriation unfold in a good balance between the public and the private sphere, open and closed space, similar-minded and like-minded people.

Enacting both the right to occupy housing space (1) and to actively contribute to it (2) is not only a question of collective action in the domain of housing for underprivileged groups. A critical mass is necessary in order to develop a broad support base or a larger (housing) commons movement. In order to develop such critical mass, the question of housing for underprivileged groups requires interconnection with the production of housing and urban amenities in general. Individual homeownership or publicly sponsored housing developments could become more inclusive by integrating commons dimensions. Similarly, a broad support base requires an aggregation or interlinking with other commoning struggles, such as labour, food production, the environment, culture, social services and digital commons.

**A common(s) compass for the Brussels Capital Region**

This study has shown that agents such as community workers, concerned citizens, architects, urban designers and other professionals play an important role in claiming the right to housing and developing housing commons for underprivileged groups in the Brussels Capital Region. Nonetheless, regions and municipalities are indispensable partners in reinforcing housing commons by adopting legal frameworks and by subsidizing initiatives that support the twofold right to housing. The rise of inequalities and the very limited impact of supporting homeownership in combatting the housing crisis (Romainville, 2010), may convince Brussels governments to opt for limiting the anti-social consequences of ownership. Instead of regenerating neighbourhoods by attracting newcomers they could support a social inclusion in situ, in which housing is conceived as an empowering experience, extending to an increased access to opportunities that go beyond the housing domain.

To increase affordable housing in the BCR (1), the Brussels government should entirely reorient its housing policy. It should gear its housing policy and subsidies
to those groups that currently do not have access to qualitative and affordable housing. Alternatives for private homeownership should be stimulated and studied according to their merits and subsidy levels. In the same vein, a part of the private market could be ‘communalized’ (Hodkinson, 2012). This practice is already taking place by renting private properties at social rates. Next to a more substantial support for the social rental offices (AIS/SVK) that organise such renting, a regulated rent threshold could be introduced. Furthermore, existing homeowners that do not have the means to renovate their housing according to decent dwelling standards or that risk repossession by banks, could be helped by entering a CLT formula or a housing cooperative. In the first case, the owner could sell the land on which the dwelling is built to the CLTB. The amount of money the owner would make could enable him/her to undertake the necessary renovation works. In the second case, homeowners could swap existing mortgages for rents that build up an equity within a housing cooperative. When leaving the house, the owner would sell it under the resale restrictions of CLT or would sell the shares to the cooperative (Hodkinson, 2012). As such, the dwelling would be self-controlled without the speculative aspects of homeownership. Expanding those practices of communalizing individual homeownership would allow developing a collective shield that protects residents from expulsion.

Strengthening the self-organization of housing (2) in the BCR implies boosting and calibrating existing legal formulas that allow for management, neighbourhood and design participation. CLTs, associations supporting temporary occupations, rental cooperatives and tenant associations are instances that have been committed to such participation in variable degrees. Lessons can however be drawn regarding the prospect of different participatory devices for each model.

The rental cooperative, some associations that gather people inhabiting temporary occupations and Community Land Trust Brussels, have a substantial number of residents in the management boards. These residents can also vote for the members of the management boards during the yearly general meetings. Regarding the temporary occupations, several projects (123 Logements, La Poisonnerie) combine the need to co-manage housing with an individual autonomy over the different dwelling spaces. In these projects, the management and development or adaption of the dwelling units mostly happens in a spontaneous and generative way (Caballero, 2013). Inhabitants transform and organize the space by themselves, reaching a more advanced form of participation than the one promoted in social estates. However, it should be recognized that this type of self-organization does not meet everyone’s needs. A temporary occupation can be a good solution for households in immediate need of shelter, but the lack of technical quality and intimacy of the dwelling space, especially for larger households, might cause problems of appropriation in the long term, undoing the advantages of such advanced form of participation.

In the case of CLTB, the design workshops preceding the development of
the public tender, in which inhabitants are trained and guided, guarantee a high
degree of implication of residents. However, this participatory device is disrupted
through the public tender process, which does not fully recognize the implication of
residents in the process. In general, public tenders for selecting architects and urban
designers would gain from more transparency and a representation of Brussels
citizens in its procedures, especially the people for whom they are conceived.
Next, the other main characteristic of CLTB - the tripartite institutional structure
involving Brussels citizens, CLTB residents and public authorities - is indispensable
for a transparent and democratic management of the organisation. In order to keep
this, it is important to not embed its daily operations or land management within
other housing organisations – as suggested by the Brussels government - but to
keep CLTB fully responsible.

As social housing still remains one of the most important form of housing
security for low-income groups, it is important to reflect on a greater tenant
control in this model. Regarding this issue, different types of participation have
been promoted by the umbrella organization for social housing. As shown in this
study, by stimulating the development of tenant associations in social housing
companies and by giving 2 members a voice in the management board, the
umbrella organization makes efforts to increase the participation of residents in the
management of social housing. However, the representation of 2 residents that do
not hold equal positions of power in the company is difficult. Although the tenant
association members can follow trainings in order to get a basic understanding
about themes discussed during the meetings, the inequality of knowledge about
the company and management skills risks to bypass these intentions. Even when
administrators treat the residents as real experts of their own living environment,
their participation will have few prospect due to an unequal representation of
residents.

Another type of participation is stimulated through non-profit
organisations operating in difficult social estates. In such organisations, residents
are stimulated to set up their own activities and get professional support for doing
so. Such 'neighbourhood participation' has potential, in the sense that it encourages
residents to define their own conception of participation, rather than pushing
them into an existing management structure they are not capable of modifying
or changing. The participation in renovation works of social estates is not yet fully
explored. Currently, such participation sometimes takes place when the estate is
located in the perimeter of a neighbourhood contract. Such participation is far
from evident, and there is need for a more thorough understanding of how this can
go beyond consultation in social estates without any cooperative culture. The direct
involvement of inhabitants in the construction process is one potential exploration.
For instance, organizations such as Casablanco combine the renovation of housing
of underprivileged groups with employment in the social economy. An employment
of long-term unemployed and low-educated social tenants in the renovation
works of their own housing might be a way to both increase self-organization
and education in the construction sector. Naturally, this is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Inhabitants should be able to participate in different ways and degrees according to their own interests and availabilities.

Enacting the right to self-organize housing is not only about allowing people to participate in the development of their dwelling environment, but also about creating dwelling environments hospitable to individual and collective appropriation. On a macro-level the issue of connectivity and centrality should be taken into account. This is especially important in the case of planning housing for underprivileged groups, who are more dependent on public transport and local facilities. In several social estates at the fringes of the Brussels Capital Region, residents still have to travel long distances for their daily groceries. On a meso- and micro level, within the public housing domain efforts are undertaken to improve the quality of the housing patrimony. These efforts were already taken regarding the energy performance and building quality, but also the general spatial configuration of public housing nowadays deserves greater attention. The years of 'building more with less means' are over, and the Brussels umbrella organization for social housing makes serious efforts towards the development of qualitative tender procedures for appointing design-and-build teams of social housing. Also Citydev projects are making progress in comparison to the problematic start in the beginning. Whereas in the beginning, focus was put on the financial performance of a building operation in the context of 'difficult' neighbourhoods for property developers, nowadays the technical and architectural quality are gaining importance in the tender award criteria. The recent supervision of the Brussels Chief architect (bouwmeester/maitre d'ouvrage) of Citydev projects adds to this (Interview 2 administrators Citydev, 16 September 2014).

Educating young architects about the social role of space is another step in the good direction for enabling the right to self-organize dwelling space. The necessity of good designed individual, in-between, public and secondary spaces that enable a freedom of appropriation, encounter and socialization should be tackled during education. Regarding this issue, a deeper sociologic understanding of the role of space within certain neighbourhoods is necessary, especially within the prospect of rehabilitation works. A transdisciplinary approach between architects, urban designers, residents, sociologists or anthropologists in neighbourhoods might be necessary in order to achieve this. However, the effect of such transdisciplinary approach does not guarantee socially inclusive outcomes. The relationship between space and social relationships remains highly ambiguous. An incremental approach should therefore be taken seriously as it allows to test and to verify certain interventions and spatial configurations.

In order to create a broad basis of support for the right to affordable housing (1) and the right to the self-organization of the dwelling (environment) (2), interconnection with other urban domains and themes will be necessary.

On the one hand, this implies that housing for other income groups should
be targeted as well. As already indicated in this study, housing developed by Citydev is labelled as ‘public’ and ‘housing with a social character’, while the beneficiaries of such project dominantly include middle income households that are not in need of additional subsidies to buy a house (Dessouroux et al., 2016). Furthermore, they are developed in public-private partnership and sold without leasehold formulas. This implies the public funding is a one-off investment, flowing back to the private market as soon as the first person sells his or her dwelling unit. Such one-off investment is also made in the reduced tariffs mortgage loans (that now benefit both low-income and middle-income households) of the Brussels Housing Fund and the fiscal advantages for homeownership. All these measures still make homeownership the most interesting option for more wealthy households, who are able to enjoy an increased value of their asset as soon as they sell the house. As long as more collective forms of housing remain unrewarded, these households will stick to this tenure model. In order to counteract this, the Brussels government could decide to restrict its modest and middle-income housing policy to the support of mutual homeownership, forms of leasehold or cohousing projects. Regarding such support, a Matthew effect could be prevented, by adjusting subsidies to the actual needs of urban inhabitants.

On the other hand, a broader commons project necessitates creating links with other commoning domains. As shown in the study, existing ‘housing commons’ such as rental cooperatives or CLT already experiment with this. Collective energy systems, urban agriculture, donation libraries, collective dinners, bike repair shops, clothes swapping, cooperative houses and homework classes are initiatives that already take place within CLT projects, temporary occupations, social housing and co-housing. Rather than reducing such initiatives to non-harmful small-scale solutions, they are necessary for opening up initiatives to a larger user community and to widen the horizon of commons politics (De Peuter & Dyer Witheforth, 2010). The scarce vacant lands in Brussels have the potential to serve as experimentation sites for doing this on a more structural level.

The ‘areas of regional importance’ appointed through the Regional Zoning Plan are such sites. The sites, often located near train stations or former barracks, are of supra-local importance. The government wants to exploit them for several programmes and to absorb the demographic growth of the region. The areas will thus contain housing, offices, services, commercial functions and green space. Like the ‘Neue Bodeninitiative’ voted by the citizens of Basel (http://www.neue-bodeninitiative.ch/ja-zu-basel), the Brussels government could make the commitment to not sell such lands any longer to private investors, but to democratically manage and develop them according to local and regional needs. New urban forms could be conceived by enabling public actors, citizens and private actors to collectively think how to live, dwell and to work. This could take shape of ambitious leasehold ownership structures, participatory devices, resident controlled housing associations, municipal and social housing, energy cooperatives, a public space that is collectively maintained, new forms of mobility,
a park with local food production. A special attention to those citizens that are most in need of housing, recreation and job opportunities remains however key in such developments. Existing efforts of action groups such as Commons Josaphat, therefore need to be recognized and addressed for the development of those sites. Already for several years, this group of engaged Brussels citizens has been coming together to explore the development of a neighbourhood based on the commons on the strategic site 'Josaphat'. By making such action group a prominent partner in the urban development process of the site, the Brussels government could facilitate community self-organization while enabling a long-term perpetuity of the public investments made.

The Brussels Capital Region faces major societal challenges and constraints, not in the least within the housing domain. If it wants to transform into a livable place, it will have to invest in workable alternatives to the dominant mode of production, especially for underprivileged groups. As commons become more prevalent and mature, new governance forms will have to emerge, which require new types of coordination and support.

**Follow-up research**

This study has tried to tackle a broad range of questions. Nevertheless, in-depth research about several issues regarding the different commons dimensions was not possible within the scope of this research. There are several tracks for following up this research.

A better insight in the relationship between housing and social inclusion from a regional perspective is a first possible track. For instance, the subsidy levels across different housing models in the Brussels Capital Region could be studied, in order to understand the effectiveness of different housing programs in tackling social inclusion. By doing, next to the main publicly sponsored housing schemes, other types of community-based housing could be taken into account, such as temporary occupations, social rental offices and housing projects with roots in benefactor, non-profit and religious organisations. It would also be interesting to discover the community-based housing that are shaped by underprivileged residents without the support of such organisations. Also the ongoing support for homeownership should be part of this study.

A second track could consist of an exploration of interweaving different urban commons. In this study, I stress the importance of such interweaving, in order to create a broad basis of support against housing commodification and speculation. The urbanization of the smaller, local vacant lands in the BCR shows the potential difficulties that come along with it. Currently, the 'housing alliance' aims to give an answer to the pronounced demographic growth in Brussels by financially encouraging different Brussels housing actors to substantially increase their social (rental) and middle-income (owner-occupied) housing stock. As a
result, more prosperous green neighbourhoods in the urban belts of Brussels are subject to large-scale housing developments. These developments often deal with great delays due to protests of neighbourhood inhabitants. The protests could easily be dismissed as NIMBY phenomena. However, the case of ‘Chant des Cailles’ in the municipality Watermaal-Bosvoorde (in the south-east of the BCR) reveal that other issues come into play as well. The site currently hosts an ambitious urban agriculture project of a non-profit organisation. The project brings together shepherds, farmers and neighbourhood inhabitants with the aim to render sustainable food production accessible for diverse income groups and to generate a decent income for professional producers. The land houses a self-harvesting farm, a sheep breeding enterprise, medicinal plants, a collective allotment garden and a cooperative grocery. Although only one third of the land would be dedicated to construction of housing, local politicians and inhabitants are obstructing the project. The issue is exemplary for tensions existing over the development of urban land: bottom-up versus top-down; rural versus urban; citizen-based versus public; perceived versus actual ownership; direct action versus time consuming planning processes. The current Brussels minister of housing has understood these tensions and promotes the consultation of neighbourhood inhabitants for the development of these lands. The question remains if such consultation will lead to more citizen-control and a broad support base for the development of social housing in wealthy municipalities. These tensions could be studied and set off against best practices of public-collective cooperation such as the public land developments in Zürich, resulting in projects such as ‘Mehr als Wohnen’ in which urban amenities are combined with the development of a substantial amount of affordable housing. Within such projects, several types of housing cooperatives are involved from the very beginning of the project, before the development of the masterplan, over the design of the housing entities and dwelling units, to the collective use of outdoor spaces. It could research differences and congruencies between different claims and distinguish a potential role for mediators such as engaged social workers, architects, planners, sociologists and economists, that apply their knowledge to reunite different interest groups around shared projects.

A critical study of the notion of participation and its application in the housing domain could be a third possible track. Throughout this study, I have tried to uncover strategies and actions to involve underprivileged groups in shaping their residential space. By doing I realized that the prospect of participation has few chances when others define the modalities and margins in which these groups can participate. Even within community-based initiatives based on the mobilization of shared resources and the promotion of active citizenship, power relationships – even when not intended - impact on decision-making. Such power relationships are formed between key actors that can include and exclude, increase or decrease power of other actors within the decision-making process. Foucault’s concepts of ‘governmentality’ and ‘normalisation’ could help to unpack the notion of power within participation and decision-making processes, either in community-based
housing initiatives or other types of housing. The research reveals that agents such as social workers and spatial designers can creatively use commons for the cause of underprivileged groups. The concept of normalisation could be used as a self-reflexive entry for studying whether the participatory dynamics put in place reproduce existing normalisation processes or, in contrast, actually differentiate and disrupt the status quo. The concepts could also facilitate the examination of outcomes of certain policies, while providing a base to uncover the processes that enable to consolidate the position of underprivileged groups in order that they have more power. Naturally, housing is only one link within a broader chain of social, economic, environmental and political factors that impact on their power position. Similarly, decision-making processes on housing that are played out at the local level are largely shaped by these events, which are increasingly global. This requires such study to look beyond the local scale of participation and directly engage with those large-scale events.

A fourth track could consist of a further in-depth investigation of the effect of ‘repairing’ the lack of collectiveness in housing schemes through strategies that stem from commons dimensions. My post-doc research leans towards this fourth track. Through action research, it will investigate the potential of instigating and steering the regeneration of large-scale social estates through co-production. Building on a transdisciplinary approach, this research will seek to understand how and to what extent in-depth social-spatial and institutional knowledge; co-design; and the collaboration between producers and users of the space, can contribute to a stronger tenant control and autonomy of inhabitants. It will pursue to draw lines between researchers, social tenants, community workers, social housing companies and authorities and to study whether and for whom co-production can be an empowering experience. By drawing on Urban Living Lab experiences in the contexts of Brussels, Paris and Milan, it will try to develop a broader perspective on such processes.

References

Eroding state support for social welfare, a growing social-spatial divide and increasing problems of affordability in cities have led to new social housing initiatives as alternatives to both privatization and state provision. Their inspiration can be found in a long tradition of collective dwelling forms initiated and managed by citizens. In the Brussels Capital Region, historically marked by a very weak regulation of the housing market, these initiatives have (re)emerged due to an on-going housing crisis. Through the conceptual lens of the commons and commoning, this research investigates two such initiatives on their merits: a recently established Community Land Trust project and a post-war cooperative garden neighbourhood. Their conceptualization allows to give a critical reading of the strategies and measures applied to resist land speculation and to promote the coproduction of dwelling space.

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