



Universiteit Utrecht



# THE COMMONS: JUST A TRAGEDY OR A JUST OPPORTUNITY?

*K. M. Kazimowicz*

*6699243*

*Utrecht, NL*

HOUSING COOPERATIVES AS ALTERNATIVE  
SPACES OF JUSTICE IN AMSTERDAM

## ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of housing cooperatives in influencing the wider context of justice in Amsterdam's housing market. Following a recent decline in social housing, concerns have been raised about the "death" of justice in Amsterdam, thus it is necessary to investigate potential solutions to this crisis. Justice on the cooperative level is understood as a combination of equity, diverse relatedness, radical democracy, urban rights, and re-enchantment; on the larger scale, justice entails a city that is affordable, is accessible, is integrated, offers choice, and avoids displacement. This study follows a mixed-methods approach, with content analysis of promotional materials being used to gain in-depth insights into everyday practices of justice on the cooperative level and semi-structured interviews with members of cooperatives, the Municipality of Amsterdam, real estate agents, academics, and social housing corporations being used to understand the wider context of justice in Amsterdam. The findings suggest that although cooperatives tend to be just on the small scale, they risk losing these just features if they are to scale up—a goal that would likely be unrealistic in the present context. A key finding is that cooperatives can work alongside social housing to create and share an inspiring story about de-commodified housing opportunities as a way out of the current crisis in access and affordability. Policy should aim to stimulate cooperatives, social housing, and middle-rent housing while placing greater regulations on the private market. Future research may contrast Amsterdam with a city in Sweden or Denmark where the "cooperative ideology" is well-established in order to better understand how this narrative can become more prevalent and what the effects of such a shift may be.

*Key words: housing cooperatives, affordability, access, justice, the just city, the good city, the right to the city, Amsterdam*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH TOPIC

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*"In retrospect, it appears that Amsterdam would have been far more resilient to gentrification if squatters and militant tenants had established cooperatives to purchase and manage their houses."*

- Uitermark, 2009, p. 358

While Amsterdam has long been considered an ideal model of a "just city" (Fainstein, 1999; Fainstein, 2009c), recent scholarship has brought this status into question. Uitermark (2009) mourns the "death" of the Just City of Amsterdam, claiming that neoliberal ideologies have impacted municipal policy in a manner that has reduced equality and democracy and therefore justice; examples of such policies include the commodification of the housing stock, the shift to regarding residents as consumers, and the displacement and dispersal of lower-income households. This argument is supported by Kadi and Musterd's (2014) finding that housing conditions have become tied to market forces, resulting in housing that is less affordable and accessible for the poor and creating a city that is less just overall. This problem is relevant beyond the context of Amsterdam, as neoliberalism has been embraced by the European Union and has been described as the dominant ideology across Europe (Novy & Mayer, 2009). These changes can have a substantial impact on justice, as most existing scholarship has found a conflict between urban entrepreneurialism and social justice (Fainstein, 2001).

My research will seek to understand how these neoliberal changes have impacted housing justice in Amsterdam: I will elucidate the historical decline of social housing—a system that was long considered to be the embodiment of widespread justice in Amsterdam—and introduce potential alternative spaces of justice in the form of housing cooperatives. I will draw upon the theories of the just city, the right to the city, and the good city as a means to examine the extent to which cooperatives can offer just housing options in the neoliberal context. The purpose of my research will be to determine the role of housing cooperatives in contributing to a wider context of justice in Amsterdam's housing market, with particular attention to the changing roles of social housing and the private market. I will seek to understand the particular barriers to housing justice in the current circumstances as well as the ideal arrangements for improving justice in the future.

## 1.2 DEFINITIONS

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### 1.2.1 THE COMMONS

“The commons” is a broad term, of which cooperatives can be understood as one example. Commons may generally be described as “geographical entities governed by those who depend upon them—the commoners” (Chatterton, 2020, p. 626), meaning that they are collectively owned or shared among the individuals who make use of them. They can manifest in many different forms, but are generally regarded as alternative arrangements to the capitalist processes of production, exchange, and consumption (Nonini, 2017); in this way, commons are perceived by commoners to be an act of defense and resistance against capitalist encroachments on daily life (Chatterton, 2010).

According to Marxist theory, capitalism creates “exchange value” by appropriating the surplus value of commodities through sales and capital accumulation; commons are seen as resisting this pattern by emphasizing the “use value”—the real value of a commodity based on the purpose it can serve—through the sharing of these commodities among a collectivity of users (Nonini, 2017). Commons are created through the dynamic, complex process of communing, which means that they are perpetually produced and reproduced through social relations and moments of solidarity: they have their own unique socio-spatial practices, shared interests or values, and forms of governance (Chatterton, 2010). Housing is just one form of a commons, as commons can also be found in schools, public health facilities, performance venues, and many other spaces.

The well-known “tragedy of the commons” debate, initially formulated by Garrett Hardin (1968) in response to growing global populations, describes the notion that commons are unfeasible in a market economy and will inevitably fail. This is based on the notion that each individual will endeavor to maximize her or his gain, prioritizing individual over collective ends when resources are limited. Human beings are assumed in this scenario to be self-interested, rational, and profit-seeking. Hardin (1968) suggests that there are three mechanisms through which personal maximization can be controlled: conscience can be used to shame individuals who prioritize themselves over others, although it is supposed that this will be unsuccessful as it fights against human nature; state coercion can be used, a solution that is rejected by Hardin due to the historical context of socialism and communism; or coercion can be achieved through privatization, which is presented by Hardin as the ideal outcome.

Feeny et al. (1990) reject this scenario as overly simplistic, instead offering the more extensive options of open access, the complete absence of well-defined property rights; private property, the right to exclude; communal property, the holding of a resource by an identifiable community of independent users while excluding others; and state property, the right of the state to govern resource use. The commons as I will understand them in this paper will follow the definition of communal property, meaning that resource use (i.e.



housing) is successfully governed through mutual coercion in the form of community arrangements. It must also be acknowledged that these forms of governance are not mutually exclusive, and thus several can exist simultaneously. Housing exists in the broader context of private property regimes, and although it is conceived to be communal property, there exists some potential for the state to intervene in housing cooperative governance.

### 1.2.2 COOPERATIVES

According to the International Cooperative Alliance, a housing cooperative can be understood as “a legal association formed for the purpose of providing housing to its members on a continuing basis” (cited in Bunce, 2013, p. 11). The theoretical principles of housing cooperatives under ideal circumstances include open membership, participatory democratic control (understood as consensus decision-making and one-person-one-vote), political and religious neutrality, the promotion of education, autonomy and independence, mutual aid with other cooperatives, and concern for the wider community through volunteerism (Bunce, 2013). These principles may of course not always be followed in practice, and will be examined in greater depth through my research.

Another key aspect of cooperatives is that are understood to be non-profit entities and therefore do not provide residents with the opportunity to financially profit from their use; shareholders do not own any real property but only a limited equity, and most of the money that is earned is invested back into facilities (McStotts, 2004). In order to provide a greater sense of ownership, cooperatives generally offer a proprietary lease on each unit that extends for 99 years (McStotts, 2004). Although residents theoretically do not earn a profit from cooperative housing, lower-income residents are understood to benefit from the fact that the cooperatives often arrange financing for those who do not have the resources or credit to obtain a mortgage independently (McStotts, 2004). The International Cooperative Alliance boldly asserts that “co-op housing has the answer to many of humanity’s deepest needs: for shelter, for community, for control, for values” (cited in McStotts, 2004, p. 150). My research will seek to investigate whether this perception of cooperatives as a comprehensive solution for urban justice issues holds true in practice.

### 1.2.3 AFFORDABILITY

Affordability is a contested term, as there is disagreement among academics who write about affordability, social movements who demand affordability, and governments who regulate affordability. At its most basic level, affordability involves the ratio between housing cost and household income (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). Beyond this simple understanding, there exist attempts to define the most appropriate ratio for affordable

housing: some argue that reasonable housing costs would be those that leave households with a sufficient income to meet their other basic needs, while others go further, suggesting that on top of basic needs there must be an assurance that affordable housing is adequate in standard and location (Bunce, 2013; citing the National Housing Strategy and National Forum on Affordable Housing, respectively). For the purposes of this research, I will be borrowing Bunce's (2013) extensive definition of affordable housing:

"Housing which is affordable to households on low to moderate incomes and within their capacity to pay while still leaving them with sufficient disposable income for other essential costs of living. The household should also be of an appropriate standard commensurate with the needs of individuals and families and be available in locations with good amenities and employment opportunities" (p. 7).

## 1.3 HOUSING COOPERATIVES: DEBATES IN THE LITERATURE

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### 1.3.1 DEBATES IN THE LITERATURE

Although Fainstein (2009c) refers to cooperatives as a generally agreed-upon “good” urban value, there remains debate underlying scholarly research on cooperatives and cooperative housing. According to Bunce (2013, citing Birchall, 1988), there are four main competing worldviews that present different perceptions of cooperatives: *competitive individualists* present a rather pessimistic view, suggesting that cooperatives cannot survive; *pluralists* believe that society must evolve in order to allow cooperatives to function; *collectivists* suggest that human nature gravitates toward the dominant mode; and *communitarians*—the most optimistic of the four—believe that humans are inherently cooperative and therefore housing cooperatives can be run successfully. This last view is reflective of the ideas embraced by the first cooperative theorist, social reformer Robert Owen (Bunce, 2013), and stresses the potentials that may arise from connecting individuals who share the desire to live cooperatively.

Common ownership forms such as affordable housing cooperatives are celebrated by scholars who argue that they reward a number of positive values that are neglected by traditional capitalist arrangements. For one, collaboration and discussion between owners can lead to clear visions and goals for resource use through a process of collective value-clarification (Di Robilant, 2011). Further, cooperatives may achieve better-informed decisions than privately-owned buildings, as the variety of expertise, skills, and attitudes that may exist among members could contribute to a more diverse environment for management and decision-making (Di Robilant, 2011). This collective deliberation can then allow for individual empowerment, as community members may gain important skills through collaboration as well as a strong civic sense (Di Robilant, 2011). Finally, cooperative ownership is viewed as rewarding solidarity, as it may provide individuals with a sense of material and emotional security from belonging to a community and sharing a project (Di Robilant, 2011). These urban values may be viewed as normatively “good” in that they offer a contrast to perceived problems in the current dominant mode as well as a positive new imaginary of what may be possible.

While housing cooperatives have generally been embraced by urban scholars, they have also faced critiques. McStotts (2004) introduces the claim that limiting the return that residents can obtain on their investment in housing may serve to restrict the ability of these individuals to improve their own housing situation, thereby entrenching class differences. In response, it is argued that increased popularity of cooperative ownership may lead to a diversity of options: as more cooperatives are built, a social shift may occur towards understanding cooperatives not as a niche last-resort option to traditional homeownership but rather a valuable alternative (McStotts, 2004). This can potentially lead to greater social mobility and socio-economic diversity among cooperative members.

Di Robilant (2011) presents the criticism that cooperatives sacrifice the liberal autonomy of owners by implementing restrictive entry rules, such as interviews and eligibility requirements, and restrictive exit rules, including limits to the resale price, limits to reimbursement for improvements, and limits to the pool of prospective buyers. As a result, this may have negative effects on an individual owner's sense of worth by denying the authenticity of one's life plans and the confidence of this individual to carry out his or her desires (Di Robilant, 2011). In response, the author argues that limits to liberal autonomy can be justified to some extent, as housing cooperatives are a special resource with special interest and values, and the privilege that an individual gains from belonging to a community of solidarity can overrule individual autonomy; in this sense, cooperative ownership is progressive without being restrained by the dominant ideologies of liberalism and capitalist individualism (Di Robilant, 2011). The more pessimistic findings of Henry's (1985) research on experiences of cooperative living inspire further, more recent research on whether this is truly appealing to many people: he finds that cooperatives are not always effective as some individuals either leave or are pressured to leave because they have trouble acclimatizing to the collective governance style.

Another critique of cooperatives suggests that the informal enforcement mechanisms of cooperative rules may reinforce negative capitalist norms; for example, visits of reasonably sized groups to individuals' apartments as a means of pressuring residents to pay rent do not offer a comfortable context for discussing financial struggles, mirroring the capitalist view on credit and debt (Henry, 1985). Further, without the involvement of the state, informal rules may not be taken seriously, and eviction notices may be regarded as empty threats (Henry, 1985). This contradictory relationship means that although cooperatives reject traditional capitalist landlord-tenant law, this capitalist law is what allows the cooperatives to function, thus validating the wider system for those inside and outside of cooperatives (Henry, 1985). Additionally, a combination of structural factors and individual agency have been shown to lead to a number of challenges to justice in cooperative living, including exploitation of generosity, factionalism, reinforcement of hierarchy, and sexism in normative orders (Henry, 1985). Despite these many challenges, Henry (1985) argues that "total victory is contingent upon partial advances" (p. 325), meaning that a shift towards socialism will be more effective if existing mechanisms of communal justice within the capitalist system are taken as a starting point rather than the rejection of capitalism as a whole.

### 1.3.2 IN INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE

In contrast to most other countries around the world, cooperative living in many forms is a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday life in Denmark; cooperatives are seen as one of the key institutions beyond the family for developing strong social ties (Bruun, 2011). These cooperatives, which emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in response to real estate speculation and housing shortages, are founded upon the traditional cooperative belief in egalitarianism,

manifesting in the principles of one-person-one-vote, voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, economic participation, and profit sharing (Bruun, 2011). There is little state interference in cooperative associations, as they are considered to be independent, self-regulating societies (Bruun, 2011). Danes embrace the “cooperative ideology” on a large scale, believing that inexpensive and attractive cooperative housing should be available to all members of society; this ideology stresses the importance of equalizing class, power, and economic differences to integrate all individuals and share with society as a whole (Bruun, 2011). Despite the relative historical success of housing cooperatives in Denmark, neoliberal changes have resulted in the recent commodification of the Danish housing commons and increased rental prices (Larsen & Hansen, 2015), a trend that has been denounced by media and residents alike as “greedy” and offensive to the traditional Danish principle of solidarity (Bruun, 2011). This example demonstrates both the potential successes and vulnerabilities of housing cooperatives, and may serve as not only a model but also a warning for Dutch housing cooperatives.

Similarly, approximately 50% of all multifamily housing in Sweden is owned and operated in cooperative forms, with 23,900 registered housing cooperatives owning buildings (Vogel, Lind, & Lundqvist, 2016). Following the cooperative framework, it is housing societies that own the buildings—the units cannot be sold off—and residents are members who pay fees to finance the cooperatives, have authority in decision-making, and have a right to use their dwelling for an unlimited time period (Vogel, Lind, & Lundqvist, 2016). This decision-making authority manifests in a right to vote at membership meetings, a right to elect and be elected as board members, and a right to invest in the interior of dwellings. The cooperative is then responsible for operation and maintenance, capital investments, shared spaces, and collective services; external developers are responsible for founding the cooperatives. Vogel, Lind, and Lundqvist (2016) argue that this arrangement is unsustainable in the long term and does not encourage social innovation or collective action. A further issue with Swedish housing cooperatives is presented by Motevasel (2016), who suggests that although cooperatives offer more luxurious atmospheres, they do not have as much collective culture as rental apartments. Additionally, Swedish cooperatives tend to be homogenous, with residents having academic educational backgrounds and having held senior positions in business or higher education, whereas rental apartments are occupied primarily by industrial workers and craftspeople (Motevasel, 2016). It is interesting to note in my own research whether this socio-spatial segregation and privilege is reflected in Dutch cooperative housing as well, as such a pattern would present a significant barrier to justice.

## 1.4 SOCIETAL AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

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### 1.4.1 SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

*"There is still an insufficient awareness of the very substantial economic and social weight of co-operatives throughout the world, and of the degree of their success in adjusting to varied and often hostile societal environments, thereby contributing to the achievement of the personal objectives of millions of individuals, their families and their communities as well as to national economic and social progress."*

- *United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (cited in McStotts, 2004)*

An in-depth analysis of housing cooperatives as just spaces offers benefits to society because cooperatives may hold the potential to transform urban areas into more enjoyable and affordable spaces for all residents. The possible opportunities presented by these spaces include a deepening of social relations in the city, the de-commodification of urban life through the provision of alternative spaces for the fulfilment of social needs, and strong, sustainable communities that do not reduce human exchange to market processes (Chatterton, 2010). Traditional cooperative values, such as equality, autonomy, and self-respect, may manifest in equitable access to high-quality, affordable housing for all income levels. Additionally, the value of community may lead to the sharing of problems while fostering agency and creative energy through collective decision-making (Di Robilant, 2011), possibly improving the life satisfaction of urban residents. Di Robilant (2011) argues that housing cooperatives may help to achieve a wide variety of policy goals, from equality in access to housing and the formation of active communities to more efficient and sustainable use of valuable resources.

For communities facing gentrification, cooperatives—if they are found to be successful—may offer a powerful means for avoiding displacement, while also empowering community members by providing a sense of ownership and control over one's living environment, security of tenure, improvements to living conditions, a strong sense of community, a right to lifetime residency, and protection from rent increases (McStotts, 2004). Although cooperatives cannot solve the issue of the existence of economic inequality, they can potentially offer stability, affordability, and opportunity for those who are disadvantaged in the existing system (McStotts, 2004). Di Robilant (2011) suggests that arguments for equality must be substantiated with a concrete vision of the common good, including clear institutions that can advance shared goals such as solidarity—cooperatives offer one means through which this can potentially be achieved. By seeking to assess the effectiveness of housing cooperatives in the promotion of justice, my research will also be addressing a wide variety of societally relevant urban issues.

#### 1.4.2 SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

My research will contribute to the advancement of theories of urban justice in the planning literature through a scientific examination of potential spaces of justice in practice. Fainstein (2005b) argues that a narrow understanding of planning theory can have the effect of isolating process from context and outcome, which can be particularly problematic when examining theories of justice that generally focus on democratic inclusion and participation; accordingly, I will draw heavily upon theoretical understandings of justice in the academic literature. At the same time, I will examine cooperatives as a possible practical means to implement justice in the real context of Amsterdam, thus evading the common issue of urban theorists neglecting to offer a clear means to realize their principles (Fainstein, 2009c).

By narrowing in on a specific case and accounting for its historical development and current political context, I will be able to account for the realities of urban life and justice, including important factors such as regime formation, social exclusion, causes of conflict, and variation within and between places (Fainstein, 2009c). Further, Nonini (2017) argues that most of the existing scholarship on commons focuses on rural communities, but urban commons are inherently different as they are implemented in spaces that are already used for various purposes, have been injected with capitalist investment, and are constituted by the coming together of strangers. My research on urban commons in the form of housing cooperatives will further the scientific understanding of commons by expanding beyond the rural context to understand how justice may be able to be enacted in more complex, heterogeneous, dense, and lively areas with their own sets of issues. For urban governance, my research on cooperatives is important as it may provide a means to imagine governance in new ways, examining the interplay between rebellion and cooperation to create new political vocabularies for the promotion of spatial justice (Chatterton, 2010).

## 1.5 CURRENT LIMITATIONS: RESEARCH GAP

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While a significant amount of research has already addressed the reduction in justice induced by neoliberal reforms with regard to social housing and state-focused measures (e.g., Fainstein, 2009c; Kadi & Musterd, 2014; Novy & Mayer, 2009), little work has attempted to examine potential alternative spaces of justice in this new context. According to Purcell (2013), the works that critique neoliberalism for its widespread privatization and perceived fragmentation generally fail to propose alternatives to the current arrangement. My research will acknowledge that critiques of neoliberalism are certainly valid and that greater restoration of the Dutch welfare state may still be beneficial; however, it is also important to recognise that it is not enough for urban scholars to simply demand a return to the welfare states of the past without a plan as to how such structural change may be achieved.

Fainstein (2016) argues that state intervention is not only helpful but required for equitable policy: the spread of the benefits of increased competitiveness through society is dependent on the degree to which the government is dedicated to promoting public benefits and challenging neoliberal hegemony. In the context of neoliberalism, the processes of financialization that are occurring in the Netherlands could prove beneficial for justice if the state was committed to using its power to promote redistribution (Fainstein, 2016). Although some level of state intervention may be necessary for equitable policy, in the case of housing, reasonably priced accommodation for low-income households does not necessarily have to be provided through state ownership: a multitude of diverse arrangements can improve access to affordable accommodation, including community land trusts, lease-purchase agreements, and cooperatives (Fainstein, 2016)—the latter of which I will examine thoroughly in my research. Additionally, while social housing may be more dependent on the historical trajectory of a country, housing cooperatives may be more flexible and feasible in a variety of circumstances. This suggests that further research is required to determine the extent of justice in alternative arrangements that may be able to compensate for reductions in or a lack of social housing, such as housing cooperatives.

Although the state can be necessary in implementing justice, Uitermark (2009) warns that it may be dangerous to invest too much power in state forces as this may impose top-down structures over grassroots initiatives. Fainstein (2005a) acknowledges that local urban movements do have the potential to cause great transformation, even if their impacts are limited to the scale at which they operate. Given that it is everyday residents who live and experience the city, it is necessary to question and struggle against the processes that give the power of urban development to both the state and the market (Uitermark, 2009). In the words of Fainstein (2009c), “the movement toward a normative vision of the city requires the development of counter-institutions capable of reframing issues in broad terms and of mobilizing organizational and financial resources to fight for their aims” (p. 25)—transcending self-interest for the sense of justice of the collective. The housing cooperatives that will be analyzed in my research offer a potential means to provide just housing resources while maintaining this important connection to smaller-scale, local needs.



## 1.6 SCOPE OF RESEARCH

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### 1.6.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The core objective of my research is to understand the level of justice embodied by various forms of governance arrangements and community initiatives in the cooperative housing sector. I will be seeking to comprehend whether the Just City of Amsterdam has truly perished or if it is simply transforming and adapting to new circumstances. My research will, after thorough examination of existing literature, take for a given that social housing provided a level of justice to the residents of Amsterdam; following this supposition, my primary aim will be to determine whether recent reductions in social housing in Amsterdam—which will be explained in great detail—must necessarily lead to a loss of justice. Housing cooperatives will be analyzed as a potential means to compensate for these reductions in affordability and access, as they are in the non-profit sector and many claim to be diverse and relatively low-rent. My research will attempt to understand whether traditional state solutions to the housing crisis in the Netherlands—embodied by social housing, which is rapidly declining in the contemporary neoliberal context and being substituted with state regulations on the private housing market—can be adequately replaced by small-scale, civic solutions in the form of housing cooperatives. If this is found to be unfeasible, other possible roles for housing cooperatives in this wider context will be investigated.

### 1.6.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Central Research Question: *What is the role of housing cooperatives in contributing to an overall just housing market in Amsterdam?*

Sub-questions:

- In what wider context have housing cooperatives emerged in Amsterdam?
- How do various stakeholders (i.e. social housing corporations, cooperatives, private companies, academics, government employees) understand and interpret these initiatives?
- To what extent do various existing housing cooperatives in Amsterdam satisfy the combined justice requirements of the just city, the right to the city, and the good city on the scale of individual projects?
- How do housing cooperatives fit into the city-scale context of justice in Amsterdam's wider housing market?

The focus of my research will be on housing cooperatives, which I will situate in the historical development of Amsterdam. After establishing a working understanding of housing cooperatives, I will create a more concrete definition of justice; in order to accomplish this, I

will draw upon three key ideas of justice, two that have been central to urban theory and one that heavily draws upon them—the just city, the right to the city, and the good city, respectively. Information about these theories will be gathered through extensive literature review. I will then synthesize these theories to create a set of criteria for evaluating the degree of justice of initiatives in the housing sector, which will then be applied to individual existing projects in Amsterdam. Information will be obtained about these projects through content analysis of promotional materials on their websites. A set of criteria will also be formulated for assessing the wider circumstances of justice in Amsterdam and the role of housing cooperatives in contributing to this, which will be examined through interviews with key stakeholders. I will then analyze how the small-scale levels of justice in housing cooperatives can fit in to the larger context of housing justice in Amsterdam.

## 1.7 THESIS STRUCTURE

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My thesis will begin with the creation of a thorough theoretical framework, which will elucidate analytical understandings of urban justice, particularly with regard to housing. After introducing main debates in the literature of urban justice, I will then outline the theories of the just city, the right to the city, and the good city in great detail, explaining their key principles as well as main critiques. Finally, I will synthesize the core ideas of these theories of justice into a comprehensive set of criteria for assessing justice in housing projects. This section will include information obtained through detailed literature review.

The methodology section will outline my empirical approach, beginning with an explanation of my choice of Amsterdam as a case study based in the just city literature. I will then explain how I narrowed down my focus onto the specific housing cooperatives under analysis, and describe their significance for Amsterdam and the cooperative movement more broadly. While this will be grounded in academic literature, I will also include context on the specific projects, which will be obtained through analysis of non-scholarly web materials provided by cooperative associations. I will then outline my data collection methods, which include literature review, interviews, and content analysis, as well as my data analysis strategy. This section will conclude with discussion regarding the quality of my research and limitations of my applied methodology, paying particular consideration to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my research.

I will provide context on the case of Amsterdam, examining the decline of social housing in the Netherlands and the current context in which housing cooperatives are operating. In the results and discussion section, I will outline the findings of my content analysis to better understand how projects frame their goals, and I will explain the key findings from my interviews with stakeholders. I will connect these empirical findings to my criteria of justice that were elucidated earlier, primarily through the structuring of these results and the avenues of discussion. Policy recommendations will be provided and the role of the state will be discussed in great detail.

The final section of my thesis will address the implications of my findings for future just urban planning policy, theoretical debates, and the cooperative movement more broadly. I will consider the wider context of my findings and their generalizability beyond my specific case study of existing cooperatives in Amsterdam. The strengths and weaknesses of my research will be acknowledged, and I will provide a number of suggestions for future research on the topic.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 URBAN THEORY

#### 2.1.1 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN JUSTICE

According to Fainstein (2001), it is important that theorists of urban justice formulate their social values explicitly; they must not only account for inclusionary processes but also present particular criteria for what constitutes a just outcome. Throughout the history of planning theory, there has been a tension between those who emphasize planning process and those who elucidate just outcomes (Fainstein, 2000). The current study of urban justice is founded in critiques of positivism and the rational comprehensive model, which is now generally viewed as ideological support for an unjust status quo disguised by the pretence of objectivity (Fainstein, 2014). In place of the rational model, the dominant direction in planning theory has shifted towards public participation and deliberation, offering recognition to the uneven power relations that complicate planning decisions (Fainstein, 2009b; Connolly & Steil, 2009). While this has been noted as progress, Fainstein (1999) contends that simply increasing citizen oversight in the planning process cannot overcome economic power biases inherent to the current system, and may even present new difficulties such as NIMBYism (“Not In My Back Yard”).

Another key issue in planning for urban justice has also arisen in response to the rational model: it is difficult for contemporary planners to enforce just processes and outcomes without positioning themselves as “experts” reminiscent of the technocratic planners of the past (Fainstein, 1999). This is closely related to what Uitermark and Nicholls (2017) refer to as the “power of representation dilemma”, which suggests that the credentials, knowledge, and expertise of trained urban planners can make them powerful actors in the promotion of social justice, but can at the same time place professionals in a position of power over the communities they represent. Given these issues, it must be acknowledged that the engagement of planners in social justice can only be imperfect at best.

Despite its many challenges, planning presents a number of opportunities: it can act to reduce socio-spatial inequalities in a number of areas, such as health, education, economic well-being, and social mobility, it can address place-based issues such as community safety and infrastructure, certain actions can reduce the impact of displacement from gentrification, and planning can improve access to transportation and employment (Reece, 2018). According to Connolly and Steil (2009), the main questions in planning for urban justice include “under what conditions can conscious action produce a better city for all residents?” and “how do we evaluate what outcomes would truly be better?” (p. 7). My research will reflect these questions, utilizing the philosophical theories of the just city, the right to the city, and the good city in order to formulate a synthesized set of criteria for assessing justice in Amsterdam’s housing cooperatives. Figure 1 below demonstrates the

relationship between these theories of justice and the key principles of each, which are discussed in greater detail through the remainder of section 2. It is important to acknowledge in my formulations that it is impossible to deem certain actions or circumstances to be absolutely “good” and others to be “bad”; however, it is indeed possible to judge what is better and what is worse in a particular context (Fainstein, 1999).

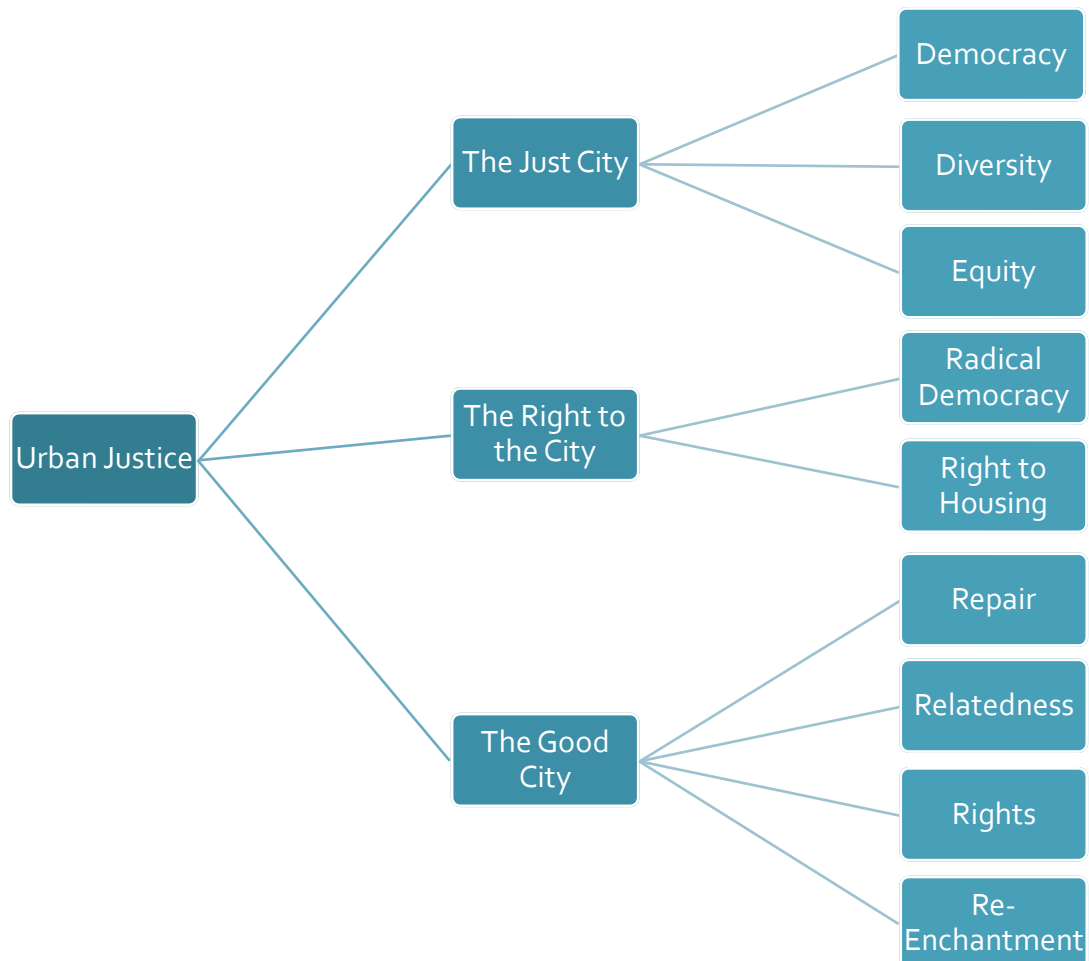


Figure 1: Theories of urban justice.

### 2.1.2 JUSTICE AND HOUSING

Housing is a key issue in formulating theories of urban justice as it is important for ensuring an adequate quality of life for all urban residents, particularly in the case of low-income populations. When rents are more affordable, lower-income residents have higher disposable incomes, leading to improved overall welfare and reduced class differentiation (Fainstein, 1997). Housing plays a significant role in discourses of justice, such as the right to the city, as it can be connected to displacement, evictions, threats to security of tenure, and exclusion from decision-making processes (Rolnik, 2014). Scholars of urban justice (e.g.

Bunce, 2013; Rolnik, 2014) view housing as more than property rights over real estate, but a universal human right and a gateway to a variety of other rights. Housing is important for creating a sense of belonging in cities—"to be deprived of the access to adequate housing is to be deprived of the very possibility to be part of and to enjoy the city life" (Rolnik, 2014).

Local housing practices and institutions are the primary mechanism through which housing outcomes are decided, as the impacts of changes such as marketization can vary based on the extent to which residents can assert their right to the city or a broader claim to justice (Kadi & Ronald, 2014). Accordingly, the greatest threat to housing justice is not necessarily neoliberal ideology and financialization, but rather the practical results of the commodification of housing (Kadi & Ronald, 2014). This commodification has resulted in policies that ignore the widespread conceptual understand of housing as a social good: housing is viewed as a means to accumulate individual wealth rather than a way for society to redistribute wealth to those with fewer resources (Rolnik, 2014). This can be seen as problematic given that the private market has failed to make affordable housing available to all residents (Bunce, 2013), a situation that will be demonstrated below in the case of Amsterdam.

Housing is a crucial element of the right to the city—upon which I will later expand in greater detail—as this theory is often cited in struggles against displacement resulting from gentrification and privatization (Aalbers & Gibb, 2014). While mixed-income housing has the potential to increase residents' right to the city, these policies are usually measured by the amount of profit that governments and housing corporations can extract from the neighbourhoods, thus reducing the potential for justice (Duke, 2009; Uitermark, 2009). Do-it-yourself urbanism projects, such as housing cooperatives and squatting, can potentially contribute to a more just and democratic urban environment by appropriating urban space and asserting new forms of authority in the city based on the principle of equality (Iveson, 2013). Nonetheless, in order to create large-scale change, the independent projects must be interconnected through a common discourse of justice and new democratic forms of authority (Iveson, 2013). While small-scale experiments are crucial to urban change, they can only be effective in widespread transformation if they are politicized; they must reject attempts of authorities to marginalize them as "inner-city creatives", "hipsters", or even "slum-dwellers" (Iveson, 2013). Iveson (2013) connects various movements through the right to the city discourse; however, I will attempt to devise a more thorough framework that combines several related theories of justice.

## 2.2 THE JUST CITY

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### 2.2.1 KEY PRINCIPLES

The just city model, most widely associated with Susan Fainstein, is founded upon three central principles—democracy, diversity, and equity—with the latter being the most important. It can be defined as a “normative approach to urban planning that combines progressive planners’ traditional focus on socio-spatial and politico-economic equity with concerns for diversity, participation and sustainability to improve urban life for all within the context of a global capitalist economy” (Irazábal, 2009, p. 559). The last point is important, as Fainstein differs from a number of other scholars of urban justice in that she accepts the capitalist system as a given and aims to work within this framework rather than advocating for revolutionary change. This does not mean that she accepts the status quo, as her ideas do indeed run counter to the unequal distribution of power and resources that has emerged in the current capitalist system, and she attempts to benefit poorly represented groups to rectify injustices. The just city is a modification of the underlying political economy approach that promotes equity in an era of globalization and neoliberal policy (Fainstein, 2000; Fainstein, 2009b; Reece, 2018). One of the key means through which Fainstein (2000) hopes to accomplish this goal is through changing policy discourses, with planners as advocates of programs that encourage a shift from competitiveness to justice and quality of life. Fainstein (2014) believes that justice is indeed attainable under capitalism, and the capitalist state can use its power to promote redistribution.

Although Fainstein (2005a; 2000) argues that the core values of democracy, equity, diversity, growth, and sustainability must all be met at a basic level, she acknowledges that there will often be tension between them, requiring trade-offs between growth and equity, growth and sustainability, and diversity and democracy. The just city is founded on the Rawlsian notion that inequalities do not have to be eliminated entirely but must be lessened through benefits to the worst off, thus it promises a better future not only for the poor but includes the middle class as well (Fainstein, 2000; Fainstein, 2009b). The role of the planner is not to be morally neutral—which is impossible—but rather to empower marginalized communities through participation, empowerment, and decision-making, complemented by socially just urban policy and progressive political consciousness; it aims for justice in both process and outcome (Fainstein, 2000; Fainstein, 2009b; Reece, 2018). Examples of how this can be achieved in practice include preventing the displacement of “marginal” uses for spaces of profit, setting requirements for affordable housing, and shifting political consciousness at the national and local levels towards respectfulness and equality (Fainstein, 2005a). Uitermark (2009) further develops the just city theory, building on Fainstein’s previous work to envision a city where exploitation and alienation are absent: the just city involves both material equity and civic engagement that allows residents to have control over their own living environments.

## DEMOCRACY

Democracy in the just city is based upon the ideal speech situation devised by Habermas, which suggests that a deliberative, democratic decision-making process will lead to the soundest outcomes (Fainstein, 2014). This is grounded in the notion that process is socially constructed, and the force of the best argument will lead to optimal decisions (Fainstein, 2009c; Fainstein, 2014). In this situation, the planner is merely a facilitator rather than a possessor of technocratic or supposedly “objective” knowledge, thus establishing a non-hierarchical relationship with marginalized communities (Fainstein, 2014). Democratic policies may entail inclusive and participatory planning processes, broad consultation, and the use of advocates for those who are unable to participate (Fainstein, 2009b, 2014). Democratic processes are a necessary but insufficient condition for the just city (Fainstein 2000): in practice, they may not always result in just outcomes, as democracy is not the same as equity and thus the outcomes may reflect existing power inequalities (Fainstein, 2014). As a result, planners must deliberately advocate for the worst off while ensuring that they do not impose any particular outcome.

## DIVERSITY

Diversity can be interpreted to have several meanings, including varied physical design, mixing of uses, or multiple social groups having input in decision-making (Fainstein, 2005a). It has been promoted by notable urban theorists such as Iris Marion Young, Jane Jacobs, and Richard Florida, who contend that it attracts social capital, encourages innovation and creativity, ensures equal access to a variety of groups, creates competitive advantage, promotes tolerance, and underlies the very appeal of the urban (Fainstein, 2005a). In Amsterdam, this can be seen in the multitude of different uses for buildings, such as workshops, entertainment venues, residences, and offices, despite relative architectural homogeneity (Fainstein, 2005a). Fainstein (2005a) argues that physical diversity does not lead to equity and growth, and therefore the real source of diversity entails social programs to lower rents and limit extremes in socio-economic and therefore socio-spatial difference. Although bringing diverse individuals together can enhance equal rights to city space, it may also risk increasing conflict; it is for this reason that Iris Marion Young calls for differentiated solidarity with voluntary group formation (Fainstein, 2009b; Fainstein, 2014).

The value of diversity in the just city draws upon Iris Marion Young’s notion that differences should be promoted and respected without oppression, and groups should be able to define themselves instead of being assimilated (Fainstein, 2014). This approach includes multiple forms of oppression beyond the traditional Marxist focus on class—such as race, nationality, gender, sexuality, and religion—without neglecting income inequality. Examples of policies that promote diversity include porous boundaries between neighbourhoods, accessible public spaces, inclusionary zoning, and mixed uses (Fainstein, 2009b, 2014). While a culture of tolerance and social rights is necessary for the Just City, it is again insufficient, as inclusion and diversity have multiple dimensions that may contradict one another and can even



undermine other forms of justice (Fainstein, 2014). Accordingly, Fainstein (2005a) argues for overall “justice” rather than diversity as the main goal of planning, recognizing that urban diversity may not necessarily nurture all of the capacities needed for the just city.

## EQUITY

Equity, the most crucial value of the just city, demands that all interests are fairly represented; this produces greater material equity and greater respect for marginalised populations (Fainstein, 2014). The equity of the just city is philosophically grounded in Rawls’ notion of the original position (Fainstein, 2009b), which suggests that inequalities do not have to be entirely eliminated but rather policies should aim to benefit the worst off; this results in situations in which no member of society has a low quality of life or is in a position of extreme need. Examples of policies that contribute to equity include requirements for affordable units in new developments, the prevention of involuntary displacement, low transit fares, affordable housing development, and planners taking an active role in decision-making to promote egalitarian solutions (Fainstein, 2009b, 2014). Fainstein (2014) argues that the purpose of inclusion in decision-making is not necessarily the intrinsic value of participation, but rather to have interests fairly represented; the purpose of equity in the just city is not equality but fairness (Uitermark, 2011). The combination of the three values of democracy, diversity, and equity is intended to create a city that offers not only open processes but explicitly just outcomes as well (Fainstein, 1999, 2000).

### 2.2.2 CRITIQUES

Despite being the main proponent of the just city, Fainstein openly acknowledges many critiques and drawbacks of her theory. For one, popular values such as order, efficiency, and economic growth may be incompatible with equity and diversity; however, to deny the majority desire would be undemocratic (Fainstein, 1999). Further, democratic decision-making takes place in a context of power inequalities, meaning that it may reproduce existing power structures rather than furthering justice (Fainstein, 2000; Fainstein, 2014). Fainstein (2000) responds to this dilemma by prioritizing equity above the other two core principles of the just city: there must be a judgement of results and claims rather than simply process, which can be achieved by evaluating alternatives based on who benefits and choosing that which helps the worst off or at least does not harm the most vulnerable (Fainstein, 2014). At the same time, she recognizes that policymakers must promise improvements beyond equality in order to gain popular support. By examining affordable living options that are supposedly open to diverse groups, I hope to remedy this issue as it promises economic benefits as well as justice.

The just city also faces challenges in terms of implementation. Drawing upon Robert Dahl’s problem of participation and power—which suggests that the local level offers the greatest

opportunity for democracy but the least influence, whereas higher levels have greater influence but also more bureaucracy—Fainstein (2014) suggests that the shift in rhetoric that she proposes can only truly be achieved if it is implemented at the national level. The theoretical foundations of the just city are criticized for focusing on a specifically American context (Novy & Mayer, 2009): Fainstein (2013) suggests that only welfare states have the power to implement a commitment to justice as an evaluation of policy, thus neglecting contexts that lack the historical foundations of a welfare state and failing to offer new potential alternatives. Although this may be true, the theory does acknowledge that local policies can have an impact on the lives of disadvantaged populations, particularly in the area of housing. Since I will be focusing on housing, I will assume that the local scale can have a significant impact.

One of the most consistent critiques of the just city scholarship come from Marxist theorists, who claim that Fainstein is wrong for assuming that justice can be achieved in the existing capitalist system. Building on David Harvey's critiques of the just city approach, Connolly and Steil (2009) argue that "any attempts to realize justice within the context of capitalist relations will fail to address the root causes of injustice" (p. 10), thus it does not go far enough. Novy and Mayer (2009) are equally skeptical of this assumption, believing that the just city approach places unnecessary constraints on the struggle for urban justice by working within the status quo. Instead, it is suggested that alternative imaginaries must be formulated, going against the grain of the hegemonic neoliberal system in order to achieve truly transformational change. In my own research, I will limit the scope to the existing capitalist context because it will allow me to explore the possible benefits of options that are more readily attainable than revolution.

## 2.3 THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

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### 2.3.1 KEY PRINCIPLES

The right to the city is based in Lefebvre's understanding of urban space, which he views as constituted by social relations of production and reproduction that contribute to current inequalities (Fainstein, 2014). Cities are the sites of "creative destruction", where conflicts and confusion create unexpected outcomes (Harvey, 2003). This is connected to Marx's notion of a dialectical relationship in cities whereby individuals can change themselves by altering the world around them through their daily actions, but at the same time they are shaped by the existing cities in which they live (Harvey, 2003). Harvey (2008)—a proponent of the right to the city—stresses that the question of what a desirable city should look like is inseparable from the question of who its residents want to be, with this dialectical relationship manifesting in social relations, connections to nature, daily lifestyle habits, desired technologies, and aesthetic values. In the current free market context, the rights to private property and profit are regarded as most important, but, according to Harvey (2003), "thirty years of neoliberalism teaches us that the freer the market the greater the inequalities and the greater the monopoly power" (p. 940), leading to contexts of alienation and injustice.

One example of a disadvantage of the current neoliberal system is the existence of scarcity in situations of plenty, such as housing shortages in times of speculation, which some believe is created by the market's need for scarcity in order to function (Harvey, 2003). Harvey (2008) claims that urbanization has been a class phenomenon, as it has dispossessed the urban masses of their right to the city. Following this view, contemporary issues of injustice have emerged due to the growing unchecked power of capital, which is insufficiently regulated by liberal-democratic political structures and has placed the right to the city in the hands of elite private interests (Purcell, 2002; Harvey, 2008). This context has made and re-made urban dwellers without their knowledge or understanding (Harvey, 2003). The right to the city does not demand that urban dwellers receive a greater share of capitalist profit, but rather that they move beyond the purportedly impoverished, classist, capitalist "city" to cultivate "the urban" more broadly (Harvey, 2008; Purcell, 2014). In other words, it is not a right to what exists but rather a right for residents to live in their own creations, remaking themselves by shaping the city according to their hearts' desires (Harvey, 2003).

Lefebvre's vision entails an urban utopia where use value is prioritized over exchange value and urban space meets the everyday needs of its inhabitants (Irazábal, 2009). This can theoretically be achieved by re-prioritizing existing rights that have been downplayed in favour of private property and profit—for example, the right to be treated with dignity—as well as the definition of new rights, such as the right of residents to remake the city and therefore to remake themselves according to their own desires (Harvey, 2003). Lefebvre (1996) describes the right to the city as "like a cry and a demand" (p. 64), an experimental utopia that is studied through its dynamic consequences on the ground. In order to achieve

this utopia, it is necessary for urban residents to defeat the existing hegemonic ideologies by questioning structures through daily relations, ensuring that they do not confine their imaginations to the framework of possibilities that are offered by their current society (Lefebvre, 1996). The right to the city is rooted in the already existing but hidden “urban”, which makes profound change and even revolution practical through concrete, everyday acts of resistance (Purcell, 2014).

Marcuse (2009) builds upon Lefebvre’s work to provide further clarity to the concept of the right to the city. Responding to the question of “whose right to the city?”, Marcuse (2009) defines the right to the city as “an exigent demand by those deprived of basic material and existing legal rights, and as an aspiration for the future by those disconnected with life as they see it around them, perceived as limiting their own potentials for growth and creativity” (p. 190). In other words, the right to the city is extended primarily to those who are directly oppressed, including those whose immediate material needs are not fulfilled as well as those who are excluded and alienated from the immaterial aspects of a fulfilling life; this includes the homeless, the hungry, the imprisoned, the persecuted, and many other marginalized members of society. The right to the city is currently held by a small portion of financial elites such as real estate owners, financial speculators, state politicians, and owners of the media; given that the right to the city involves a fundamental rejection of the existing capitalist system, it must be given to those who do not have it now—the deprived and the disconnected (Kadi & Ronald, 2014; Marcuse, 2009). It is also important to note that the right to the city is not the same as legal rights and therefore applies to all urban inhabitants who live their daily lives in these spaces, rather than exclusively national citizens (Purcell, 2002).

In response to the question of “what right?”, Marcuse (2009) suggests that the right to the city is not only a legal claim but a moral claim to the fundamental principles of justice, ethics, morality, and virtue. It is a collectivity of rights encapsulating a right to totality; individual rights—the rights to public space, information, transparency in governance, access to services—represent only parts of the whole to which urbanites are entitled (Marcuse, 2009). Answering “what city?”, urban scholars (Aalbers & Gibb, 2014; Marcuse, 2009; Purcell, 2002) describes a future urban society in which hierarchies have disappeared and the general principles of social justice, equity, democracy, empowerment, ability to appropriate space, full development of capabilities, from all according to their abilities to all according to their needs, and recognition of human differences are embraced; however, they warn that outcomes cannot be pre-directed in great detail as the product must be shaped by urban residents themselves. In this sense, the right to the city is both abstract and concrete, embracing concrete actions that challenge forces of alienation while at the same time aspiring to broad sentiments such as the right to belong, the right to co-produce urban space, and the right to not be alienated (Aalbers & Gibb, 2014). The right to the city avoids excessive utopianism by embracing a continuous struggle to transform urban space, building upon what already exists to move beyond what is known (Purcell, 2013).

## RADICAL DEMOCRACY

The understanding of democracy embraced by the right to the city discourse is far more radical than traditional liberal notions. While liberal democracy typically entails the formal institutions for decision-making that exist in liberal democratic states, the right to the city discourse defines democracy as “a mode of living together in which people manage *for themselves* the conditions of their own existence” (Purcell, 2013, p. 341, emphasis original). This understanding of democracy is active and takes a great deal of effort to maintain; it requires that urban residents create their own laws and rules rather than having laws given to them, ensuring that they are ruled only by themselves (Purcell, 2013). Radical democracy is fully horizontal, with no hierarchies, oligarchies, or “expert” technocracies. It is not an incremental addition to existing liberal democratic rights, but a key element of the wider struggle towards revolution—a new urban commons (Harvey, 2010; Purcell, 2014). According to this theory, real participation beyond ineffective formal procedures such as public hearings will eventually lead to the withering away of urban professions such as planners, architects, and the state, as urban residents take control of their own existence (Purcell, 2014).

Purcell (2013) emphasizes the importance of embracing this governance structure in formulating alternatives to the neoliberal system: while many may promote a return to the welfare states of the past, these do not offer a truly democratic alternative as they are inherently strong-state and oligarchical; in order to achieve true democracy, our imaginations must extend beyond what is familiar to something more—to true democracy. Lefebvre’s reworking of social relations does not call for the reform of the state but rather a reorientation of decision-making away from the state and away from existing power relations (Purcell, 2002). It allows urban residents to govern themselves without the state and without capitalism (Purcell, 2013). While some may argue that it is impossible or impractical for everyone to govern themselves directly while still working together to shape society, Purcell (2013) responds that it may be better to conceive of real democracy as a constant struggle, a state of becoming rather than being—a state that can always be strived towards but never reached. Lefebvre himself (2009) writes that “democracy is nothing other than the struggle for democracy” (p. 61, cited in Purcell, 2013). In my own research, I draw heavily on this idea of radical democracy, as I focus on independent cooperatives rather than state-run social housing; the small-scale nature of these cooperatives makes the strive towards radical democracy more realistic and practical.

## ACCESS TO HOUSING

Discussing the right to the city, Marcuse (2009) writes, “let us tighten the noose around the housing system, and move to squeeze the profit out of it, one sector at a time” (p. 196). This dramatic statement is reflective of the general discourse surrounding housing among right to the city theorists, as it is tied with attempts to eliminate private profit as a motivation for providing services to the public (Marcuse, 2009). The elimination of profit motives calls for

the de-commodification of urban space, particularly in the area of housing (Aalbers & Gibb, 2014; Fainstein, 2009c). In practice, the right to the city movement has served as an inspiration for squatting movements, encouraging them to expand their agenda to include the rights of other marginalized groups such as immigrants, artists, and environmentalists (Uitermark, Nicholls, & Loopmans, 2012). Following the prescriptions of Lefebvre, Connolly and Steil (2009) argue that the right to the city can be used to fight gentrification, as it calls for a right to land and housing that is free from the pressures of real estate speculation, instead offering cultural and political spaces to build sustainable communities. These desires and uses of the right to the city can easily be connected to my own research on housing cooperatives, as cooperatives offer access to a form of de-commodified, community-run housing.

### 2.3.2 CRITIQUES

A key criticism of the right to the city is that Lefebvre restricts his idea of the “inhabitant” to the working class, as he claims that “only the working class can become the agent, the social carrier or support of this realization” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 64). Although this offers a means to challenge the economic inequalities perceived to be inherent in capitalism, it does not acknowledge oppressions against other identities such as gender, sexuality, and race (Purcell, 2002). Accordingly, Purcell (2002) argues that the right to the city must not be pre-determined but rather negotiated through political struggle; it will likely turn out to be a complex combination of political interests, producing hybrid urban geographies. Although my research specifically focuses on affordable housing options, my theoretical understanding of equity will extend beyond economic circumstances to include a wide array of identities.

Uitermark, Nicholls, & Loopmans (2012) critique the complex role of the right to the city discourse in practice: the concept is far more popular in academia than in social movements, and even when it does gain prominence in practice it often fails to scale up from the local context, particularly in non-urban areas. While nascent right to the city social movements do exist around the world, often in response to neoliberal urbanization, they have not yet unified in pursuit of a singular, cohesive aim (Harvey, 2008; Uitermark, Nicholls, & Loopmans, 2012). Even in the literature, Purcell (2002; 2014) finds that right to the city research is both theoretically and politically underdeveloped, as its frequent use makes its meaning unclear and it is often supposed to be far less radical than Lefebvre intended. In my research, I will attempt to make the right to the city discourse more accessible to and coherent among social movements by connecting it to the struggle for affordable housing, as this may be more relatable for many individuals than purely academic discourse.

## 2.4 THE GOOD CITY

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### 2.4.1 KEY PRINCIPLES

The good city, devised by Ash Amin (2006) and drawing upon Iris Marion Young's notion of a group-identified urban society, aims to offer a "practical urban utopianism" of active and distributed democracy based upon four registers of solidarity—repair, relatedness, rights, and re-enchantment. By incorporating these elements into the everyday urban experience, the good city aims to create a well-functioning, inclusive, and participatory city (Connolly & Steil, 2009). The good city was developed in response to the urban juxtaposition of the rich and poor as well as the negative implications of state power and surveillance for urban solidarity; it addresses the context of cities that now lack distinct identities due to endless sprawl, lack community well-being due to alienation, insecurity, isolation, and poor living conditions, and lack civic behaviour in the public sphere (Amin, 2006).

Amin (2006) aims to embrace the positive potentials of urban living, including the "being-togetherness" and politics associated with heterogeneous strangers placed in close proximity. The good city can be defined as "an urban ethic imagined as an ever-widening habit of solidarity built around different dimensions of the urban common weal" (Amin, 2006, p. 1009), meaning that it aims to create urban societies that value difference, de-privatize the commons, eliminate exclusion, and benefit the majority rather than a small urban elite. Similar to the right to the city, it is intentionally unspecified exactly what the good city will look like in practice, as it is experimental and shaped by urban residents themselves in their own unique contexts, continuously building upon previous lessons (Amin, 2006). The good city holds the same stance as my own research regarding current global trends, as it does not intend to praise neoliberalism and globalization but does examine the possibilities that exist for emancipation within the existing circumstances (Amin, 2006).

#### REPAIR

Repair—the first of Amin's four registers of solidarity—entails the continual maintenance of the infrastructures and institutions that underlie the functioning of urban life, including universal and affordable access to basics of life such as shelter (Amin, 2006). Although repair is one of the four registers of solidarity, I will not draw upon it heavily in my research beyond recognizing the necessity of accessible housing.

#### RELATEDNESS

Relatedness aims to build a socially just city in which all residents have a sense of obligation towards the marginalised in order to address the consequences of unequal provision (Amin, 2006). This means that urban and national cultures should not be defined by features such as race and ethnicity but rather collective standards of political virtues (Amin, 2006); this creates an ease with unassimilated difference and reduces fear of and discrimination against

strangers, lower social classes, immigrants, and asylum-seekers. Public spaces that embrace relatedness should be created for mixed public use, bringing individuals from different backgrounds together without excessive surveillance or privatisation (Amin, 2006).

While Amin (2006) advocates for legislation against prejudice, he specifies that day-to-day mixture should not be forced, but can only emerge as an acceptance of relatedness among the populace. This addresses the fact that the vast majority of negotiations of difference manifest in everyday experiences and encounters (Amin, 2002), symbolizing more concrete displays of the national frame of social relations. The micro-politics of everyday encounter signify the key space for reconciling difference, with particular attention to local negotiations of identity (Amin, 2002). Amin (2002) thus does not view policy fixes as a solution to tensions and discrimination, instead arguing that inclusive and accepting relations can be produced through “the vibrant clash of an empowered and democratic public” (p. 960). Living with diversity requires constant negotiation through democratic everyday urbanism, which encourages contact and dialogue among various social groupings (Amin, 2002). This calls for an embrace of democratic values such as empowerment, citizenship, belonging, and the significance of rights (Amin, 2002). Ultimately, Amin (2002) argues, success will not arise from changes to policy but rather through local contexts and energies.

## RIGHTS

Rights in the good city are closely tied to the right to the city, calling for the right of all residents to have the means and entitlement to both shape and benefit from urban life (Amin, 2006). Although disagreement will surely emerge in this context of public pluralism, it is necessary that residents extend solidarity in order to withstand this dissent (Amin, 2006). While the fight for rights is currently conceived as a threat to public order, leaders must display more confidence in the creative powers of disagreement and dissent, as the greatest legitimacy and public vitality can be achieved through the greatest popular involvement (Amin, 2006). In other words, the right to the city must be made available to all.

## RE-ENCHANTMENT

Finally, re-enchantment demands that group activity shift from intragroup experiences of spectacle and consumption to wider sociality with intergroup gatherings in public spaces such as associations, clubs, and restaurants (Amin, 2006). This can be accomplished through radical urbanism in the form of theatre, art, and events; protest can be mixed with education, pleasure, and enchantment to create spaces in which solidarity and awareness are shared in a commons (Amin, 2006). Sociality is a form of urban solidarity, offering hopes and rewards for all who engage (Amin, 2006).



## 2.5 SYNTHESIZING THEORIES OF URBAN JUSTICE

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The commonalities between the just city, the right to the city, and the good city are many. For one, they share a “desire to rearticulate the political and moral connections between inhabitancy, social provision and social justice” (Connolly & Steil, 2009). Additionally, they all ally themselves with the claims of the socially marginalized and oppressed (Fainstein, 1999). On the other hand, they differ over the importance of class in comparison to other social groupings—the right to the city offering the most predominant focus on class—and whether justice is attainable under capitalism—Fainstein and Amin would believe it is possible, Lefebvre and Harvey would not. My assumption will be that justice is indeed attainable under capitalism, and was in fact reasonably achieved during the post-war welfare state era of the Netherlands, but that it is as yet unclear whether justice can be continued in the neoliberal era. The purpose of my research is to find an initial answer to this uncertainty through the opportunities offered by housing cooperatives.

Drawing on the just city, the right to the city, and the good city, my criteria for justice will be as follows (see Figure 2 for a visual representation):

*A housing cooperative is just when...*

1. *It exhibits equity.* This includes equity in terms of both material and social circumstances for the well-being of marginalized populations. Drawing upon Fainstein, I will understand equity as fairness, meaning that equality does not have to be absolute (e.g., the rent does not need to be exactly the same for units of different sizes) but relative—benefiting the worst off.
2. *It exhibits diverse relatedness.* I will focus on social rather than physical diversity, and extend my definition of diversity beyond class to include all identities. Drawing on the works of Amin, Fainstein, and I.M. Young, I will not expect forced diversity but rather an ease with unassimilated difference, allowing all individuals to define themselves and embrace their own identities. This does not require explicit policy for diversity but addresses how various individuals experience everyday encounters.
3. *It exhibits radical democracy.* Moving beyond liberal democratic notions, I propose that a housing cooperative is just when each and every member has an important role in everyday decision-making. State involvement should be minimal if existing at all, and there should be no administrators or “experts” placed in a hierarchical role above ordinary residents when making decisions.
4. *It exhibits urban rights.* This means that individuals are able to shape the cooperatives and appropriate the circumstances in which they live according to their own desires, while being treated with dignity and respect. Housing must be conceptualized by the cooperative as a right, and the use value of these spaces must receive priority over exchange value. There must be room for experimentation and constant modification.
5. *It exhibits re-enchantment.* Residents in just spaces should experience joyful solidarity, for instance through community events and feelings of belonging.

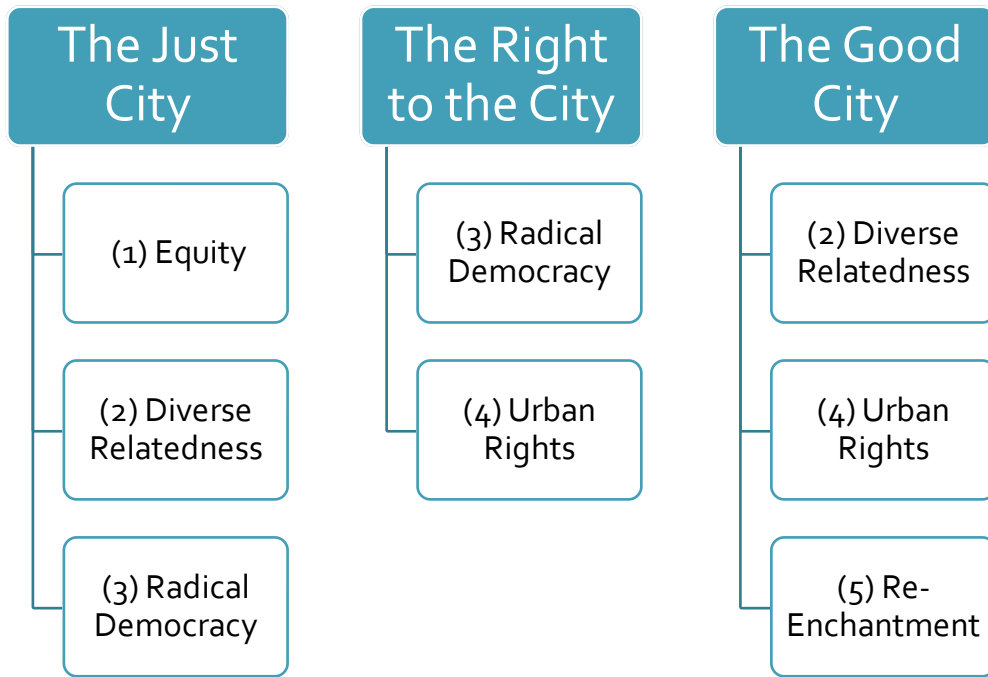


Figure 2: Relationships between theories of urban justice and criteria of housing justice.

## 2.6 HOUSING JUSTICE AT THE CITY SCALE

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### 2.6.1 NEOLIBERALISM AND FINANCIALIZATION

Neoliberalism can be defined as the notion that “market processes produce the most efficient allocation of resources, provide incentives that stimulate innovation and economic growth, reward merit, and consequently are conducive to the greatest good of the greatest number” (Fainstein, 2014, p. 6). This entails limited state interference through policies promoting redistribution, as the state should instead incentivize investors to increase market competitiveness: redistribution efforts generally involve higher taxes, which would make cities less attractive to businesses and therefore less competitive overall (Fainstein, 1997; Fainstein, 2014). While neoliberalism is a fairly broad term, it is associated with a number of particular changes, including lower taxation rates, privatization of public assets, and reduction of welfare provisions (Purcell, 2013). This is based on the key premise that private enterprises will meet supply and demand while offering greater freedom of choice for individuals, relying on the functioning of the invisible hand to improve overall welfare rather than deliberate government redistribution (Bunce, 2013; Fainstein, 2014). Scholars (Bunce, 2013; Fainstein, 2014) have criticized the neoliberal ideology as leading to a divided and unjust society in and beyond the housing realm, as it is perceived as not accounting for the impact of policies on minorities, neglecting necessary redistribution, and providing further benefits for the already well-off.

A related concept is financialization, which entails “the increasing dominance of financial actors, markets, practices, measurements and narratives, at various scales, resulting in a structural transformation of economies, firms (including financial institutions), states and households” (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017, p. 573). In the realm of housing, this manifests in governments offering subsidies to private property developers rather than building housing themselves, creating a context in which housing becomes a commodity to be accumulated and traded in financial markets (Fainstein, 2016). Following the traditional Marxist terms, this means that exchange value takes primacy over use value (Fainstein, 2016): the selection of housing, scale of projects, location of housing, and maintenance of the existing building stock is based upon the price that can be obtained in the real estate market rather than intrinsic value. Financialization has also been associated with the heightening of real estate speculation and boom-bust nature of housing markets (Fainstein, 2016).

The purported benefits of marketization and commodification include pluralism, diversity, and growth; however, most existing scholarship has found a contradiction between urban entrepreneurialism and social justice, as growth and competition can also lead to increased social segmentation, exclusion, and inequalities (Fainstein, 2001). Fainstein (2001) argues that the neoliberal ideology shows no signs of disappearing, and thus it is necessary to make production more participatory and collective, responding to the needs of the public at large.

She further suggests that it is indeed possible for economic growth to occur alongside a greater role for the non-profit sector and benevolent social policy: this can be achieved through a regulated capitalist economy, with urban governance seeking both economic development and social justice (Fainstein, 2001). In order to obtain justice, it may not be necessary to transform the entire system, but rather to ensure an equitable distribution of scarce resources as well as democratic engagement (Uitermark, 2009).

## 2.6.2 THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE (WELFARE) STATE

At the supra-national level, the European Union has used policy to promote marketization and competition among member states. These changes from previous policy began in the early 1990s, when the European Monetary Union decided that subsidies were consuming too great a portion of state budgets and thus severe austerity policies were introduced; this resulted in changing priorities in the Netherlands that deemed social housing to be a resource only available for “target populations” (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017). Over time, these policies heightened, with the EU pressuring the Dutch government to prioritize market principles as a means of increasing competitiveness: the EU viewed hybrid state-market housing associations as an illegal form of state aid, and defined the existing problem not as one of rising inequalities and poverty but rather “exclusion” from the market (Kadi & Musterd, 2014; Novy & Mayer, 2009).

In the wider Western European context, EU directives about social housing harming competitiveness have had the effect of reduced direct subsidies for social rental housing, programs to sell off social housing, reductions of the maximum income for social housing, promotion of homeownership, and deregulation of rents (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017; Kadi & Musterd, 2014). While social housing has not been fully eradicated, it has been greatly reduced, representing what Kadi and Musterd (2014) refer to as a “layering” of previous, de-commodified structures and newer neoliberal pressures. In Northern Europe more specifically, the “welfare state” is in transition, with reduced commitment to welfare programs, lower expenses on welfare, loosening regulations, and the privatization of state-owned industries (Fainstein, 1997); this approach builds on the assumption that common welfare can be better addressed by the market.

At the national level, the global ascendancy of neoliberalism has been extremely consequential in the Netherlands (Uitermark, 2009). The shift toward de-commodification and market-based policies in the Netherlands began in 1989, involving reductions in government spending on social housing; decreases in social mix, due to higher-income residents being excluded from social housing; lowering of subsidies for renters; changes to rent regulation, including increased freedom for associations to set rents; and measures to promote homeownership, such as generous subsidies for homeowners and mortgage interest payment deductions (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). The governance structure of the

Netherlands entails a strong national government that issues planning guidelines and financial resources, but considerable city-level power for implementing policy (Fainstein, 2008). The Netherlands has historically exhibited a strong tradition of social democratic politics, with the construction of housing controlled by non-profit housing corporations that used to be a de facto arm of state (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017; Fainstein, 2008).

Beginning in the late 1980s, neoliberal changes to national policy included reduced government subsidies for social housing, the elimination of subsidies to promote housing construction, and the widespread selling off of social housing to stimulate private investment (Uitermark, 2009). By the late 1990s, Fainstein (1997) noted that inter-urban competition had increased, national subsidies had been reduced, and the changing ideology on policies regarding welfare had led to inequality and spatial segregation. One of the most significant changes of the 1990s was that housing associations were separated from the national government through a process of “regulated deregulation”: housing associations began to merge into larger, for-profit organisations, which created problems for self-regulation, afforded excessive freedom to housing association CEOs, and eventually led to mismanagement and financial losses (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017; Kadi & Musterd, 2014). While the previous state-regulated structure was uniform, this new institutional structure allowed for more agency and variation, leading to opaque rules and procedures, particularly as housing associations began attempting to capitalize on their rich assets through dealings with investment banks (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017).

Two decades later, Fainstein (2016) observed the growth of the “entrepreneurial city”, which resulted not from financialization alone but from the way that the state managed its implementation. The decentralized governance trend of the “entrepreneurial state” neglects the role of the state in ensuring the economic well-being of individuals through just distribution (Fainstein, 2001). Through the encouragement of competition and movement away from the public sector towards financial markets, the role of the state transformed from a risk absorber for the citizenry to a risk absorber for the private market (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017).

At the local level, the municipal government of Amsterdam has adapted to neoliberal changes as well. Following the general shift in the 1980s towards urban governments sacrificing redistribution in favour of economic growth, the Amsterdam government initially resisted these changes before beginning to adopt such policies in the 1990s (Fainstein, 1997; Uitermark, 2009). Although cities have gained much stronger roles in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres due to the devolution of responsibilities, the circumstances of pressure from globalization, economic restructuring, and neoliberal policies from the national government and EU meant that it was nearly impossible to resist the prevailing ideologies and associated practices; the financialization of the housing sector cannot be separated from the wider financialization of the state (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017; Novy & Mayer, 2009). Accordingly, local governments have shifted their approach from

redistributive policies to entrepreneurial, competition-oriented strategies (Novy & Mayer, 2009).

Local neoliberal reforms in Amsterdam include the transfer of 28,575 units of social housing—14% of the city's stock—to private landlords in 2001, and a 2008 memorandum deeming housing to be “too affordable” and too dominated by rental housing, which resulted in goals to reduce the inexpensive housing supply by 2020, to sell off 30,000 social rental units by 2027, and to offer greater attention to the middle-class rather than the poor (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). The Amsterdam social housing sector has thus declined substantially, from 58% in 1995 to 48% in 2012 (Kadi & Ronald, 2014). This strategy has been promoted as creating a city for everyone rather than only the lowest income levels, as it supposedly liberates higher-income tenants who are trapped in the social housing sector where they do not belong; however, the previous policies may be seen as having treated everyone more equally—although not necessarily equitably—by allowing everyone to apply for social housing no matter their income. The new policy is viewed by some as privileging upper classes rather than ensuring that lower-income groups have the right to housing (Novy & Mayer, 2009; Uitermark, 2009). Despite embracing the notion that justice is unattainable at the local level without support from other levels, Fainstein (2009c) argues that urban movements do have transformative potential at the level in which they operate. Housing cooperatives may offer one example of this potential in practice.

### 2.6.3 IMPACTS ON HOUSING JUSTICE

Government reforms in the housing sector generally entailed commodification and the promotion of private market provision. Examples of these structural reconfigurations towards marketization, as previously mentioned, include the selling off of social rental housing, the reduction of subsidies for rental housing construction, the deregulation of rents, and the promotion of homeownership (Kadi & Ronald, 2014). The main impacts of these new housing policies and regulations include changes to the type of housing available, the entry criteria for housing, the price of housing, and the distribution of housing (Kadi & Ronald, 2014). This has exacerbated spatial manifestations of social inequality in that speculation undermines the availability and affordability of rental housing: access to housing has become more exclusive and more difficult for low-income households to afford, leading to inequities and citizen disengagement (Kadi & Ronald, 2014; Uitermark, 2009).

With regard to affordability, the increasing rent levels brought about by speculation and the reduction of social housing overall has made housing increasingly expensive. Between 1995 and 2009, the median rent increased by a substantial 28%—adjusted for inflation—while growing nationwide income inequality began to develop in the Netherlands (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). This can be seen in the increase of the median rent-income ratio from 21.1% to 25% over the same period, with poor and very poor households paying more while the middle-

income ratio remained fairly stable (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). Although direct subsidies have been eliminated, the extensive Dutch system of housing allowances is a crucial measure for maintaining affordability. The reduction of affordability can be credited at least in part to financialization, as housing associations that are gambling on derivatives and borrowing on global capital markets have had to sell off housing units and raise rents to offset losses (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017).

Accessibility has become a serious issue as it has been severely altered for numerous groups due to market restructuring. While the demand for housing is high in all segments, it is much easier for the wealthy to find accommodation: strict regulations and criteria for social housing, combined with a shrinking rental sector and growing homeownership, have created a context in which the market is disproportionately more easily accessed by those who can afford to buy (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). Although middle- and upper-class residents benefit from increased access to private homeownership, this is not an option for most poor households: purchase prices have increased more than 100% between 1990 and 2010 (Kadi & Musterd, 2014), and there are few alternatives as the share of social housing is decreasing, resulting in increased competition. This is a marked change from the previous situation, in which accessibility was determined by factors other than ability to pay, and affluent households who wished to buy highly-priced housing for-purchase had to wait for a longer period of time to obtain one of the limited dwellings available (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). Wait times for social housing have significantly increased, from two years in 1982 to 10 years in 2008 and 15 years or more in the present day (Kadi & Musterd, 2014; Uitermark, 2009).

These changes have created growing concerns regarding urban inequality over the past several decades, as the complex interplay of financialization, neoliberal ideology, globalization, and the changing nature of state-sponsored welfare and housing affordability programs has intensified uneven development, particularly in the housing sector (Fainstien, 2016). Fainstein (2016) notes that it is not financialization alone that has caused the affordable housing crisis, as financialization in a more just context may actually improve the distribution of benefits in urban development, but rather it is the government's adoption of the neoliberal role that has reduced urban justice.

Changes to state policy have had an impact on socio-spatial segregation in Amsterdam: previous policies have been modified so that the required 30% social housing in new developments can now be placed anywhere, including entirely different buildings, and the possibility to charge higher rents based on location has now been introduced (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). Additionally, inner-city neighbourhoods are being gentrified and the differences in living conditions between various groups and neighbourhoods are growing (Novy & Mayer, 2009). This has implications for the right to the city, as Kadi and Ronald (2014) argue that the shrinking affordable rental stock and increased wait times have led to exclusionary displacement. Irazábal (2009) argues that citizens who cannot take part in the neoliberal economy are being deprived of their urban citizenship rights, as the issues brought about by recent planning practices with regard to land markets and property rights have

created spatial inequalities and polarization; at the same time, social movements—which could mobilize residents to resist these changes and demand rights—are in decline (Nonini, 2017).

#### 2.6.4 CRITERIA OF A JUST URBAN HOUSING MARKET

Given this wider context of housing justice, a set of criteria can be devised for measuring justice at the city level in the circumstances of the housing market more broadly:

*A city offers access to just housing when...*

6. *It is affordable.* As previously mentioned, I will understand affordability to mean that residents are able to pay for high-quality housing while still having enough remaining income for the necessities of life.
7. *It is accessible and inclusive to all.* This means that individuals are not excluded from housing opportunities for any reason, whether it be income or identity. There should be no displays of favouritism or discrimination, and residents should feel welcome in their communities.
8. *It offers choice.* Housing options should not be uniform, and the ability to choose one's ideal circumstances of living should not be limited to those with higher incomes.
9. *It is integrated.* Residents should not be socio-spatially segregated on account of their income levels or any other feature of their identities against their will.
10. *It avoids displacement.* The impacts of neoliberalism and marketization should not result in the displacement of residents from their communities.



## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 GENERAL RESEARCH STRATEGY

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In order to address the question of justice in Amsterdam's housing cooperatives, I will follow the general research strategy of an in-depth analysis of one specific case study—Amsterdam—as this will allow me to capture the complexities of justice in everyday contexts. Yin (2009) argues that case studies are appropriate when the researcher seeks understanding beyond pure description regarding the intricacies of social phenomena, when the focus is on a contemporary occurrence in a real-life context, and when the researcher has little control over events or behaviours. This is appropriate for my research as I would like to gain in-depth knowledge on the role of cooperatives in contributing to justice while capturing the complexities of housing—a situation that is beyond my control. By narrowing in on Amsterdam, I will be able to develop a thorough understanding of how justice is or is not implemented in real-life contexts.

Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that atypical cases often reveal more information than those that are standard; Amsterdam offers an interesting example of an extreme case due to its previously described status as the “most just” city. My case study will be “embedded” within the city of Amsterdam in that it will be separated into logical subunits through the individual housing cooperatives under analysis. Case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence that converge in order to capture the intricacies of a case while linking the findings to prior theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009); accordingly, I will base my analysis upon a number of sources of data including literature review, content analysis, and remote interviews, which will be structured through the criteria devised in my theoretical framework.

I have opted for a qualitative approach in recognition of the post-modern turn in planning, as I acknowledge that strictly positivist research strategies—which treat objects as objective facts—and empiricist methods—which collect descriptive data without interpretation—cannot fully grasp the complex social constructions of reality (Silva et al., 2015). According to Flyvbjerg (2006), it is difficult to wholly prove anything in the social sciences, as only context-dependent knowledge exists, and therefore a researcher can only hope to learn. This will be kept in mind throughout the research, and the specificities of the case of Amsterdam will be described in great detail in recognition of this fact. My approach will be inductive, as I will begin my research without a hypothesis as to whether or not housing cooperatives will adequately meet my criteria of justice. I will however begin my research with a comprehensive theoretical framework and a clear idea of how justice will be understood; this ensures that my notion of justice will not be distorted by my findings.

## 3.2 CASE STUDY LOCATION

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### 3.2.1 AMSTERDAM: A "GROUNDED UTOPIA"

Amsterdam has been selected as a "most extreme case" because it has long been idealized as the most just existing city. Since this is largely due to its traditionally high share of de-commodified social housing (Kadi & Musterd, 2014), it is the optimal case for assessing the effects of the decline of social housing and rise of the neoliberal state. According to Fainstein (1999), Amsterdam "offers the best available model of a relatively egalitarian, diverse, democratic city, with a strong commitment to environmental preservation" (p. 19): it is characterised by diversity in population and lifestyle, community participation, high levels of redistribution, and social mix in neighbourhoods. It is seen as a "grounded utopia", as it demonstrates that social cohesion and justice can be accompanied by economic growth (Fainstein, 2001). Following the just city theory, Fainstein believes that Amsterdam managed to find the perfect balance between equity, diversity, growth, and sustainability (Uitermark, 2009). Lefebvre, the main proponent of the right to the city theory, was equally attracted to Amsterdam in the 1960s by the actions of urban social movements resisting modernization (Uitermark, 2009). Various authors (e.g. Kadi & Musterd, 2014; Novy & Mayer, 2009) have concurred that Amsterdam has become widely recognised as a desirable model for urban justice.

One of the key features of Amsterdam that has led to this reputation has been its history of heavy government involvement in urban planning, particularly in the area of high-quality, affordable housing (Fainstein, 1997; Uitermark, 2009). Substantial state welfare activity allowed for Amsterdam to remain relatively diverse with limited spatial inequality, as housing subsidies were scattered throughout the city, rents were very low, and there were no "slum" or "ghettoized" areas (Fainstein, 1997; Fainstein, 1999). Fainstein (2005a) regards the Dutch national housing policy as key to Amsterdam's equity, as it has historically ensured that neighbourhoods avoid homogeneity and isolation through mixed uses, diversity, and participatory governance. Nonetheless, there has always existed a level of indirect discrimination in housing, as native Dutch residents have had greater upward social mobility due to advantages in the labour market (Fainstein, 1997). Despite these disparities, Amsterdam has historically been far more equal than other major cities such as London and New York, with immigrants in Amsterdam being protected from extreme need and almost no residents living in terrible-quality housing (Fainstein, 1997).

In terms of social structures, Amsterdam achieved relative equality through a widely accepted moral code of fairness and generosity as well as a relatively low gap between the rich and poor, leading to reduced class antagonism (Fainstein, 1997). The upper classes in Amsterdam have supported high levels of redistribution in exchange for the benefits of living in a cosmopolitan, egalitarian city, and property developers have accepted assured profits over higher speculative gains (Fainstein, 1999). Traditionally, urban social movements have

had a great deal of power, opposing top-down planning through large-scale squatting, resistance to the eviction of squatters, and protests against urban renewal (Fainstein, 1999). This demonstrates Fainstein's (1999; 2009c) claim that greater social justice can more easily spring from contexts in which social justice already exists: "achievement of the just is a circular process, whereby the pre-existence of equity begets sentiments in its favour, democratic habits produce popular participation, and diversity increases tolerance" (Fainstein, 2009c, p. 23). Justice in Amsterdam is widespread, relying not only on working class resistance but also upper class support (Fainstein, 1999).

Amsterdam is viewed as the epitome of the "European City" thesis, which entails de-commodified urban development, significant state ownership, regulation of private rental housing, national welfare, and an organized housing supply to mitigate socio-spatial divisions (Kadi & Musterd, 2014; Novy & Mayer, 2009). In Amsterdam, much of the housing stock was de-commodified in the post-war period, run by non-profit associations and supported by state subsidies; this allowed for relatively affordable and accessible housing (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). Even within the context of Europe, Amsterdam is viewed as having relatively low rates of segregation, high opportunities for social mobility, progressive attitudes towards immigration and diversity, leniency to radical opposition such as squatting, and high citizen involvement in policy-making; in other words, it is seen as "a center of progressive urban policies and the epitome of a tolerant, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan city" (Novy & Mayer, p. 111). The long history of justice in Amsterdam, and especially of housing justice, makes it a perfect example of an "extreme" case for my analysis of justice in the housing market.

### 3.2.2 THE DEATH OF THE JUST CITY?

Over the years, Amsterdam's status as the most just city has been questioned, as the glorification of Amsterdam can be seen as idealising the past of European cities without offering sufficient attention to present-day problems and their underlying issues (Novy & Mayer, 2009). Additionally, this idealisation of Amsterdam can distract from and disregard the inequalities and injustices existing in the city, which can undermine the struggles of Amsterdam-based activists in fighting against injustice and repression (Novy & Mayer, 2009). Fainstein (2006; 2009c) has acknowledged these criticisms of the Just City of Amsterdam, admitting that present-day Amsterdam demonstrates the potential for destabilisation and disruption of virtuous cycles of democracy, diversity, and equity. Further, she recognizes that the decline in the Dutch welfare state, increasing ethnic tensions, and tightening rules concerning immigration threaten the notion that Amsterdam could be a real-life model of the just city, thus necessitating social change (Fainstein, 2009c).

The decline of the just city of Amsterdam has been associated with reductions in affordable and accessible housing for the poor, as well as increasing connections between housing

conditions and market forces (Kadi & Musterd, 2014; Uitermark, 2009). In the present day, accessibility to housing in Amsterdam has become easier for the rich and more difficult for the poor, and there is speculation that the “neo-liberalizing just city” may lose its just features entirely in the long term if nothing is done to change the situation (Kadi & Musterd, 2014).

Novy and Mayer (2009) argue that Amsterdam could never have been a utopia, as these changes could not emerge rapidly with no prior context; accordingly, despite its past successes, it should not be used as a present model for informing just strategies. The case of Amsterdam offers a stark example of contemporary changes to European cities, displaying the same political-economic and social restructuring processes as other cities under contemporary capitalism (Novy & Mayer, 2009). Uitermark (2009) perfectly encapsulates the complexity of Amsterdam’s history of justice in arguing that “Amsterdam should not only be held up as an example of a just city but also as an example of how quickly and dramatically movements striving for the just city can lose their momentum” (p. 351). This controversy over Amsterdam’s status as a just city makes it an ideal case for an examination of the impacts of neoliberal changes on justice and alternative movements for change. Cooperatives offer a de-commodified housing option that differs in many ways from the traditional social housing of the past, thus it is important to examine their role in the future of Amsterdam.

### 3.3 HOUSING COOPERATIVES UNDER ANALYSIS

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As conceived by Amsterdam Alternative, living cooperatives entail projects to remove housing units from the market in order to create affordable living spaces free from property speculation, thus protecting these spaces from profit-based exploitation (D. S., 2018). More generally, cooperatives offer a social and environmental alternative to the economic laws of the market and the state (De Meent, n.d.). The primary model for housing cooperatives in Europe is the German-based *Mietshäuser Syndikat*, which adopted a capitalist legal form of governance and organisation—a “Limited Liability Company”—as a cheaper and simpler scheme than a traditional cooperative; *Syndikat* managed to transform this into a post-capitalist model with a participatory and solidarity-focused economy (D. S., 2018). In theory, each property is permanently withdrawn from the real-estate market and secured as a commons—*Syndikat* has a veto on selling—ensuring that these spaces remain affordable, communitarian, and socially-committed (D. S., 2018). Despite belonging to the larger organisation of *Syndikat*, each collective is owned and run autonomously.

In the Netherlands, a similar organisation is *Soweto*, which functions as a social housing association but with greater inclusiveness in tenancy, a break in the traditional power relationships between tenants and landlords, and collective, affordable, sustainable living conditions (D. S., 2018; *Gemeenschappelijk Wonen*, n.d.). Another comparable organisation is *VrijCoop*, which is an alliance aimed at transforming buildings, housing complexes, and workspaces into collective community property with resident self-management based on a multi-year plan (*VrijCoop*, 2019). This is framed as a just ideal, offering collective ownership and self-management to make residents no longer dependent on large institutions or the politics of social housing, providing rights that are independent of capital injection, and giving each resident a voice (*VrijCoop*, 2019).

My research will explore the organizational practices of *Soweto* and *VrijCoop* as well as *De Meent*, a larger commons organisation that aims to connect cooperatives through mapping; *Amsterdam Alternative*, an alternative magazine-turned-cooperative organization; and *Gemeenschappelijk Wonen* [Common Living], an organization that links together and supports cooperatives. These organizations have been selected because they claim to embrace the core values of the cooperative model and represent the key foundational organizations that support the functioning of individual cooperative projects. They are the funders and often owners of cooperative buildings, offering crucial financial support and advice during the early stages of cooperative formation. Accordingly, an examination of these organizations will allow me to determine whether the just ideals of housing cooperatives are truly reflected in practice and therefore to understand whether cooperatives offer a feasible just alternative to social or private housing.

I will also examine the four projects that are explained and rationalized individually below, all of which belong to either *Soweto*, *VrijCoop*, *De Meent*, *Amsterdam Alternative*, or *Gemeenschappelijk Wonen*. Figure 3 offers a visual representation of the connections

between these organizations. The analysis of these individual projects will be embedded in my examination of the Amsterdam housing market more broadly as it is assumed that if these projects offer access to just housing, then they are contributing in a small way to a just urban housing market overall.

## DE GROENE GEMEENSCHAP

Founded in March 2011, De Groene Gemeenschap [The Green Community] is a small-scale living collective offering housing and working spaces to six residents as well as a communal garden and regular activities focused on sustainability and solidarity that are accessible to individuals from outside the house (Cooplink, n.d.; De Groene Gemeenschap, n.d.; De Meent, n.d.). This case is interesting for my research as it is smaller-scale than many other cooperatives, and the difference in size could potentially have notable impacts on the effectiveness of the organisation. It will allow me to further investigate claims referenced in my theoretical framework that small-scale organizations offer the greatest potential for democracy but the least potential for widespread change.

## NIEUWLAND

Founded in 2014 as the first project of Soweto, NieuwLand [New Land] is a community project that combines a living collective, workplaces, and a socio-political neighbourhood centre with non-commercial, volunteer activities based on solidarity and self-organisation (De Meent, n.d.; NieuwLand, n.d.). This project pays an affordable rent to Soweto for the living, working, and community space in order to pay off the loan that was originally used to buy the building (D. S., 2018). It will be particularly interesting to examine the unique governance structures of this cooperative, given that it is closely connected to a larger cooperative organization.

## OT301

Unlike the other projects, OT301 was initially a squatted settlement from 1999 onwards before being bought in 2006 (Jansen, 2013). It is now a collectively-owned non-profit project organised by an association called EHBK that combines housing with public functions and work spaces connected to art, politics, and subculture (Jansen, 2013). The core values of the organisation are autonomy, self-organisation, and inclusivity (Jansen, 2013). This project will be unique to my research in terms of examining the politics of squatting in Amsterdam and the transition from squat to housing cooperative. According to Uitermark (2009), the squatting movement has been crucial to Amsterdam, as it represents the “intensification and radicalization of resident protests” (p. 351). The squatting movement in Amsterdam has fought the demolition of affordable housing, the incursion of modernist fantasies on urban spaces, and the vacancies that allow for real estate speculation (Uitermark, 2009). While squatters were historically rejected by the Dutch general populace, they are now seen as an ally of residents demanding high-quality, affordable housing; this has led to greater

government support for squatters and radical change by preventing spaces from being redesigned for maximum profit (Uitermark, 2009). In line with my theoretical framework, this represents one manifestation of the democratization of planning.

## BAJESDORP

The Bajesdorp differs from the other selected cases as its original houses were demolished, and it has now had to purchase a new space as of November 2019 in cooperation with the Municipality of Amsterdam and VrijCoop (Bajesdorp, n.d.). The new building, ideally to be constructed in the next two years, will have 20 to 25 work and living spaces, with residents forming a cooperative and sustainable environment that is free from market forces and gentrification (Bajesdorp, n.d.) Bajesdorp builds upon the knowledge gained from 15 years of living and working in the former location of Bijlmerbajes, as well as drawing from VrijCoop’s experiences with not-for-profit living and working spaces (Bajesdorp, n.d.). This cooperative may provide important insights from its previous failures and new experimentation, demonstrating the dynamic nature of radical democracy.

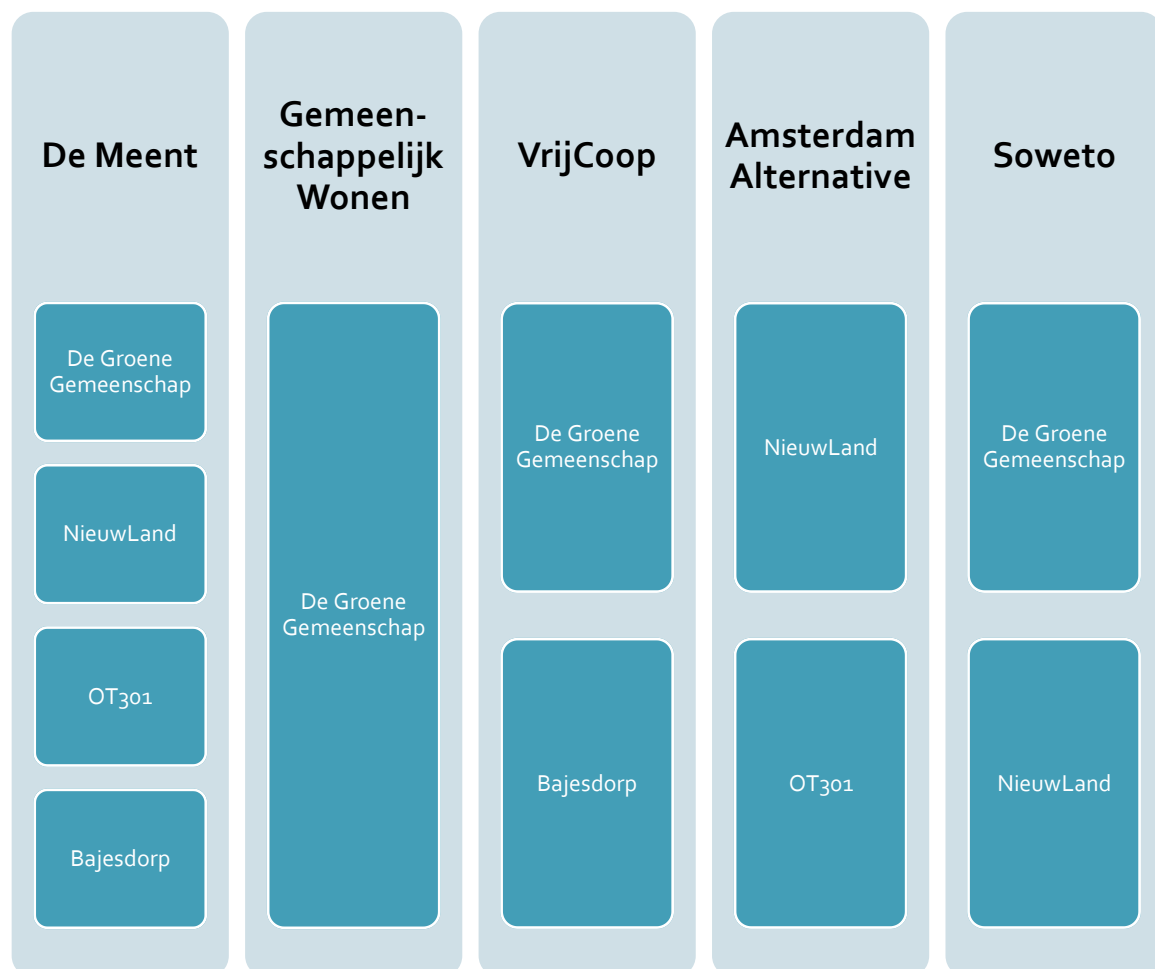


Figure 3: Connections between wider housing cooperative organizations and individual housing cooperative projects.

## 3.4 SOURCES OF EMPIRICAL DATA

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### 3.4.1 ONLINE CONTENT

For the content analysis, I examined nine different websites. The first five—De Meent, Gemeenschappelijk Wonen, VrijCoop, Amsterdam Alternative, and Soweto—entail wider housing cooperative organizations to which the individual projects belong. All of these organizations encompass several of the projects under analysis and work in cooperation with one another. This allows me to gain a deeper understanding of the governance structures and networks underlying the establishment and management of housing cooperatives, as well as the theoretical principles upon which they are founded.

The final four websites analyzed belong to the individual housing cooperatives themselves—De Groene Gemeenschap, NieuwLand, OT301, and Bajesdorp. These websites allowed me to examine how the principles of the wider organizations were applied in specific cases in the context of Amsterdam. Most of these websites were only available in Dutch, and I used Google Translate to translate the information into English. While Google Translate does not always provide perfect translations, and therefore I may not have understood the exact connotations of particular words in Dutch, the translations were adequate for my collection of relevant information. On each of these websites, I visited every available webpage, gathering an extensive amount of data. These data were then organized and sorted according to the five criteria of justice stated in section 2.6 of the theoretical framework and analyzed accordingly.

### 3.4.2 INTERVIEWS

In order to broaden my analysis from the scale of individual cooperatives to the housing market in general, I contacted individuals from across Amsterdam's housing market for interviews. While a vast majority of contacts were unable to offer interviews due to the circumstances of the pandemic, such as time stresses due to childcare and other increased responsibilities, I was able to reach several representatives of cooperative and housing organizations as well as urban scholars in the field of housing. Unfortunately, two of these interviews had to be conducted through email rather than conversation, which reduces the spontaneity and potentially the openness of responses. While most were carried out over Zoom (a video call software), some were phone calls, which reduces the ability to gain further insights through body language. I conducted email interviews with representatives of Amsterdam Alternative/OT301 and De Groene Gemeenschap and Zoom interviews with !Woon/Soweto and Bajesdorp to gain the perspective of those involved directly in the housing cooperative system (Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4). In order to include other perspectives, I also conducted phone interviews with three key representatives from different real estate brokers in Amsterdam (Interviewees 5, 6, 7). For an academic understanding, I spoke to two



scholars from the University of Amsterdam who specialize in housing (Interviewees 8, 9). I also carried out phone interviews with important policy advisors from the Gemeente Amsterdam whose work is connected to social housing (Interviewees 10, 11) as well as a professional who works for a social housing corporation (Interviewee 12). This variety allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of various perspectives on the housing market and to better determine how a more just housing system might manifest. After these 12 interviews, saturation was reached. Figure 4 below offers a visual representation of the interview information; for interview guides, see Appendices I and II.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Reference Number</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Interview Format</i>	<i>Date of Interview</i>
<i>Cooperatives</i>	1	De Groene Gemeenschap	Email	09.06.2020
	2	AA, OT301	Email	11.06.2020
	3	!Woon, Soweto	Zoom	25.06.2020
	4	Bajesdorp	Zoom	04.07.2020
<i>Private Sector</i>	5	City Housing Amsterdam	Phone	10.06.2020
	6	Amsterdam Housing	Phone	12.06.2020
	7	Expat Help – Housing	Phone	29.06.2020
<i>Academia</i>	8	University of Amsterdam	Zoom	16.06.2020
	9	University of Amsterdam	Zoom	19.06.2020
<i>Government</i>	10	Gemeente Amsterdam	Phone	23.06.2020
	11	Gemeente Amsterdam	Phone	01.07.2020
<i>Social Housing</i>	12	Amsterdamse Federatie van Woningcorporaties	Phone	22.06.2020

Figure 4: Interview Information.

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

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My research entails a qualitative case study that includes literature review, content analysis, and online, semi-structured stakeholder interviews. I conduct a literature review on justice and housing cooperatives in order to identify key theoretical perspectives, gaining an understanding of debates on the subject of cooperatives. Further literature review focuses on theories of justice and circumstances of housing in the Netherlands. I develop an in-depth understanding of the chosen frameworks of justice—the just city, the right to the city, and the good city—in order to apply them to my empirical research. These concepts are synthesized to formulate criteria for evaluating justice. My literature review also involves close examination of the context of housing in the Netherlands, seeking to understand what made the social housing of the Netherlands particularly just and why this justice is allegedly unfeasible in the private market. This information is used to scale up my specific criteria of justice to a set of criteria for a just urban housing market more broadly.

The content analysis focuses largely on promotional online materials distributed by the various cooperatives, including advertisements for community events and claims made on websites. My analysis examines the extent to which the discourses used by these cooperatives align with the theories of justice from my literature review. I use my five criteria of justice as a framework to analyze these data sources, thoroughly reviewing the available resources in order to determine if and how these criteria are addressed.

In order to determine whether the findings of my content analysis hold true on a larger scale, I then conduct multiple semi-structured stakeholder interviews over remote formats such as phone calls and Zoom. These interviews are with representatives from government and social housing corporations, regarding the decline of social housing in recent years, effects of this change, and opinions on cooperatives; representatives from private development corporations, regarding their impressions of social housing and cooperatives as well as their own efforts to promote justice; representatives from cooperatives, regarding their efforts to promote social justice in the capitalist context and impressions of social and private housing; and academics, regarding their research findings on housing cooperatives and the overall context of housing justice in Amsterdam. I follow a semi-structured interview format, meaning that I entered the interviews with a pre-designed question list of specific topics but followed a flexible interview schedule, which allows the interviewees to bring up new topics throughout the discussion (Bryman, 2016). I use follow-up questions as a means to further understand what the interviewees themselves view as most important. These interviews are analyzed by grouping the answers by theme and then examining commonalities, differences, and key points among various stakeholders.

Given that all of the selected cooperatives organise community events, it would have also been beneficial to attend one or more of these events to make observations and gather a general impression of the dynamics of these organisations. This element of my initial research plan was prevented due to cancellations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3.6 QUALITY OF RESEARCH

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In terms of construct validity, which is the use of the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Yin, 2006), I am using multiple sources of evidence, and I believe that interview-based, subjective measures of personal experiences are the best means of exploring this topic; justice is a complex phenomenon that is experienced differently by each individual and thus it cannot be captured by quantitative strategies such as questionnaires. The methods are suitable to the research question as they allow me to gain both an in-depth understanding of cooperatives at the individual initiative level and a broader understanding of the context of housing justice in Amsterdam. Content analysis is suitable at the project scale because it examines detailed and thorough information about individual housing cooperatives, and interviews with numerous diverse stakeholders scale these findings up to the city level.

The establishment of causal relationships and thus internal validity is generally challenging in the social sciences (Yin, 2006); however, the purpose of my research is not necessarily to prove a clear causal relationship between housing cooperatives and justice but only to understand whether the former can be one tool in contributing to the latter. With regard to external validity, I will aim for analytical generalisation—the generalisation of particular result to a broader theory (Yin, 2016)—meaning that the results from my specific case can be applied theoretically to housing cooperatives and justice more widely, but not necessarily to the particulars of other local contexts.

There may be questionable reliability and replicability in interviews, as participants' answers may be influenced by the direction taken in conversation and therefore the data collection procedures could not be repeated with the same results (Yin, 2006). This is especially true as I am limited to online or phone interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been shown in some cases to reduce depth due to shorter interview lengths and lack of body language (Bryman, 2012). Nevertheless, I increase the reliability and replicability of my interviews by reaching saturation and further supporting these findings with other sources of data, including literature review and content analysis. Additionally, the literature review and content analysis could be replicated as I have provided thorough description of the methods used for my research, and my criteria of justice have been outlined in detail.

Accuracy may be an issue when an interviewee is responding to open-ended questions (Bryman, 2012), as the exact meanings of answers may not always be clear, but the interviews used for my research are conducted with attention to as much detail as possible and clarification questions are asked so as to minimize the possibility of misinterpretation. The semi-structured nature of my interviews ensures that responses are closely relevant to the topic at hand so that there is a reduced chance of unintentionally misconstruing comments in order to fit my research. Accuracy will be more robust for my content analysis and literature review, as the wording in these sources has been carefully selected by writers and aims to be as clear and direct as possible.

### 3.7 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF APPLIED METHODOLOGY

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The primary limitation of my applied methodology is that I was unable to conduct participant observation as initially planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thus leaving interviews to be my only source of direct, personal communication with housing cooperatives. Participant observation may have provided me with a more effective means of seeing life through residents' eyes (Bryman, 2012), as I would have gained a real-life understanding of their daily activities as well as potentially stronger relationships with the residents I would be studying. My content analysis may have been more robust if accompanied by participant observation, as I would have been able to familiarize myself with the special words and slang used by cooperative residents in the everyday (Bryman, 2012) and could thus better understand their usage in promotional materials. Participant observation would also have allowed for the revelation of taken-for-granted features of social life in cooperatives that interviewees may regard as implicit (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, particularly in the study of justice, interviewees may be hesitant to reveal questionable or "unjust" practices, but these may become clear through unexpected occurrences during observation (Bryman, 2012).

Although the inability to conduct participant observation may have posed some limitations to my research, there exist several clear strengths of interviews. For one, interviews allow residents to reconstruct events in retrospect (Bryman, 2012), which may reveal personal reflections that would have been missed through observation alone. Participant observation may also induce reactive effects (Bryman, 2012)—especially as residents would want to seem particularly just when being observed—but there may be greater openness and honesty in interviews as a conversation can be more comfortable than feeling that certain behaviours are expected during observation. Further, residents may be more open to interviews than observation, as it is less intrusive (Bryman, 2012). Interviews may also better allow me to narrow in on the focus of my research (Bryman, 2012), whereas participant observation may lead to an excessive time commitment for irrelevant details. Given these strengths, interviews provide an ideal method for answering my central research question concerning the role of housing cooperatives in the wider context of Amsterdam's housing market.

Content analysis offers a number of strengths as well. The web content of each cooperative project has been carefully constructed to present the cooperative to others, meaning that it will allow me to understand how the cooperatives perceive themselves. It also offers an excellent resource for assessing several of my criteria, as the websites contain information on community events and organizational structures. The main disadvantage of content analysis is that the cooperatives will only post on their websites that which they want to be available to the public eye, thus they may intentionally leave out anything that may be perceived as negative. Although this may be true, it can be beneficial to first grasp the positive aspects of cooperatives through the content analysis, then to question or trouble this ideal representation in my interviews with various stakeholders. While content analysis alone would be insufficient, it is an optimal method for answering my research question when combined with interviews.

## 4. HISTORICAL AND PRESENT CONTEXT OF HOUSING IN AMSTERDAM

Social housing has traditionally provided one of the key foundations of justice in Amsterdam and the Netherlands more broadly, as it has allowed individuals of all income levels to gain equal access to high-quality housing. Between 1945 and 1985, 90% of all residential construction in Amsterdam belonged to the subsidized social rental segment, resulting in an increase in social housing from 18% in 1950 to 58% by 1995 (Kadi & Musterd, 2014; Kadi & Ronald, 2014). Additionally, rents in the private market were regulated to ensure fair housing circumstances beyond social housing, which meant that a total of approximately 90% of Amsterdam's housing market was tightly regulated by the late 1980s (Kadi & Musterd, 2014; Nonini, 2017). This meant that, after 1945, social housing was no longer seen as merely a last resort for low-income individuals but rather the standard housing situation for the majority of the population (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017). By the mid-1970s, social housing corporations had declared access to affordable housing to be a universal right in Amsterdam, irrespective of income level (Nonini, 2017). Rents were regulated and allocation was based on waiting lists, making social housing accessible to both low- and middle-income groups (Kadi & Ronald, 2014). In terms of governance structures, most social housing in Amsterdam was delivered by non-governmental organizations who were granted generous public subsidies (Fainstein, 1997; Kadi & Ronald, 2014).

The widespread availability of social housing was enabled by a generous welfare state with relatively far-reaching regulatory powers. Welfare states are characterized by central state intervention in the economy, high rates of taxation, and material redistribution through policy (Purcell, 2013). The core principles of social and regulated private housing in Amsterdam included supply-side subsidies for construction and operation, rent regulation, allocation regulation, and a system of non-profit housing associations that received financial aid from the state (Kadi & Musterd, 2014). Individual rental subsidies were allotted according to need, based on the premise that average workers should not have to spend more than 17% of their incomes on rent, and those belonging to the lowest income group should spend no more than 10% of their income on housing (Nonini, 2017).

The central government had the ability to determine rents and provide detailed building requirements through subsidies and loans (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017). On a local level, the municipal government could decide the manner of contracts, supervise construction, and allocate housing in both the public and private sectors (Aalbers, van Loon, & Fernandez, 2017). Amsterdam signified the most extreme case of the wider social-democratic housing system in the Netherlands, with housing interventions historically more pronounced in the city due to economic and demographic diversity (Kadi & Ronald, 2014).

This changed in the late 1990s, when increasing neoliberal pressures began to limit the previously large-scale nature of social housing in Amsterdam. The welfare state began to retreat and urban competitiveness began to be prioritized, thus making the provision of de-commodified housing appear less attractive compared to more entrepreneurial strategies

(Kadi & Musterd, 2014). Neoliberal influences on Amsterdam resulted in the termination of direct subsidies for housing associations, the sale of social housing, and the promotion of homeownership, with an explicit intention to attract higher-income residents (Fainstein, 1997; Kadi & Musterd, 2014). The reduction of government investments in public housing resulted in a greater role for the market, which would have consequences for both the economy and quality of life in Amsterdam.

In the present day, the rental value of social and private housing is determined by the *woningwaarderingstelsel* [housing valuation system], which is based on various measures of housing quality. These measures include the size of the residence, the location, the officially listed property value, the type of heating, the outdoor space if existing, the insulation, the washroom, and the kitchen arrangement (City of Amsterdam, n.d.). In order to ensure a level of equity and improve access for low-income renters, rental homes that have a base rent of €720.42 or below (as of 2019) are regulated and considered to be *sociale huurwoningen* [social housing] (City of Amsterdam, n.d.). Landlords are prohibited from charging higher rents than that which is determined by the points system, and there is a maximum limit on annual rent increases. The primary disadvantage of the social housing supply is long wait times, which can limit accessibility. There is a maximum income criteria for access to social housing—capped at €38,035 in 2019 (City of Amsterdam, 2019)—although this only applies to new applicants, thus allowing higher-income individuals to remain in social housing long after they have passed this threshold. This is a controversial issue, as it may be regarded as deceptive or exploitative to fill spots that are intended for those in greater need.

On the other hand, rental homes that have a base cost of more than €720.24 as of 2019 are part of the *vrije sector* [private sector] and are not regulated; landlords can set their own prices and there is no maximum for annual rent increases (City of Amsterdam, n.d.). According to the City of Amsterdam (n.d.), “prices are higher in the private sector rental market, but you can often find housing more quickly” (para. 8). This contributes to inequalities in that wealthier renters have quicker access to housing.

Inequalities have emerged from these changes to the housing market, resulting in challenges in accessibility and an increase in segregation. Kadi and Musterd (2014) find that the affordable housing market is becoming increasingly inaccessible for poor outsiders, as commodification has reduced the availability of affordable housing. Policies have pressured higher-income individuals to leave the relatively small portion of social housing that remains (Kadi & Musterd, 2014) and commodified housing has differentiated residents by consumer categories (Uitermark, 2009), thus resulting in greater segregation. This has occurred because social housing is no longer seen as an option that should be available to everyone, but rather it is now believed that it should only be for the working class, whereas middle and higher classes are given subsidies to buy their own houses from the newly privatized stock (Kadi & Ronald, 2014; Uitermark, 2009). The separation of individuals by socio-economic status has created a situation in which, in contrast the previous case, different groups do not have equal access to the same housing options.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 HOUSING JUSTICE AT THE CITY LEVEL

#### 5.1.1 IS THE HOUSING MARKET IN AMSTERDAM JUST?

Policy discourses and practices have evolved over the decades, resulting in changes to the housing market that may be seen as reducing justice; however, there has always been some degree of injustice in Amsterdam (Interviewees 9, 12). The priorities of policymakers have shifted between lower-income residents and those with higher incomes (Interviewee 11), but this has not been in only one direction—“it’s like a pendulum” (Interviewee 12). Injustice or exclusion in some form can be seen as inevitable because housing is a scarce resource and there is a major housing shortage in Amsterdam (Interviewees 6, 9). Nonetheless, there remain policy decisions to be made about how to distribute this scarcity and how to determine housing affordability (Interviewees 9, 11).

Although social housing has indeed declined dramatically over the past several years, the share of social housing is still relatively high compared to most other countries around the world (Interviewees 3, 8, 9, 10). This creates a tension between justice and injustice:

“If you look around the city here, you would say about half of the population of the city is living in affordable, secure, high-quality generally, housing. ... That is very high compared to a lot of cities. ... On the other hand, because it has come from a higher level and declined, the new stock that is put on the housing market is very small, and not sufficient to the housing demand, so to get into it is almost impossible.” (Interviewee 8)

This conflict between the justice of widespread affordable housing and the injustice of inaccessibility demonstrates the need for changes to the current housing system. There exists debate over whether the previous system of social housing can be held up as the ideal to which new policy should strive, with some arguing that it was the “best form, simply put, of providing affordable housing for large sectors of the population” (Interviewee 8), while others—citing protests in the 1980s—suggest that “the Amsterdam housing market has always had its fair share of unjust outcomes” (Interviewee 9). In recent years, policy has shifted back towards growth of the social housing sector, with an aim to build 750 dwellings per year (Interviewee 12); this will increase affordable rental housing for low-income populations but does not help the middle class, which also struggles to find housing (Interviewee 9). Given that there was never consensus on the justice of Amsterdam’s housing market, it is clear that there is space for change and a role for alternative arrangements such as cooperatives.

### 5.1.2 AFFORDABILITY

When discussing affordability, it is important to keep in mind that there are political choices underlying the determination of what is considered to be affordable. The decision to lower the income threshold for social housing was made by the national government under pressure from a lobby group of developers, but was blamed on the European Union (Interviewee 8). It has been active political decisions, primarily from the national government but also from the local government, that have created more unequal outcomes in recent years (Interviewee 9).

On the national level, conservative politicians have introduced their own notions of justice, which exclude middle renters from social housing and allow social housing corporations to build market housing. On the local level, the Municipality has actively endeavored to attract multinational companies to relocate to Amsterdam, with the former Minister of Housing attending international real estate fairs to promote the purchase of social housing units as an investment opportunity (Interviewees 7, 9, 12). The Municipality also has an important role in determining pricing due to the fact that it owns a significant portion of the land in Amsterdam (Interviewee 3). Notions of affordability have changed dramatically over the years: in the 1980s, Dutch politicians declared that no more than 15% of one's income should be spent on housing, but the conception of an acceptable rate has now increased to 30%, and the average Amsterdam resident spends 40% of his or her monthly income on rent (Interviewees 4, 9). Cooperatives conceptualize affordability very differently as they are a non-profit housing option, understanding rental fees merely to be the cost of maintenance and organization.

The primary means through which affordability is regulated in Amsterdam, as previously mentioned, is through the points system. Regardless of whether a house is social housing or private market, it must satisfy a certain criteria of points based on a number of features (Interviewee 8). It is only once a house reaches 146 points that the price can be determined on the free market (Interviewee 6); below this, the rent is controlled. There is a sharp threshold between the regulated sector and the liberalized sector, and prices increase dramatically once the 146 points are reached (Interviewee 8). This system still generally applies to housing cooperatives, but the price increases beyond the maximum point threshold are not as dramatic (Interviewee 3). Affordability is flexible in cooperatives, as it can be determined by numerous different factors; however, if the cooperative receives subsidies from the Municipality, then the Municipality has a role in determining rates (Interviewee 4).

In the private sector, housing is simply unaffordable for the vast majority of Amsterdam's population, and income now has a significant impact on whether or not residents are able to find housing. Cooperatives emerged as an alternative in part because of transformations over the past few decades, which have seen the introduction of temporary contracts so that rents can be considerably increased when tenants move out, the introduction of market



ideas on basic needs such as housing, and the use of income as a key determinant of the type, quality, and affordability of housing (Interviewees 3, 9). Amsterdam “has been moving in the past years towards a more elite city” (Interviewee 7), and it is unaffordable for those who do not have a high budget (Interviewee 6). Rent prices regularly reach €2000 per month and landlords check whether renters have a high enough income to pay these prices (Interviewee 5); this eliminates many from accessing the housing market. Alternatives such as cooperatives are therefore crucial for resisting commodified and profit-centred housing.

### 5.1.3 ACCESS

In terms of access, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain housing in Amsterdam. In addition to the previously discussed factors regarding affordability, one key change has been the active political decision to stop allowing middle-income people to access social housing and instead restrict it to lower-income groups, thus increasing stigma and worsening the system of entry (Interviewee 8). The decision to include middle income groups in social housing may be seen as an injustice in that it restricts the choices of middle-and high-income populations on the market (Interviewee 11); however, it may also be seen as just because it ensures some level of access to housing for all (Interviewee 3). Although support for social housing is widespread, there is now a disagreement over whether middle- or higher-income populations should be able to remain in social housing when they are well beyond the threshold. This trend is lamented by some for reducing accessibility for populations in need (Interviewee 5), but may also signify the inaccessibility of housing prices in Amsterdam even for middle-income residents. This has resulted in many middle-income Amsterdam residents having to leave the city for surrounding suburbs such as Zandaam (Interviewee 6). Cooperatives may play a role in solving this conflict, as it provides an option for middle renters that bridges the gap between social housing and the private sector, as will be discussed further below.

These changes in social housing have also created a generational divide:

“Those people who already got into it are in it, in secure housing, they’ve been in it for years, they can stay in it, it is a large share of the population that is secure in affordable housing. Those that aren’t, even if they are lower income, are having a hard time getting into it because the supply coming onto the market that’s being made available annually is so small.” (Interviewee 8)

There is a sharp insider-outsider dynamic between those who are continuing to benefit from earlier access to social housing and those who are disadvantaged by growing lack of access. This often means that younger adults are less able to access housing than older adults who have lived in Amsterdam for a long time, and also makes housing access more difficult for international migrants (Interviewee 9). Such a system has been created by a government

that did not support social housing and is not inclusive for a significant middle sector of the population (Interviewee 8). This is an issue that cannot be addressed by cooperatives, as it requires political action with regard to social housing policy.

Similar to income, personal networks also play a significant role in finding housing in Amsterdam, particularly on the private market. It is much easier to find housing through connections, as the private housing market is fragmented and difficult to navigate (Interviewee 12). As a result, it is easier for those who have “cultural capital” and can find a room through social circles and mutual friends (Interviewee 12); this disadvantages expats and migrants who are new to the city and do not have large networks (Interviewee 3). This difficulty is furthered by the prevalence of false advertisements and illegal rentals without contracts or registration (Interviewee 7), which makes it easier for those without connections to be scammed. There also exists discrimination on the housing market that restricts access for some groups in Amsterdam (Interviewee 12). Housing cooperatives may offer a partial solution to this, as they find new members through open calls rather than personal networks, but discrimination may still persist.

A key issue in access is that groups are often scapegoated and blamed for the housing shortage in Amsterdam, which shifts the focus away from real solutions. It is commonly thought that expats with high incomes are to blame for rising rental prices in Amsterdam, even by members of cooperatives (Interviewee 2). Others argue, however, that this is a short-sighted perspective as the true problem is a shortage in housing, and expats are only willing to pay high prices because that is all that they can find; furthermore, the gap between the incomes of expats and native Amsterdam residents is closing (Interviewee 7). This pattern of scapegoating is credited by some to conservative parties who fragment opposition groups by blaming expats, refugees, or middle-income individuals in social housing, so that these groups cannot unite to oppose the shared struggle of an inability to find suitable housing in Amsterdam (Interviewee 9). This blame distracts from real problems such as unaffordable prices, which cooperatives aim to address by de-commodifying housing.

The Municipality and housing corporations have been working towards improving access in social housing through a new plan that will modify the waiting list process. While 30% of social housing is currently reserved for the most vulnerable groups—such as those who would otherwise be homeless—there is no special assistance for other individuals who may need housing urgently, such as those who are recently divorced (Interviewee 12). In the new system, there will be an option for “urgent dwelling seekers”; this may also serve to reduce the generational disparity between elderly, long-time residents of Amsterdam and young people (Interviewee 12). Another important change is the addition of “searching points”, which will allow those who are actively and frequently searching for a dwelling to receive greater priority on the waiting list (Interviewee 12). These changes may make it easier for individuals in need to access social housing, but still does not help those in the middle sector who may benefit more greatly from alternatives such as cooperatives.

#### 5.1.4 CHOICE

Choice manifests in different ways between the various sectors of the housing market. In social housing, there is choice in that residents can react to their preferred dwelling on the WoningNet website; however, social housing is limited and the waiting lists are longer for some dwellings in some neighbourhoods than others (Interviewees 10, 12). This means that residents have fewer options because their choice is restricted by how soon they need a dwelling, as wait lists tend to be 15 years or more (Interviewees 7, 12). Long wait times mean that residents end up with relatively little choice and must often take whatever is available. In the private sector, choice—like affordability and access—is limited by how much one can pay and the extent of one's networks. This demonstrates how the scarce resource of housing is distributed in Amsterdam: "there are houses as long as you pay" (Interviewee 7).

It can be said that choice is necessarily limited in Amsterdam as there are certain trade-offs that arise from the decision to live in a big city. For example, it is less likely that Amsterdam residents will have a large house or a garden compared to individuals in smaller towns (Interviewee 9). In any case, there is agreement that residents should have more power to influence their own living environments, but only to the extent that this does not cause collective or future disadvantages (Interviewees 9, 10). In other words, the choices of residents in the present should not limit the ability of future residents to adapt their living environments to their own wishes.

Cooperatives aim to address this lack of choice in other sectors and to improve choice overall, as residents of housing cooperatives are constantly making collective decisions about how they want to live (Interviewee 3). In terms of neighbourhood, there are limitations in that some dwellings will be easier to acquire than others, but cooperative members can make a decision as to whether they would like to live in a particular neighbourhood or simply to succeed in Amsterdam (Interviewee 3). Further, cooperatives make decisions about how to determine rent, how much diversity will be in a cooperative, and the roles each member will play in the cooperative (Interviewee 3). Cooperatives may be seen as offering the most choice of all, as collective decision-making is a key component of their organizational structure.

#### 5.1.5 INTEGRATION AND DIVERSITY

Diversity and integration on the housing market are generally expressed through the mixing of regulated social housing, free market housing, and alternatives such as cooperatives, which can create socioeconomic mix. The "40-40-20" policy ensures a mixture by calling for 40% social rent housing, 40% middle-rent housing, and 20% expensive market housing, with similar quality housing in each sector (Interviewee 12). It is quite common that social housing corporations will sell off or rent several of their apartments to the private market, particularly

when tenants leave or pass away (Interviewee 8). In practice, this can manifest in one building having apartments of the same size but with extremely different price points, based solely on if and when the apartments entered the private market (Interviewee 8). Housing cooperatives tend to be integrated with other types of housing, including social rent, family homes, expensive rental apartments, and very expensive homes, thus creating social and cultural mix in the neighbourhoods (Interviewee 1). This is due to laws and regulations that prevent areas from becoming exclusively for the very wealthy, which may otherwise occur in Amsterdam (Interviewee 4).

Other projects to encourage diversity and integration are based not on the individuals' class but rather on their current circumstances of life. For example, several housing associations are running a special project that mixes asylum-seekers and young people from Amsterdam inside the same housing project, so that both groups can learn from one another and create a community (Interviewee 12). Policy advisors encourage the mixing of groups such as students and migrants, as well as other groups that are seen as compatible, such as the elderly and families, both of which tend to have positive results (Interviewee 10). In general, Amsterdam residents encourage diversity, and indicate in surveys that they prefer mixed neighbourhoods and support government initiatives to create more diversity (Interviewee 11). There are some groups that do not integrate well due to incompatible lifestyles, such as students and families, thus it is seen as best to keep some groups apart (Interviewee 9). Diversity can also emerge during the gentrification process, as wealthier native Dutch and expat groups begin to integrate in an area (Interviewee 7); however, this reduces diversity in the long term as it pushes lower-income individuals out of Amsterdam.

Although cultural diversity is important, this can be a problematic and controversial feature to regulate in practice. In the past, the Netherlands has limited the amount of individuals with migration backgrounds to a certain percentage in order to encourage mix, but this can be seen as a discriminatory practice (Interviewee 9). Present policies do not aim for ethnic mix, particularly because many individuals with migration backgrounds identify as Dutch and therefore this practice can be othering (Interviewee 12). Even when regulations are not in place, it is common for neighbourhoods with many individuals of migration backgrounds to become stigmatized, and intervention takes the form of demolishing social housing and building expensive owner-occupied homes (Interviewee 9). This remains a contentious form of encouraging ethnic integration. In cooperatives, many individuals who seek out collective living arrangements tend to be attracted to diversity and to prioritize diverse membership, but this is difficult to achieve in practice due to wider societal barriers to access and organic integration (Interviewees 2, 3, 4).

It is important to note that no policy to encourage diversity and integration can truly succeed unless the systematic barriers to organic diversity are addressed. At a wider structural level, individuals do not have equal access to opportunities on the housing market, and access is restricted for particular groups (Interviewee 9). Diversity cannot be forced when it is unable

to occur naturally due to systematic impediments, and policy should aim at addressing the system that prevents equal opportunity in the housing market (Interviewee 9).

### 5.1.6 COMMUNITY AND DISPLACEMENT

One key way to build community and belonging in a large city is to ensure that residents feel a sense of security in their dwellings, and to remove the fear of displacement (Interviewee 9). Any changes to a neighbourhood should be based on the desires of residents themselves rather than the middle-class “potential” of the neighbourhood:

“You’re not literally kicked out of the neighbourhood, but people do notice that what happens in the neighbourhood is not for them, and that might undermine their sense of belonging, like, ‘apparently we’re second-rate citizens because every investment here is aimed at someone else other than me.’” (Interviewee 9)

Following this understand of belonging, it is crucial that policy changes discourage both direct displacement—which typically happens on the private market, when residents are priced out of their apartments—and indirect displacement—when residents no longer feel that they are accepted in their neighbourhoods.

Recent policy changes have created circumstances for greater displacement, thus reducing community in Amsterdam. One contribution to this change can be found in the introduction of temporary two-year contracts, which allow landlords to remove social housing tenants more easily (Interviewee 8). Gentrification in Amsterdam is typically top-down and is carried out slowly, with prices rising only as tenants move out (Interviewee 8); temporary contracts allow this process to occur more rapidly. Another recent change is the modification of the points system to include location: in the previous system, “a lot of people who were low-income could live in the central area, in the city, and it would still be very affordable” (Interviewee 8) as prices could not be raised simply due to the central location. Under the new system, a portion of the points are determined by location, thus pushing many Amsterdam apartments out of the social rent sector and encouraging social housing corporations to rent out on the free market once tenants leave (Interviewee 8). These changes encourage displacement and homogeneity and reduce community-building by modifying the character of an area.

Although social housing and cooperatives can in theory offer protections against displacement, it is difficult to acquire properties in the first place as rents are already high enough that Amsterdam is considered to be in an overall state of “post-gentrification”. In the social housing sector, rents cannot be dramatically increased as long as a residents stays in the same unit, thus displacement from social housing is uncommon (Interviewee 12). Cooperatives have greater control over determining their rents, and therefore they can also keep housing affordable in the long term (Interviewee 3). Despite these protections, it is now

extremely difficult to acquire an affordable dwelling, and many cooperatives are unable to prevent displacement in the city centre because they cannot afford to buy there (Interviewee 4). In Amsterdam, displacement in the traditional sense of residents being pushed out of their neighbourhoods is not very common outside of the private market, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for any non-private housing options to exist. Furthermore, simply controlling the rental price of a dwelling cannot prevent indirect displacement.

The role of cooperatives in creating community can extend further, to ensuring that individuals feel welcome in their own neighbourhoods. This is achieved through public spaces where community members can meet, co-work, and exchange ideas to help shape their neighbourhoods (Interviewee 4). Many cooperative members are involved in anti-gentrification efforts (Interviewee 1), although it is important that these efforts do not ostracise certain community members. Hostile signs such as “yuppies get out of our neighbourhood”—which was posted on a cooperative in Amsterdam (Interviewee 9)—rejects neighbours who may also be struggling on the housing market and may have no desire to contribute to gentrification. Cooperatives must remain as inclusive as possible to help encourage belonging across the city of Amsterdam.

### 5.1.7 DEMOCRACY

While housing cooperatives may be recognized for their radical democracy, which will be discussed in further detail below, there do exist opportunities for democracy beyond cooperatives in the wider city. For example, groups such as residents’ associations can come together to make collective decisions about renovations in their neighbourhoods (Interviewee 9). In the private sector, *vakbond van eigenaren* [unions of owners], or VVs, allow residents of the same building block to make decisions about communal areas (Interviewee 10). Similarly, residents in social housing have meetings once or twice a year about communal areas and community goods such as sustainability, which are initiated by housing corporations, as well as everyday decisions among tenants about cleaning and small renovations (Interviewees 10, 12). Some projects, such as the buildings that mix students and asylum seekers, allow for wider self-management (Interviewee 12). These initiatives provide Amsterdam residents with a democratic role in shaping their living circumstances.

While democracy can certainly be improved further, it is important to consider whether more radical democracy is desired by residents. Social housing corporations that involve residents tend to find that it is always the same people showing up to participate, which leaves many voices unheard (Interviewee 9). Many Amsterdam residents may lead busy or difficult lives and do not want the hassle of intense decision-making, viewing these meetings as an unwanted inconvenience (Interviewees 9, 10). In cooperatives, many members work only part-time—which may be more possible due to the lower rental costs—because self-organization can indeed be time-consuming and require a great deal of dedication

(Interviewees 3, 4). Democracy should be stimulated for those who desire a greater role, but Amsterdam residents who do not want to participate should be respected, and even within cooperatives there must be some allowance of different individual rhythms (Interviewees 4, 9). The key purpose of democracy should not be to force participation, but rather to ensure that residents are satisfied with the neighbourhoods and housing circumstances in which they live.

## 5.2 JUSTICE WITHIN HOUSING COOPERATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

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### 5.2.1 DE MEENT

De Meent (n.d.) describes itself as a *platform voor de commons* [platform for the commons], aiming to represent the interests of the commons movement for and by commoners themselves. It organizes meetings, holds campaigns, offers expertise, and lobbies on behalf of commoners, as well as providing a meeting place and putting the Dutch commons together on a map. Its listed goals include disseminating the broad ideas of the commons in the Netherlands, uniting commoners behind a shared strategy, adding the commons to the political agenda as an alternative to existing economic and administrative structures, making visible the stories of commoners in the Netherlands, and facilitating meetings between commoners. In order to accomplish these goals, it organizes an annual Dutch Commons Assembly to connect commoners from practice, research, and politics. The map provided by De Meent includes, among many others, the four housing cooperatives under analysis—De Groene Gemeenschap, NieuwLand, OT301, and Bajesdorp.

Following the aforementioned criteria, De Meent's self-representation through its online webpage proves to be inadequate in terms of justice. There is no mention of any initiatives or goals that could be interpreted as promoting diverse relatedness or re-enchantment, and the only measure to promote equity is the annual contribution of a "free donation" so that everyone can participate (De Meent, n.d.). Although urban rights is closely related in many ways to radical democracy, the ability to shape one's surroundings is not addressed. There are no other prominent notions of justice mentioned that would be outside of my criteria, aside from the basic cooperative notion that initiatives should provide a social and environmental alternative to the economic laws of the market and the state (De Meent, n.d.).

Radical democracy is the only principle among the criteria of justice that receives adequate attention, as it is a key principle in the governance structure of De Meent. The organization defined its core values and priorities collectively through a founding assembly, meaning that all interested parties were able to have a role in decision-making. Among the decided goals, political agendas were regarded as less important than social agendas (De Meent, n.d.), reflecting the radical democratic principle that state involvement should be minimal in order to avoid hierarchies. Decision-making is undertaken via consent, following the one-member-one-vote strategy and ensuring that a decision is only made once there is no longer a strong opposition (De Meent, n.d.). According to the membership benefits listed on the website, a member of De Meent not only has voting rights at the annual assembly but can also help determine the direction of the organization. These practices demonstrate a solid foundation for radical democracy.

Nonetheless, some practices of De Meent could be understood as going against the criteria of justice, particularly with regard to radical democracy. Non-horizontal governance structures do exist in some form: although anybody can apply to become a board member,



and the board is elected by the wider De Meent membership, the board has a position of hierarchy in the sense that it decides who can become a member. This may also serve to limit equality as only groups who agree with De Meent's objectives are admitted (De Meent, n.d.), thus providing the board with grounds to exclude some groups and potentially limit diversity based on their interpretation of the objectives.

### 5.2.2 GEMEENSCHAPPELIJK WONEN

Gemeenschappelijk Wonen, or "Common Living" in English, is an association that brings together more than 70 residential communities in the Netherlands. The purpose is to promote the development of housing cooperatives by making information available to interested parties, looking after the interests of completed residential communities, contributing to national and local policy development in the area of housing, and facilitating the exchange of experiences among communal living projects in the Netherlands and internationally (Gemeenschappelijk Wonen, n.d.). The organization hopes to help citizen initiatives flourish by calling on politicians, municipalities, housing corporations, and local parties to offer support. One of the initiatives under my analysis—De Groene Gemeenschap—belongs to the Gemeenschappelijk Wonen organization.

With regard to equity, Gemeenschappelijk Wonen (n.d.) states that it has devoted a great deal of thought towards devising means through which housing cooperatives can be accessible to everyone who desires to live in this manner. One of the primary ways that they hope to achieve this is by promoting flexible rental limits, which would decrease rents for lower-income residents so that everyone is able to live where they would like (Gemeenschappelijk Wonen, n.d.). This demonstrates equity in the sense of fairness by actively promoting the well-being of disadvantaged populations. Additionally, all initiative groups are regarded as equal parties in the formation of new housing cooperatives, and their members are regarded as full-fledged partners with a stake and role in every new and existing project.

Diverse relatedness is promoted by Gemeenschappelijk Wonen (n.d.) through the use of selection criteria unrelated to income. This means that housing cooperatives should be able to control the composition of their communities by encouraging mix in terms of education and background, while preventing income from being an obstacle to participation. While this may be regarded as forced diversity, it allows housing cooperatives to develop an ease with difference and to experience diversity in everyday encounters. That said, it does not explicitly promote forms of diversity beyond economic circumstances, and may not necessarily be inclusive of other identities.

Gemeenschappelijk Wonen (n.d.) encourages radical democracy in the form of self-management, both in terms of choosing residents and everyday decision-making. Although

decision-making is generally democratic, the organization does use consultants with extensive experience in the area of communal living to offer advice to initiatives regarding correspondence with governments and housing corporations, social processes, democratic structures, and conflict mediation. This may be considered a violation of the more extreme elements of radical democracy, which would argue that the existence of “experts” creates undesirable, hierarchical positions; at the same time, this may be necessary in the initial stages of development.

The aforementioned criteria understand urban rights to be the ability of residents to shape their living circumstances according to their desires by prioritizing use value over exchange value; Gemeenschappelijk Wonen (n.d.) offers these rights by regarding housing not as an object of speculation but as a part of liveable neighbourhoods in which residents permanently take responsibility for creating and implementing visions for the future of their urban spaces. Residents are seen as having a shared responsibility and commitment towards the projects, while constantly making the conscious choice to continue living in alternative communities. Communal living is viewed by the organization as creating added social value and offering solutions to complex social problems while improving quality of life. Gemeenschappelijk Wonen (n.d.) demands the support of politicians in stopping real estate speculation and envisioning new forms of living; however, this may violate the radical democratic principle of minimal state involvement—citizens should not be in an inferior position of relying on the state for the enablement of their living circumstances.

Re-enchantment is promoted through joint activities and mutual commitment, being particularly facilitated through members’ meetings that include a tour of the hosting cooperative, a communal meal, a themed afternoon, and a party in the evening (Gemeenschappelijk Wonen, n.d.). This allows for the establishment of solidarity among member cooperatives through enjoyable activities. Further principles of justice that are embraced by Gemeenschappelijk Wonen (n.d.) but excluded from my criteria include sustainability, such as adaptable homes and flexible construction practices, which can be understood as a way to promote justice for future generations.

### 5.2.3 VRIJCOOP

VrijCoop (2019) is an organization that unites groups and individuals who desire to turn buildings into collective property, belonging to the community rather than an individual. It was created in response to the growing neoliberal pressures on the Dutch housing market, particularly the decrease in available social housing, the tightening of rules for accessibility to social housing, and the long wait lists for social housing. The organization also drew upon the individual desire to shape one’s own living situation and to have control over the immediate living environment (VrijCoop, 2019). Based on the German model of Mietshaüser Syndikat, VrijCoop (2019) put pressure on the local and national governments to make

cooperative housing a viable option in the Dutch context. Now, the key principles of VrijCoop (2019) include collective ownership of property, self-management by residents and other users, taking real estate off the market, creating affordable housing in the long term, giving each individual equal rights of use and voting rights independent of capital contribution, and solidarity between projects. Among the projects that I will be focusing on in my analysis, De Groene Gemeenschap and Bajesdorp are members of VrijCoop.

After close examination of the online content available, it can be seen that diverse relatedness is not addressed, but there are initiatives for the other criteria of justice. Re-enchantment is addressed only slightly, as a “solidarity fund” is used to share funding and skills among members, but there do not appear to be organized events for improving feelings of belonging in member cooperatives. With regard to equity, the organization ensures that individuals of all income levels can join, as residents have rights independent of capital injection and new members are not obligated to invest capital in the property (VrijCoop, 2009). This is important for ensuring access to affordable housing; however, it does not specifically encourage the inclusion or equal treatment of individuals’ identities beyond class.

VrijCoop has a number of initiatives intended to promote radical democracy through self-management by residents. For one, it is the residents themselves who are responsible for arranging that rent is paid on time, payment obligations are met, repairs are made, and money is set aside for major maintenance (VrijCoop, 2019). Additionally, residents themselves decide democratically how to divide housing costs among members (VrijCoop, 2019), for instance by income, size of house, or both. This empowers residents by allowing them to play a significant role in the management of their living environment. The structure of the organization is democratic in nature, as it creates an even balance between individual housing cooperatives and the wider organization: the real estate is placed in a separate association of which both the residents’ association and VrijCoop are members, ensuring that the most important decisions are taken together in a horizontal manner. Within the residents’ association, each member has one vote regardless of capital contribution. The explicit intention of this structure is to prevent residents from selling property while also ensuring that VrijCoop does not become a centralist organization in which residents have no voice (VrijCoop, 2019). From a justice perspective, this appears to be an effective means for ensuring horizontal, non-hierarchical governance structures.

Urban rights are also promoted through self-management and collective ownership more broadly, as this allows residents to be less dependent on large institutions and the politics of social housing and therefore to shape their living environments according to their own preferences. According to VrijCoop (2019), “een huis is geen verhandelbaar object, maar een plek om te wonen en samen te leven” [*a house is not a tradeable object but a place to live and live together*]; this demonstrates the conceptualization of housing as a right that should be affordable in the long term rather than an object for real estate speculation. The VrijCoop (2019) organization allows room for experimentation, encouraging members to exchange

knowledge in order to continuously learn how to best put ideals and concepts into practice. There exist no further identifiable ideals of justice in VrijCoop beyond my criteria.

#### 5.2.4 AMSTERDAM ALTERNATIVE

Amsterdam Alternative (n.d.) was founded by several organizations from Amsterdam's subculture in response to the extensive commercialization of the city, which they viewed as creating "een kleurloze metropool gericht op het bedrijfsleven in plaats van de bewoners en hun welzijn" [*a colourless metropolis aimed at business rather than residents and their well-being*]. The organization does not desire a return to what Amsterdam used to be, but rather to create a new future through positive change (Amsterdam Alternative, n.d.). Amsterdam Alternative in its current state is primarily a newspaper and public event space that enables awareness and collaboration; in the future, it hopes to begin buying buildings and spaces to start building its own collective. NieuwLand and OT301 are members of this organization.

With regard to equity, Amsterdam Alternative (n.d.) has an open-door policy and claims to be accessible to all members of the public. It values affordability and aims to offer the lowest price possible for events and rentals so that all can join. It aims to resolve the accessibility issues faced by social housing by using open calls rather than waiting lists, thus allowing everyone to register (Amsterdam Alternative, n.d.). This can be seen as equitable as it enables all individuals to participate regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds; however, it may be equality rather than equity as fairness, as the organization believes that high earners can also offer a valuable contribution and therefore it does not indicate aims to explicitly help the poor.

Amsterdam Alternative (n.d.) demonstrates an ease with unassimilated difference in its assertion that "Verschillende perspectieven, gedachtegoederen, achtergronden bestaan naast elkaar, zonder de behoefte om ze tot één mass ate kneden" [*Different perspectives, ideas, backgrounds coexist, without the need to knead them into one mass*]. While some cooperatives may privilege artists and cultural workers, Amsterdam Alternative (n.d.) promises that its future housing cooperative will offer opportunities to everyone, not solely cultural entrepreneurs. Perhaps the most clear demonstration of Amsterdam Alternative's commitment to diversity can be found in the claim that it is not a space exclusively for highly educated white men and women, but rather open to all people of all colours and all cultures. The organization does not have explicit policy for diversity, hoping that it will manifest in everyday encounters in the space. Additionally, Amsterdam Alternative (n.d.) specifies that its space is not only for "leftists" or "communists" but people of all ideologies who are united by a desire to escape the selfish and destructive nature of capitalism.

The governance structure of Amsterdam Alternative (n.d.) is horizontal, with the collective having ownership and no individuals having the power of a boss. While there is a distinction

between a large collective consisting of all members and a small collective of individuals who live or work in Amsterdam Alternative's buildings, both have a role in decision-making, with the small collectives being distinguished by the freedom to shape their everyday lives in the cooperatives. It is specified that the large collective is not intended to have a hierarchical position over the small collective, as it simply exists to offer guidance and structure (Amsterdam Alternative, n.d.). The organization does not operate on a consensus model due to its large size, but it ensures that a majority vote is not taken until all options are clearly worked out and well-considered; this reflects the Habermasian notion that the best argument will win. Among the core values of Amsterdam Alternative are autonomy, self-management, self-government, independence, democracy, active participation, and transparency in administration, all of which reflect radical democracy. The organization does not rely on the state for support, arguing that contemporary politics support financial interests and therefore truly free spaces must be created by empowered residents themselves.

Amsterdam Alternative (n.d.) specifies that its members have a right to their city, and its newspaper and website are intended to help Amsterdam residents fight for the city that they desire. It is structured around the notion that the alternative scene must be protected from the dangers of individual enrichment while making it possible for all members to be free. Periodic evaluations by the board ensure that residents are active in shaping their collective environments, as this is a key principle of the organization. All members are to be treated with respect, as exemplified by the ban on sexual harassment, racism, and other unacceptable behaviours (Amsterdam Alternative, n.d.). Within the small collectives of residents, the organization strives for as much freedom of thinking and doing as possible, allowing for experimentation and tolerated anarchy as long as there is a horizontal structure with no boss (Amsterdam Alternative, n.d.). This demonstrates a dedication to providing residents with their urban rights.

Re-enchantment is embraced by Amsterdam Alternative (n.d.) through its working groups, which prioritize productivity, quality, and pleasure at work, ensuring that all participants do work that they enjoy. The organization overall aims to combine living, working, and especially public functions so that connections are built among neighbours in the wider community. Solidarity is a key value of the organization, as are community and connection. It is mandatory that buildings associated with Amsterdam Alternative have public programming to foster interaction with residents of the city more widely, being open to the public as much as possible; this does not only include arts and culture but also various social, civic, and activist activities such as education, activities for children, multicultural programming, and social care. These principles demonstrate that Amsterdam Alternative is dedicated to building re-enchantment in the city.

Beyond my criteria of justice, Amsterdam Alternative also prioritizes sustainability, aiming to be as circular, self-sufficient, self-producing, and self-cultivating as possible, bringing sustainability into all solutions and decisions made. There is also heavy emphasis on the non-

commercial nature of the organization, as Amsterdam Alternative will not accept money from companies, individuals, or municipal authorities that do not align with its values. Activities should not aim to generate as much profit as possible but rather to develop the organization's values, and 50% of profits made are given back to the large collective in the form of the action pot and solidarity fund.

### 5.2.5 SOWETO

Soweto was founded by housing activists in response to the disappearance of social housing in Amsterdam, representing a connection between residents and squatters as a way to preserve accessible housing (Nieuwland, n.d.; Soweto, n.d.). It is an organization that advises individuals joining forces to form living groups or developing new housing projects, helping groups to take the first steps towards starting a collaborative project. After six years of negotiation, it acquired its first cooperative building—an old schoolhouse that was to become NieuwLand.

The website of Soweto does not offer much information with regard to its commitment to just principles. It vaguely embraces the criteria of justice by providing living and working spaces that are affordable (equity), that are democratic with collective decision-making structures (radical democracy), and that are self-managed and shaped according to tenants' desires (urban rights); however, no detail is provided regarding how these principles would manifest in practice. At present, NieuwLand is the building most closely connected to Soweto, and it could be argued that some of its principles can be assumed from this association, but this is not sufficient to understand the organization as a whole. There is also no mention of initiatives for diverse relatedness and re-enchantment, although sustainability is briefly mentioned as a core principle.

### 5.2.6 KEY FINDINGS

Amsterdam Alternative was the only cooperative that exhibited all of the criteria of justice, although most embraced equity, radical democracy, and urban rights to some extent. Among those that did not fully satisfy these criteria, the key issues included a need to agree with the principles of the group and the existence of hierarchies in some form. The most commonly neglected areas of justice proved to be diversity and re-enchantment: many groups failed to mention diversity at all, and those that did rarely extended this diversity beyond socio-economic status. Re-enchantment generally manifested through group or community activities as well as support for other cooperative projects, although some groups did not offer any initiatives to improve belonging. A summary of the key findings for each organization can be found in Figure 4 below, with the drawbacks designated in blue.

<i>Criterion of Justice</i>	<b>De Meent</b>	<b>Gemeenschappelijk Wonen</b>	<b>VrijCoop</b>	<b>Amsterdam Alternative</b>	<b>Soweto</b>
<i>Equity</i>	<p>"Free donation" (all can join)</p> <p>Must agree with principles</p>	Flexible rents, all members regarded as equal	Rights independent of capital injection	Open-door policy, open calls for residents, low prices for events	Affordable living and working spaces
<i>Diverse Relatedness</i>	Not addressed	<p>Selection criteria unrelated to income (diverse economic backgrounds)</p> <p>Not addressed beyond class</p>	Not addressed	Open to everyone of all backgrounds, identities, and ideologies	Not addressed
<i>(Radical) Democracy</i>	<p>Consensual decision-making, one-member-one-vote, separate from state</p> <p>Hierarchies</p>	<p>Self-managed</p> <p>Uses consultants ("experts"), demands state support</p>	Self-managed, residents decide how to divide housing costs, one-member-one-vote	Horizontal, collective ownership, no bosses, no hierarchy, no state, majority vote	Democratic, collective decision-making, self-managed
<i>Urban Rights</i>	Not addressed	Shared commitment to shaping project, de-commodified	Collective ownership, experiment, de-commodified	Residents must be active, all treated with respect, tolerated anarchy	Shaped according to tenants' desires
<i>Re-Enchantment</i>	Not addressed	Joint activities, mutual commitments, members' meetings	<p>"Solidarity fund"</p> <p>No events</p>	Working groups, public functions, public programming	Not addressed

Figure 4: Housing Justice in Housing Cooperative Organizations (drawbacks in blue).

## 5.3 JUSTICE WITHIN HOUSING COOPERATIVE PROJECTS

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### 5.3.1 DE GROENE GEMEENSCHAP

De Groene Gemeenschap (n.d.) is a small cooperative house of only six people. It is unclear whether the selection of members is equitable, as the website specifies that De Groene Gemeenschap had to turn down more than forty potential residents in the search for “like-minded people”; this may have excluded individuals in dire need of housing in favour of individuals with particular desired values. While the desire to live among like-minded individuals may be considered a form of shaping residents’ circumstances of living according to their desires, urban rights do not necessarily permit exclusion. Further, there is no additional mention of particular processes guaranteeing urban rights or radical democracy, thus suggesting that these are not key values for the organization.

The two areas in which De Groene Gemeenschap (n.d.) does demonstrate an embrace of just principles is through diverse relatedness and re-enchantment in their community events. The neighbourhood centre that forms part of the cooperative offers both Dutch conversation lessons and Arabic classes for children, which shows that De Groene Gemeenschap aims to celebrate diverse ethnicities by helping adults learn to operate linguistically in Dutch society while allowing children to get in touch with their backgrounds. Additionally, the baby-parent club celebrates diversity of life stages by allowing new parents to join their communities instead of being isolated in their homes.

Beyond these diversity-celebrating events, De Groene Gemeenschap (n.d.) offers re-enchantment through regular activities accessible to all community members from outside the house. This includes crochet and knitting, math tutoring for students, craft afternoons for students, and neighbourhood action networks. There are also resources for community members including a bookshelf for free borrowing and sharing and a giveaway corner for trading items that are no longer needed. These activities are volunteer-run and not-for-profit, with the main goal being to share social and green lifestyles with the community.

Despite the name “De Groene Gemeenschap” [*The Green Community*], the website makes no mention of specific sustainability initiatives. There are also no other identifiable measures for justice beyond my designated criteria.

### 5.3.2 NIEUWLAND

NieuwLand (n.d.) was bought by Soweto in 2015 but is operated by three associations independent of Soweto—an 11-member living group, a community-driven volunteer-based public space, and a building itself to bring together all parties. In terms of equity, events for the public are generally donation-based or low-cost, and encourage all to participate regardless of their economic circumstances: “Self-preservation yoga with Juliette”



recommends a donation of €5-€10, but suggests that individuals can pay more or less depending on their situations and will not be turned away due to lack of funds; a general “Yoga in NieuwLand” class boasts that “there’s still someone who believes that yoga is for everyone and must be accessible to everybody”, operating on a donation-based system; the “Radical Fringe” hair and beauty salon works on a pay-as-you-can basis so as to be as accessible as possible to people of all economic backgrounds; and the “Paper Jam” print shop runs non-commercially, asking for donations instead of a set price (NieuwLand, n.d.). The housing cooperative practices equity as fairness by calculating rents based on “the principle of solidarity” (NieuwLand, n.d.), which means that they are income-dependent in order to be affordable to all living group members.

Diversity is expressed in NieuwLand primarily through its events, although it is unclear from the web content whether these principles are reflected in practice. At NieuwLand’s first public meeting, it was decided that one of the key community goals is to strive for an intentionally diverse community—one that is intergenerational, with queer and racial representation, and with diversity in abilities, origins, and incomes (NieuwLand, n.d.). The “Self-preservation yoga with Juliette” class presents itself as embracing body positivity, welcoming “all shapes, sizes, colours, genders and sexualities”, and the other “Yoga in NieuwLand” is for all levels of experience, all genders, and all body types (NieuwLand, n.d.). The “Radical Fringe” salon aims to create a new vision of hair and beauty as a form of self-expression, “built out of the nervousness and anxiety that we [the organizers] experience as queer and trans people having to work up the courage to go to commercialized hair and beauty places” (NieuwLand, n.d.) and instead offering non-judgemental, open-minded styling. Additionally, NieuwLand (n.d.) hosts the Amsterdam Black Women Collective, which creates a safe space for meeting the social and emotional needs of marginalized members of the Amsterdam community. With regard to the living group itself, NieuwLand (n.d.) “is composed of members with different professions, education and skills,” although it does require that members be politically active and socially engaged.

Despite the requirement for political activity, NieuwLand does not provide adequate public information regarding its governance structure. It claims to be autonomous and horizontally-organized, with residents themselves making decisions about new living group members and the wider community being encouraged to feel comfortable to bring in their own ideas and initiatives. Beyond these basic principles, there is no explanation of how this is achieved in practice.

The larger housing organization that owns NieuwLand, Soweto (n.d.), argues that the notion of DIY (Do-It-Yourself) is a core value of affordable housing projects and communities of solidarity; this can be seen in practice through the heavy participation of volunteers in the project. DIY can be understood as a form of urban rights because it allows residents to influence the shape of their communities concretely and physically. Residents are empowered with a sense of ownership over their creation, which can then manifest in participation in the administration of the building and public spaces within.

Re-enchantment is strongly prioritized by NieuwLand (n.d.), as the living collective is combined with cooperative work spaces and a socio-political neighbourhood centre to build a sense of solidarity and community among volunteers and participants. The affordable working spaces can be used for the administration of the building and running of public space as well as for neighbourhood initiatives, small organizations of artists with social or political engagements, local craftspeople, or collectives; the purpose of this is to stimulate interaction with the neighbourhood and to create a dynamic between the NieuwLand project and the neighbourhood more widely (Soweto, n.d.). In addition to the aforementioned events such as yoga and Radical Fringe, NieuwLand (n.d.) hosts DIY bike repair workshops on the premise that “everyone should feel comfortable doing bike repairs regardless of ability, age, gender, identity, income, or sexual orientation” as well as “alternative, body positive, low pressure” DIY lifedrawing, both of which also satisfy the criteria of equity, diversity, and urban rights. The community-oriented, non-commercial activities hosted by NieuwLand satisfy the criteria of re-enchantment.

Beyond my criteria of justice, NieuwLand (n.d.) also aims for sustainability, as it has installed solar panels on the roof of the building—the long-run income from which will be distributed among the different users of the building. Among the community events, Code Rood calls for a bottom-up, horizontal, diverse, and inclusive movement against climate change, consisting of ordinary individuals rather than large organizations.

NieuwLand organizers themselves express fears that their association may become a force of gentrification despite their best efforts, which raises questions about the long-run inclusivity and accessibility of the cooperative. There is no explanation of what exactly has motivated these concerns, but it introduces the possibility that simply purchasing a property for cooperative use does not necessarily guarantee that this space will remain affordable in the long term.

### 5.3.3 OT301

The prime location of Overtoom 301 was initially occupied as a squat before becoming a state-supported “creative breeding ground” and eventually being purchased by a group that would become “OT301” (Jansen, 2013). The cooperative that exists in this space today embraces equity in the sense of equality rather than fairness: different rates are charged for different functions, meaning that residents of the property have to pay more than those only using the space for work purposes (Jansen, 2013). Although this is equal in the sense that residents use more gas, water, and electricity than individuals using the space for work, it does not embrace equity as it does not account for the different socioeconomic circumstances of residents in determining rent. Furthermore, rent charges for tenants are based on a rate per square metre (Jansen, 2013); studios cost €450 per month for individuals and €500 per month for two people (OT301). This can be considered an unequal rental system

as it is based on the size rather than the ability of renters to pay. For community events, the space has an open-door policy and welcomes everybody through prices that are as low as possible (OT301, n.d.). This in some ways accounts for the fact that different individuals may have different abilities to pay by attempting to be accessible to everyone.

With regard to diverse relatedness, OT301 (n.d.) is run by a “diverse, international community” and is based on the principle of inclusivity towards all backgrounds, nationalities, genders, orientations, and ages. The organization considers it to be a top priority to find connections between diverse voices, initiatives, and disciplines in order to create a wider coherence and community. Beyond these goals, the particular means through which diversity might be achieved are unclear.

Radical democracy is entrenched in the foundations of OT301 due to its history as a squat, as it is now committed to the values of autonomy and self-organization (Jansen, 2013). The OT301 understands self-management to be a collaboration between various individuals and parties in order to keep the organization running; users must commit to practical duties and responsibilities even though it may be time-consuming and places additional pressures on members (Jansen, 2013). Additionally, everybody in the community—even those who do not have a space in the OT301 building—are welcome to visit events and offer new ideas, granted that they keep in mind the vision and history of the organization (OT301, n.d.). The organizational structure of the OT301 is described as having a general assembly as the highest organ, a board that implements policies and guidelines decided by the general assembly, and committees that are given specific tasks such as finance, maintenance, or PR and communications (OT301, n.d.). It is not specified whether this structure is arranged hierarchically or horizontally. Decisions were once made by consensus, but this structure was later altered to a voting majority model (Jansen, 2013), which may be seen as less radically democratic.

The just principle of urban rights is best demonstrated by the OT301’s claim that “the significance of autonomy sooner lies in the way in which it has succeeded in gaining a place in the city. The group that broke into OT301 to squat there, itself determined it needed space” (Jansen, 2013). This demonstrates the ability of residents to take control of the spaces in which they live and build the city according to their own desires. There is much room for experimentation within the OT301, as the organization “represents development and not stagnation”—it is in continual flux to give communal shape to the building, resisting conformity through organic residency (Jansen, 2013). The OT301 is an experiment in development to be constantly shaped by its residents and other users.

Re-enchantment is expressed in the OT301 through the combination of public functions, work spaces, and housing. There is an expectations that residents are actively involved in the collective ownership of the property in order to create a more vibrant, open place (OT301, n.d.). Public spaces in the OT301 include studios for music, theatre, classes, and discussion nights; De Peper, a vegan culture kitchen; 4bid gallery for art, exhibitions, classes, and

performances; and the Cinema of the Dam'd, a space for films and performances (OT301, n.d.). Community events include imaginative drama and dance classes for children, studio spaces for low-to-no-budget theatre-makers, dancers, and artists, and participatory arts methodologies (OT301). This wide range of activities creates a space that exhibits solidarity with the wider community, although it may be ostracizing for individuals whose interests are not related to art and who therefore desire other ways to connect.

Beyond my criteria of justice, OT301—like many other previously mentioned cooperatives—has sustainability initiatives. This is primarily exemplified by the Go Green committee, which aims to up-green both the organization and the building; for instance, this has manifested in the form of a 400m<sup>2</sup> green roof, a solar energy system, and balcony vegetable gardens (OT301, n.d.). The committee also researches future projects such as re-using rain water and working on a self-reliant community, aiming to contribute to a healthier Amsterdam overall with higher air quality and increased biodiversity (OT301, n.d.).

A content analysis of OT301's website demonstrates that it is willing to acknowledge the areas in which its attempts at justice may not have always been perfect. Although OT301 hopes to connect diverse voices and initiatives, it has found that members are not always open to sharing their networks with others (Jansen, 2013), thus creating division and reducing values such as equity, diverse relatedness, and re-enchanting solidarity. One member claims that he does not feel welcome by the organization and believes there to be favouritism at play, a claim that has been supported by others in the organization (Jansen, 2013). This has a strong impact on all of the criteria of housing justice, as it is exclusionary, unwelcoming, and un-democratic. Throughout the development of the OT301, there has been a great deal of intra-group conflict, which created mutual distrust and led some dedicated members to leave the organization (Jansen, 2013); this failure to appropriately address conflict may have made the organization less democratic, decreased the diversity of voices, and diminished feelings of solidarity. The level of radical democracy has overall been reduced over the course of OT301's development, as it was found that meetings were attended by fewer people over time, there was less discussion among members, and the composition of the group changed to a tenancy that were unaware of rules and regulations (Jansen, 2013). Finally, there may be some exclusion of residents in need, as individuals may be rejected if they do not align with the particular values of the organization (OT301, n.d.), thus reducing equality and diversity in access.

#### 5.3.4 BAJESDORP

Having had its old building sold to a real estate developer in 2018, the (Nieuw) Bajesdorp is not yet fully developed, but has built its vision on many years of experience and struggle. It still has not formulated principles for equity, but may not be equally accessible to all: it requires that participants in the governance structure must be available for entire working

days or work weekends and must speak Dutch, both of which may disadvantage low-income individuals and those who are new to the Netherlands.

The Bajesdorp encourages diverse relatedness: “The residents of Bajesdorp form a quirky, mixed and close-knit community on the edge of Amsterdam East, which is characterized by diversity and creativity” (Bajesdorp, n.d.). Bajesdorp (n.d.) offers three reasons for pursuing further diversity in terms of generation, culture, backgrounds and talents—it appears to be desirable, it creates greater opportunities to inspire and surprise one another, and it contributes to an inclusive project that keeps the city accessible to everyone. The last point is crucial to the cooperative, as organizers of the Bajesdorp (n.d.) view gentrification as a force that reduces diversity and that they therefore hope to resist.

Radical democracy is not thoroughly addressed by the Bajesdorp, although its general principles appear to violate the notions that Lefebvre and other scholars of radical democracy tended to promote. For one, the plans for the Bajesdorp were created in cooperation with what the website refers to as “experts” (Bajesdorp, n.d.)—a status that radical democratic theorists would understand as creating an unnecessary hierarchy between various epistemological claims. Further, the Bajesdorp has worked closely with the municipality of Amsterdam in developing its building (Bajesdorp, n.d.), which goes against the radical democratic notion that state intervention should be limited if existing at all.

In terms of urban rights, the Bajesdorp (n.d.) has sent out a call to artists and activists to help design the building so that the studios and workshops are shaped by and tailored to the needs and desires of the individuals who will live and work there themselves. The Bajesdorp is conceptualized as a space for experiment—a space where alternative approaches may be formulated through trial and error, organized from below (Bajesdorp, n.d.). Bottom-up initiatives at the Bajesdorp are intended to inspire many Amsterdam residents, resisting the creation of spaces by and for capital through “incubator” creative projects. Housing is conceptualized as a right and valued for its use value rather than its exchange value, as demonstrated by the fact that the project has been definitively removed from the capital market, nobody can make a profit from the living spaces, and housing will remain affordable indefinitely (Bajesdorp, n.d.). The Bajesdorp has organized an event called “Free Space Now” for the past five years that involves a large collective dance across Amsterdam in demand of more free space, giving residents the opportunity to take back the city for its cultural and social value beyond economics (Bajesdorp, n.d.)

Re-enchantment is embraced by the Bajesdorp through community activities: in the current space, there is a weekly Dutch language café, a vegan kitchen that provides three-course meals by donation, and a vegetable garden that is shared among neighbours (Bajesdorp, n.d.). The eventual Bajesdorp space is envisioned with a café and stage for theatre and music, combining work and housing with public life. This element of the Bajesdorp is not yet fully developed as the final space has not been established.

In addition to these principles of justice, the Bajesdorp also encourages sustainability, having saved and re-used the interior of the old building for the new space (Bajesdorp, n.d.). Additionally, the vision for the future Bajesdorp calls for a building that is circular and completely energy neutral, through insulation, solar panels, waste reuse, and other initiatives (Bajesdorp, n.d.). The organization is currently conducting research as to how a more sustainable future for Amsterdam can be inspired and manifested through the Bajesdorp.

### 5.3.5 KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the individual cooperative initiatives fared better than their parent organizations in satisfying the criteria of justice. All four of the projects under analysis exhibited diverse relatedness and re-enchantment, which generally included community programming and public functions that strive to welcome individuals of all backgrounds, sexualities, genders, ages, and talents. Urban rights were usually included in the form of experimentation and active resident participation. Surprisingly, radical democracy was not always discussed in great detail, although this may be because the parent organizations deal more with the governance structures than the initiatives themselves. Equity was the most contested topic, as only one cooperative demonstrated a true embrace of all possible members, but even then it admitted to having problems in practice. The cooperative structure proved limiting in some cases, as individuals had to fit in with the rest of the group, either in terms of ideology or language, and be available for extensive time commitments that many would not be able to offer. The methods for determining rents differed between organizations, as some embraced the “equity as fairness” principle that rents should be based on ability to pay, while others followed the “equity as equality” notion that rents should be based on use. A visual demonstration of these key findings can be found below in Figure 5, with the negative aspects again distinguished by blue font.

<i>Criterion of Justice</i>	<b>De Groene Gemeenschap</b>	<b>NieuwLand</b>	<b>OT301</b>	<b>Bajesdorp</b>
<i>Equity</i>	Must be “like-minded”	Events are donation-based or low-cost, open to all gender identities, rents are income-dependent  Favouritism	Open-door policy  Rents determined by use and size rather than ability to pay	Must be available for entire working days or work weekends, must speak Dutch

<i>Diverse Relatedness</i>	Events for both Dutch and Arabic speakers, events for parents	Intentionally diverse (generation, sexuality, race, ability, origin, income, education, profession, skill), body positive  May be unwelcoming	Principle of inclusivity towards all backgrounds, nationalities, genders, orientations, and ages	Pursues diversity in terms of generation, culture, backgrounds and talents
<i>(Radical) Democracy</i>	Not addressed	Autonomous, horizontal  Not addressed in detail	Autonomy, self-organization, majority decision-making, all have a voice	Use of "experts", state involvement
<i>Urban Rights</i>	Not addressed	"DIY" urbanism	Experiment, constantly and communally shaped by residents, active involvement	Experiment, trial and error, "incubator" creative projects, housing as a human right, "Free Space Now" dance
<i>Re-Enchantment</i>	Regular community programming	Cooperative work spaces, neighbourhood centre, community programming  Intra-group conflict	Public functions, work spaces, community events	Community space and events

Figure 5: Housing Justice in Housing Cooperative Projects (drawbacks in blue).

## 5.4 SCALING UP: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF COOPERATIVES

### 5.4.1 ADVANTAGES OF HOUSING COOPERATIVES

Housing cooperatives provide an alternative arrangement that brings forth many advantages that may not be offered in the private market or social housing. For one, cooperatives have a unique selection process for new residents that differs from other sectors: While the private market typically requires personal connections to find housing, and social housing has wait times of 15 or more years, cooperatives issue an open call online when there is a new space available (Interviewees 1, 2). This process has been found to follow an equal opportunity framework, as the new residents that are selected tend not to be sourced from pre-existing friendships (Interviewees 1, 4). The selection arrangement is also internally inclusive at the cooperative level, as all members contribute to decisions regarding new members first through attempts to reach consensus and then a vote, following a horizontal organizational structure (Interviewee 2). By sending out an open call and extending opportunities to those beyond existing networks, cooperatives offer a just alternative in several aspects of accessing housing in Amsterdam.

Another benefit of housing cooperatives is that they can bring together individuals who share a common feature of identity in order to create more empowering collective spaces. One example of this entails cooperatives for the elderly, as seniors can have a stronger voice against developers for acquiring sites close to facilities if they are united together (Interviewee 10). This demonstrates the empowering and uniting nature of cooperatives. Although many cooperatives encourage diversity, there also exist cooperatives that aim to create supportive spaces for individuals experiencing similar life circumstances; some bring together students who are all writing their theses, others create common spaces for self-employed individuals, and still more create safe spaces for LGBTQI+ residents (Interviewee 3). Cooperatives offer collective spaces where individuals can feel secure and inspired around others with whom they can identify.

Beyond the individual groups within cooperative living spaces, cooperatives can also offer an important opportunity for community-building in the wider neighbourhood. Many cooperatives combine their living spaces with various public functions and workplaces in order to include individuals beyond the collective itself (Interviewee 2). This endeavor manifests in a number of ways—support for and solidarity with other cooperatives, a rejection of the “anonymous neighbour”, involvement in one another’s lives, or the overall creation of a “a small village in a big city, mostly with the pluses of both and with less minuses of both” (Interviewee 4). Unlike most other living arrangements, a housing cooperative tends to be more than merely a space in which to eat and sleep; it is a wider community that provides the surrounding neighbourhood with a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Self-management is another key feature of cooperatives that tends to attract members, as it means that residents are able to take back control over their living arrangements. This



connects to both the right to the city and radical democracy in the wider context, as cooperative residents believe that “if you have control yourself it makes it a lot easier to have a nice place to live in and also be able to change it if you want” (Interviewee 4). Whereas social housing tends to be more top-down and bureaucratic, and the private market gives a great deal of control to the landlord, cooperatives allow residents to shape their living arrangements according to their own desires. This extends even to the point of being able to choose one’s immediate neighbours and to make decisions about the overall building (Interviewees 4, 8). The collective decision-making structure of cooperatives allows members to have more freedom over their circumstances, which is an attractive feature in a housing market that is often controlled by landlords and corporations with little power for residents themselves.

Finally, cooperatives offer the benefit of a de-commodified alternative to the housing that is offered by the market. Residents of cooperatives view this living arrangement as “a way out of the completely financialized housing situation right now” (Interviewee 4)—a way to show the government and the wider Amsterdam community that there are other ways to run a housing system. Rent money, rather than serving as a source of profit for landlords, is used directly for maintaining the building, paying the mortgage, and servicing the administration; there is no profit (Interviewee 3). The building is owned as a collective, and rents can be determined in a number of different ways, all united by the shared feature of a clear system based on fairness: rent may be calculated per person, per square feet, per income, or any derivative of these (Interviewees 2, 4). Cooperatives provide a practical means of teaching the rest of the Amsterdam housing market how to run housing as a human right rather than a source of profit.

#### 5.4.2 DISADVANTAGES OF HOUSING COOPERATIVES

Although cooperatives offer many advantages, they ultimately do not provide a universal solution. The process of selecting new residents, despite commencing with an open call and involving all members, is externally exclusive. This means that cooperative living is not accessible for everyone, as it is necessary that new members are compatible with the values of the cooperative (Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 8, 9). After the open call is issued, members decide together which applicants they would be interested in meeting and then have dinners as part of the selection process; the final verdict is made collectively based on “gut feeling and of course on the criteria that go with our vision and ideology” (Interviewee 2). Members of cooperatives are aware that these living forms are not universally accessible, but argue that selection is an important aspect of cooperative living given that new members will not only be neighbours but also co-owners that share responsibilities and collective living spaces in the building (Interviewees 1, 2, 3); this requires both a desire to live in such a manner and compatibility with the wider vision. Similar to the disadvantages created by long waiting lists for social housing, the interview process in cooperatives can create a strict insider-outsider

barrier in which those who have been accepted are able to experience the benefits while the wider population is excluded.

In comparison to social housing, cooperatives also present the drawback of a general failure to house vulnerable groups. Social housing associations have a quota of 30% that they must meet in terms of housing vulnerable groups, including refugees, individuals with psychiatric or addiction problems, and individuals who were homeless (Interviewee 12); however, housing cooperatives are not held to this same standard. Individuals facing challenging life circumstances may be filtered out through the selection process, as most cooperatives search for members who can contribute a great deal of time to community activities (Interviewee 9). Even if it were to be made a requirement that cooperatives house vulnerable groups, it is unclear how this will be accomplished given the structure and time commitments that are necessary for cooperative living.

An additional disadvantage of cooperatives arises from the dynamics of a communal living arrangement: quarrels between members can be frequent and detrimental, and different life circumstances may present incompatible needs. Members who decide to leave cooperatives generally do so because of “changing family situations, fed up with living in a group, with conversing that many times with each other in official meetings, having a girlfriend or boyfriend with a really nice house where you can live, going abroad, but also not enrolling enough” (Interviewee 4). While many of these reasons may be similar to moving in general, the dynamic of cooperative living adds an extra layer of complexity, as some may find that collective structures are simply not their preferred manner of living (Interviewees 3, 4). This further adds to the notion that cooperatives are a rather exclusive housing option.

The funding issues often faced by cooperatives may result in the exclusion of low-income individuals in favour of those with adequate resources to start a cooperative. It is becoming more difficult for groups to acquire a mortgage (Interviewee 5), and housing associations find it more beneficial to finance social housing for vulnerable groups rather than helping a small group form a cooperative (Interviewee 12). These difficulties with obtaining funds mean that those who get involved tend to have higher income and education levels, as well as greater social and cultural capital, which limits cooperative living to those who are already relatively well-off (Interviewees 8, 9, 12). In the words of a cooperative member, the inability of lower-income individuals to participate in cooperatives “comes back to being privileged to be able to do this, and that’s not fair, and that comes back to mainly money” (Interviewee 4). The individuals who tend to start cooperatives are those who can afford to finance the purchase of a house on the expensive Amsterdam housing market and who have the resources to make a cooperative work; in practice, this would be a relatively small group and one that likely does not involve vulnerable groups. The core disadvantage among these many particular issues is that housing cooperatives cannot offer a solution to all residents of Amsterdam, and their benefits are therefore limited to a select and rather privileged group.

### 5.4.3 CURRENT ROLE

Housing cooperatives do not have a long tradition in the Netherlands, as social housing was historically the most prevalent form of non-market housing; however, cooperatives have been researched and encouraged more recently. There has been a shift from using the more generic term *woongroepen* [living groups] to *wooncoöperaties* [living cooperatives], and the Municipality of Amsterdam is working on modifying the rules surrounding this housing form in order to encourage it and to make it easier for such arrangements to function (Interviewee 8). The Alderman, one of the most powerful political figures in the city, aims to stimulate cooperatives (Interviewee 11); this will require a great deal of overall change as finance and banking systems do not yet understand the process of funding housing cooperatives (Interviewee 4). There are different forms of housing cooperatives, including social housing buildings that are given collective autonomy, cooperatively built new housing, and jointly purchased existing buildings that are converted into cooperatives (Interviewee 8). Each of these forms requires different policies to be encouraged and understood.

One key function of cooperatives is to provide housing options in the middle-rent sector, as this is an area that is currently lacking in the Amsterdam housing market. Many Amsterdam residents continue to live in social housing long after they have begun to earn a much higher income, as they are unable to close the increasingly large gap in pricing between the social housing sector and the private market (Interviewees 2, 5, 7). There is also a significant group of Amsterdam residents whose incomes are slightly too high for social housing, but still far too low to afford housing in the private sector (Interviewee 8); market housing in Amsterdam is now essentially “reserved for the affluent,” and “it is not uncommon to spend half your income on monthly rent” (Interviewee 9). This is because there is little regulation on the middle sector and therefore it is easy for what should be middle-rent housing to become more expensive (Interviewee 11). Housing cooperatives offer a solution to this issue, as they aim for social rent levels but generally tend to be in the middle segment due to the price of housing—charging between €550 and €1010 per month (Interviewee 3)—and rarely if ever extend to the higher rental categories (Interviewees 4, 12). This means that although housing cooperatives are typically home to the relatively well-off, they are still filling an important niche of middle-rent housing that is needed in the Amsterdam housing market.

Although it has been acknowledged that housing cooperatives are not a universal solution, they can serve as an inspiring alternative to commodified housing. They can be seen as solving the affordability problem for those who embrace cooperative living, and as a way to solve social problems such as urban loneliness and a lack of accessible public spaces (Interviewee 3). Housing cooperatives may symbolize a refusal to give up housing to either the market or large social housing corporations, instead embracing small-scale and people-focused solutions (Interviewee 9). They can demonstrate to others the benefits of influencing one’s own housing environment, showing hesitant individuals that the time commitments

may be worth greater control (Interviewee 10). Overall, housing cooperatives offer an example of alternative ways to conceptualize housing and may be inspirational to others.

It is crucial to emphasize that the role of cooperatives cannot be to provide a replacement for social housing. As previously stated, cooperative living is not for everyone; cooperatives can fill a gap in the housing market, but they cannot offer many of the particular benefits of social housing (Interviewees 4, 8, 9). This means that policies to stimulate cooperatives should not encourage social housing corporations to convert units into cooperatives but rather should help cooperatives acquire houses on the private market, as social housing remains necessary for providing dwellings to low-income populations and those who do not have the ability or interest to be involved in a cooperative (Interviewees 9, 12). Members and supporters of cooperatives themselves emphasize that the amount of social housing should still be increased even if there are more cooperatives (Interviewees 3, 4). In order to solve the problem of scarcity in Amsterdam's housing market, which the government aims to do by building seven and a half thousand dwellings per year, then it is necessary to involve big players that require less negotiation such as social housing corporations (Interviewee 11). There is widespread agreement that housing cooperatives provide affordable housing to interested parties and offer an inspirational living ideal, but they are only one—likely small-scale—segment of the housing market and cannot meet the full demand for affordable housing (Interviewees 8, 11).

#### 5.4.4 POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES OF SCALE

Housing cooperatives should be stimulated to be more widely accessible for those that desire to live in such an arrangement. While some members of cooperatives doubt that government officials and housing corporations will be able to re-conceptualize housing beyond the neoliberal understanding of financial success and growth (Interviewee 2), others believe that housing cooperatives can successfully increase in size as this expansion will result in more individuals being involved and thus contributing to the organization and encouragement of the living form (Interviewee 3). The Municipality of Amsterdam aims to reach a total of 10% cooperatives in the next 20 years, a goal that garners mixed opinions: some believe that it is unrealistic to expect housing cooperatives to provide such a significant solution to the housing shortage (Interviewee 9), while others believe that 10% is an appropriate starting point that can increase as cooperatives gain more widespread support and acceptance (Interviewees 3, 4). This goal offers an experiment to determine whether cooperatives can successfully function on a larger scale.

The scaling up of cooperatives presents a number of challenges and risks for the future. As cooperatives grow in size, it becomes more difficult to reach consensus and allow all members to have a voice; there is a risk of bureaucracy on a larger scale (Interviewee 4). Further, the time and effort that would be required to reach reasonably democratic and

collective decisions would be greatly increased if cooperatives operated on a much larger scale (Interviewees 9, 10, 11); this could be seen as a waste of time when there are vulnerable groups in immediate need of housing. It is also unclear how cooperatives can expand to multiple sites, as the democratic communication and decision-making structures within and between projects would become far more complex (Interviewee 3). Large social housing corporations in the Netherlands operated similarly to cooperatives when they first formed on a small scale, but as they grew in size they became more anonymous and engaged in controversies such as speculating with derivatives (Interviewees 4, 9). This demonstrates that there are significant risks that may arise if housing cooperatives greatly expand.

Beyond these challenges, there are arguments to be made that housing cooperatives should remain relatively smaller scale. It can be said that the primary advantages of housing cooperatives, such as radical democracy and knowing one's neighbours, are derived from the very fact that they are small-scale and bottom-up initiatives (Interviewee 9). In other words, it is not only a problem that cooperatives will face difficulties on a larger scale, but also that cooperatives will lose their core values if they expand: small-scale and grassroots organization are key characteristics of cooperatives, and these will be lost or corrupted on a larger scale. Cooperatives are "a nice tool to add to the mix" (Interviewee 8)—an interesting alternative to social and market housing—that should be encouraged to grow but not forced to expand beyond their very nature.

## 5.5 THE ROLE OF THE STATE

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### 5.5.1 CURRENT CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE

The Municipality of Amsterdam is a major player in regulating the housing market, and many stakeholders are supportive of its role. The aforementioned 40-40-20 rule is an initiative of the Municipality to make housing more affordable, as “Amsterdam tries to—not always successfully but tries to—fight these trends of more market, higher rent, also by lobbying against the policies of the national government” (Interviewee 12). Although Amsterdam supported the decrease in social housing in the 1990s, it has since recognized that this may have gone too far in reducing access to affordable housing, and it now advocates against excessive increases in housing prices (Interviewees 10, 12). The Municipality also endeavors to support an appropriate *leefomstomheit* [living environment] for all residents, resisting the pressures of investors by setting minimum standards for adequate housing sizes for families and improving *doorstroming* [housing flow] by encouraging residents to find the right housing situation for their living circumstances (Interviewee 10). It is much easier for the Municipality to enforce regulations when it owns the land, but in any case “local governments such as municipalities can really be an important vehicle to really try to address the issues of local housing markets” (Interviewee 10).

Although the radical democratic aspect of cooperatives encourages as much independence from the government as possible, many cooperatives receive and even appreciate help from the Municipality. If the cooperative receives government subsidies, then the Municipality will be able to have some level of control over pricing; if the cooperative has a public space, it must acquire a licence with many rules (Interviewees 2, 4). Aside from these more restrictive aspects, the Municipality of Amsterdam plays a crucial role in helping cooperatives succeed, as it may offer a money-lending fund for cooperatives and give land specifically to cooperatives rather than simply to the highest bidder (Interviewee 3). Additionally, the Municipality sells the land according to its “residual land price”, which allows for more affordable rents and an overall non-profit model to develop (Interviewee 3). Once the cooperative has been established, the Municipality continues to offer help to cooperatives according to their needs, particularly with regard to finances as many banks do not yet understand the cooperative form (Interviewee 4). The Municipality aims to work with cooperatives to learn from the challenges they face and to support their initiatives.

### 5.5.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Many agree that the state is not currently doing enough in the housing market of Amsterdam (Interviewees 2, 7, 12). While some believe that stricter regulations on Airbnb will be key to maintaining affordability in Amsterdam (Interviewees 2, 4, 7), others argue that there are larger everyday problems in housing that must be addressed.

## EXPLOITATIVE LANDLORDS SHOULD FACE GREATER REGULATION

Landlords in Amsterdam often attempt to exploit the minimal regulation on the housing market, for instance by scamming expats and migrants or charging exorbitant rental prices (Interviewees 7, 8). These prices are often beyond legal limits but the landlords do not face any punishment. The government must do more to prevent these exploitative situations from occurring.

## MORE SOCIAL HOUSING SHOULD BE BUILT

The model of social housing that was followed in the past offered shorter wait times and higher provision, resulting in large sectors of the population accessing social housing (Interviewee 8). In recent years, there have been active policy decisions to decrease social housing—policies that must be reversed if affordable housing is to be more widespread once again (Interviewee 8). This would require increasing the supply by building more social housing, which some view as the key solution to the current housing crisis (Interviewees 5, 6, 7, 8). Investments in the affordable housing stock will require billions of euros, but this is a matter of re-prioritizing the allocation of funds in order to support Amsterdam residents (Interviewee 9). Currently, the Municipality is working towards a goal with investors and housing corporations to build seven and a half thousand new houses with social rent every year (Interviewee 10). This signifies a new commitment to affordable housing that can be used to inspire further investment.

## THE TAX ON SOCIAL HOUSING CORPORATIONS SHOULD BE ABOLISHED

The landlord levy is a controversial issue in the Netherlands, as it appears to be intended as a control on large-scale landlords but has primarily impacted social housing corporations. This reduces the ability of social housing corporations to build new housing, as it places an unfair disadvantage on what could be seen as a public good (Interviewee 8). The costs of the landlord levy amount to two billion euro per year, which housing corporations have attempted to pay by selling off social housing units to the private market, thus reducing the social housing stock overall (Interviewee 12). If the new goals for building social housing are to be reached, it may be beneficial for the national government to abolish this tax.

## MIDDLE RENT HOUSING SHOULD BE STIMULATED

One of the greatest issues currently facing the Amsterdam housing market, as previously discussed, is the lack of middle-rent housing. This is a significant issue for those whose incomes are too high for social housing or who are experiencing long wait lists to access social housing, but cannot afford the private rental market and are thus being displaced from Amsterdam (Interviewee 11). In order to address this issue, there should be more regulation on housing prices: the government should introduce maximum prices, and there should be limitations for reselling (Interviewee 10). Furthermore, social housing should be expanded to

also include middle rent units, and there should be more distinct middle scales on the housing market beyond the strict dichotomy of social housing for low-income residents and the private sector for the wealthy (Interviewees 5, 7). One way to achieve this could be modifications to the points system so that the points can apply to larger apartments with more features, as this could help to avoid dramatic gaps in pricing (Interviewee 8). It should also be made easier for new middle-rent dwellings to be constructed (Interviewee 12). The Municipality of Amsterdam is currently in discussion with the national government in an effort to obtain more influence in the middle segment so that greater regulations can be introduced, and the national government is carrying out research on social housing (Interviewees 11, 12). These actions represent a positive start that must be carried through in order for change to be achieved.

### NATIONAL POLICY SHOULD BE ADAPTED TO LOCAL CONTEXTS

Particularly in Amsterdam, it is common that national policies intended to benefit the housing market have negative impacts due to the fact that circumstances in this city generally differ from the rest of the Netherlands. For example, the points system has had the effect of raising prices in Amsterdam rather than having a regulating effect, which has made national policy counter-productive in the context of this particular city where land values are extremely high (Interviewees 10, 12). Policies introduced by the national government should therefore take into consideration the particular housing pressures in cities such as Amsterdam and Utrecht so that they are more specific and beneficial (Interviewee 11). Recent national policies have been perceived as “disastrous for social housing” (Interviewee 12), and it is difficult for the Municipality to resist market pressures when it is not supported by national policy. This addresses the dilemma of Fainstein (2014) regarding the conflict between local and national influence as discussed in the theoretical framework. Future policy must recognize that the housing market in Amsterdam requires unique forms of assistance.

### COOPERATIVES SHOULD RECEIVE GREATER GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

In addition to introducing more regulation and policy changes with regard to social housing and the private market, the government must also play a greater role in stimulating cooperatives. Existing national laws are unclear, which is a major disadvantage compared to countries such as Germany and Switzerland where there is a national framework for housing cooperatives (Interviewee 3). Additionally, it is currently 30% more expensive to start a cooperative than to buy a private house, even though cooperatives bring wider community benefits (Interviewee 4). The state is currently carrying out a research program called Platform 31 that aims to better understand the needs of cooperatives, and has indicated an intention to help with this new housing form (Interviewee 4). While the existing role of the Municipality is generally praised by cooperative members, further improvements could involve initiatives such as a municipal solidarity fund to help housing cooperatives with funding (Interviewee 3). These policy changes could improve the accessibility of housing cooperatives by making them less complex to start and easier to fund.



## 5.6 GREATEST BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

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Many perceive the greatest barrier to improved housing justice in Amsterdam to be the conceptualization of housing as a vehicle for profit rather than a human right. This is lamented by a number of different stakeholders:

“Housing is a right, not a commodity. And not something to earn money with. And at the moment it is something to make money with, it’s a commodity, it’s the wrong incentive.” (Interviewee 4)

“People should stop seeing housing as investments and money pots.” (Interviewee 2)

“We want as the Municipality bigger houses so people have more space to live in, and research shows that if you have more living space then you’re generally more happy and productive, so that’s the aim of the Municipality, but housing developers, investors, they all want to build small because they want to maximize their profits on a smaller piece of land.” (Interviewee 10)

The understanding of housing as a commodity from which to profit is viewed as resulting in Amsterdam residents being unable to access the basic human right of a roof over their heads.

In order to change this, it can be argued that it is necessary to create a new narrative surrounding housing, which can serve to build up the political willingness for real change. The government has seen examples of de-commodified housing—there is a long tradition of social housing in the Netherlands, and housing cooperatives have shown that they can be successful—but the political willingness to successfully stimulate widespread affordable housing has not yet been achieved (Interviewee 3). It can be argued that there is a need to change perspectives on de-commodified housing if this is to garner greater support.

The current dominant narrative suggests that there is too much affordable rental housing, as private homeownership is understood to be the ideal (Interviewee 4). This may be a product of the fact that over 60% of the Dutch population owns homes, and thus by serving this electorate the government can create more homeowners through pro-homeownership policies such as the mortgage deductibility system and maintain widespread support (Interviewee 9). While this has been a successful strategy by the government unto now, there is growing public awareness and dissatisfaction over inequalities in the housing system: the number of homeless people in the Netherlands has more than doubled over the past ten years, making the housing crisis much more visible, and even well-off families are beginning to notice the difficulties that their young adult children face when moving out and entering the housing market (Interviewee 9). These changes introduce an opportunity to shift the narrative surrounding housing.

Following this perspective, rental housing can be revalued through an inspiring story about affordable housing and a celebration of the proud tradition of social housing in the Netherlands (Interviewee 9). Rental housing can also be embraced as a flexible option that

allows renters more freedom to move as their living circumstances change (Interviewee 4). Numerous groups such as political parties, grassroots organizations, and cooperative movements can work together to create this new story, building upon legal supports for such a perspective: “the right to decent, affordable, and secure housing is a human right—it’s in the Dutch constitution and it’s indirectly enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights” (Interviewee 9). While there are a number of different perspectives on how the government can best help to support affordable, secure, and decent housing for all, some argue that once the government is able to view housing as a human right, it will be possible to achieve various goals simultaneously such as stimulating housing associations, investing in social housing, and investing in cooperatives (Interviewee 9). This reconceptualization of housing can thus be understood as a starting point for real change.

Housing cooperatives can play an important role in creating this new narrative. This can be brought back to the previously mentioned words of Fainstein (2009c), who argues that “the movement toward a normative vision of the city requires the development of counter-institutions capable of reframing issues in broad terms and of mobilizing organizational and financial resources to fight for their aims” (p. 25): cooperatives may provide one important counter-institution for achieving this goal. The public spaces in cooperatives can provide an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of cooperatives to the wider public and to educate interested parties on opportunities for de-commodified and non-profit housing in Amsterdam, an endeavor that cooperatives such as Bajesdorp are already attempting: “We try to be a place to meet and to exchange ideas to show people that you can live in a city like Amsterdam without having a mortgage of two million and still have a good housing situation” (Interviewee 4). Once wider support for cooperatives has been achieved, greater pressure will be placed on governments and financial institutions to make cooperatives easier to fund, which may in turn make cooperatives less intimidating and more inclusive to individuals with fewer supports and lower incomes.

## 6. CONCLUSION

### 6.1 IMPLICATIONS: SMALL-SCALE VERSUS LARGE-SCALE JUSTICE

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This research sought to understand the role of housing cooperatives in contributing to a just housing market in Amsterdam. Following a mixed-methods approach involving literature review, content analysis, and semi-structured interviews, it can be concluded that cooperatives tend to be just internally and offer a just housing option to those that are interested, but their external justice is limited in that they are not accessible or appealing to all. In accordance with my expectations, cooperatives offer a great deal of democracy and choice about residents' living circumstances, and foster a strong sense of community through neighbourhood events. While I had previously assumed that cooperatives should strive towards diversity, the findings have suggested that there is room for homogeneity within some cooperatives, as these living arrangements can provide a feeling of solidarity among groups such as seniors and members of the LGBTQI+ community. This is in line with I. M. Young's contention that some level of segregation can be beneficial as long as this is actively chosen by residents and the borders are porous (Fainstein, 2009b, 2014).

An unexpected potential role of cooperatives emerged in the finding that cooperatives may provide a solution to interested parties who struggle to find middle-segment housing, as their rental prices bridge the large gap between social housing and the private market. It was expected that cooperatives would strive to house lower-income individuals and that catering to the middle class would detract from their principles; however, it was found that the middle class is a group that faces great struggles on the housing market, as these individuals earn too much to obtain social housing but do not earn enough to afford the private market. Future studies may build upon this finding by examining the role of housing cooperatives in filling the middle-segment gap in Amsterdam's housing market in practice, which may demonstrate a key potential for cooperatives as this is the income group that would be most likely to have the time and resources necessary for cooperative living.

Following the five criteria of justice at the cooperative level outlined in the theoretical framework, cooperatives in some form have generally been found to exhibit equity, diverse relatedness, radical democracy, urban rights, and re-enchantment, with some limitations. Generally, the parent cooperative organizations provided the basis of equity, radical democracy, and urban rights, and the individual cooperative projects filled the gaps of diverse relatedness and re-enchantment. This means that the cooperation between wider organizations and their projects is essential for achieving the greatest amount of justice. It is not always clear whether these goals are effectively carried out in practice, as cooperatives can also be viewed as exclusive based on their desire for like-minded communities, but it is evident that they explicitly strive for justice. It can therefore be said that cooperatives do indeed provide just housing for interested parties, but that their current role is limited to the small scale.

My findings suggest that sustainability should be added to discussions of urban justice in future scholarly research. While this is mentioned briefly by some scholars, particularly in research on the just city, it is not generally regarded as a core principle and its importance is often neglected. Almost all of the cooperatives under analysis mentioned sustainability on their websites as a key element in their pursuit of justice, as environmental justice is crucial for ensuring the wellbeing of future generations. Further scholarly analysis and use of urban justice theories such as the just city, the right to the city, and the good city must therefore account for the importance of sustainability initiatives in order to ensure that academic study remains connected to the values of social movements in practice.

The internal justice of cooperatives cannot produce a major impact on the housing market unless it is widespread; however, the ability of cooperatives to scale up is restricted by a number of factors. For one, they require greater state support in order to function on a larger scale, but they generally aim to be as independent as possible. Further, the core values that make cooperatives just on a small scale, such as radical democracy and the right to shape one's environment according to one's desires, risk being corrupted by bureaucracy if cooperatives are to expand to a larger scale. This means that cooperatives not only would struggle to function on a larger scale, but there is reason to believe that such an expansion would be undesirable. Overall, cooperatives offer a just opportunity for those who live in them and want to live in them, but they are not an all-encompassing solution to the crisis in housing access that is currently being experienced in Amsterdam.

Although cooperatives cannot and potentially should not be scaled up, their role in creating justice is not limited to the individuals who choose to live in this housing structure. A key finding has been that housing cooperatives can function as an inspiring example to demonstrate the potentials of de-commodified conceptions of housing in the wider system. This thesis originally assumed that cooperatives should be analyzed as an alternative solution to Amsterdam's long history of social housing in the context of its recent decline; however, an unexpected finding has encouraged a new perspective. Many interviewees, including those who live in and support cooperatives, believed that cooperative housing cannot successfully replace social housing and should instead be complementary to the existing system. There was widespread agreement that the social housing system should receive the most support and stimulation as cooperatives are not suitable for all residents, particularly vulnerable groups such as individuals with psychiatric disorders.

Accordingly, there should not be a choice between stimulating either cooperatives or restoring the historical social housing system, but rather cooperatives should be viewed as supplementary to social housing in offering de-commodified alternatives to the private market. The current crisis of justice in Amsterdam's housing market, as symbolized by the "death of the just city" (Uitermark, 2009), is a wider systemic issue that cannot be solved through a particular housing arrangement but requires a large-scale shift in narratives. Housing cooperatives cannot offer a widespread solution to the housing crisis in the sense of universally housing all of those in need, but it can play a crucial role in conceptualizing

housing as a human right rather than a vehicle for profit. Once this new conception of housing garners widespread support, there will be a greater incentive for the government to stimulate not only cooperatives but social housing as well, since both traditionally offer non-profit housing options. The role of housing cooperatives in contributing to an overall just housing market in Amsterdam is to provide an inspiring discourse about a de-commodified, non-profit alternative to the system that is currently creating widespread injustice. State solutions should then focus on providing social services and resources for individuals in need of a dwelling, as well as using financial instruments such as subsidies for affordable housing.

The findings of this research present a new perspective on the existing dichotomy in urban justice scholarship between the historical contention that Amsterdam is “as just as it gets” (Fainstein 1999, 2001) and the more recent denunciation of “the death of the Just City of Amsterdam” (Uitermark, 2009; Kadi & Musterd, 2014). My research suggests that the historical development and present context of justice in Amsterdam’s housing market is far more complex, with housing cooperatives operating in a gray area. The housing market in Amsterdam cannot be placed within a strict dichotomy of “just” and “unjust”, as it displays elements of both sides of the spectrum. Referring back to the five criteria of justice on the city scale, a simplistic perspective would find that Amsterdam fails to satisfy these conditions, as it is unaffordable to most, inaccessible in both social housing and the private market, choice is restricted by income, and residents are increasingly being displaced from a city they can no longer afford and no longer recognize. One aspect in which Amsterdam succeeds is integration, as the historical circumstances of large-scale social housing has created a context of affordable housing being mixed with expensive private market apartments.

The notion that Amsterdam is becoming less justice can however be problematized, as it has been found that policymakers are recognizing their previous failures and working to adapt the neoliberal context to promote more justice. It was mentioned earlier that existing scholarship, such as the theories of Fainstein and Amin, argue that justice is attainable under capitalism if only the correct policies are created. My findings suggest that Amsterdam is shifting back in this direction, with the government moving to improve access through changes to the waiting list system, building more social housing, and acknowledging widespread calls for a number of changes to improve affordability and choice. Community also exists despite the post-gentrified state of Amsterdam as it is heavily fostered through cooperatives’ regular programming to build feelings of belonging among neighbours. This suggests that future scholarship must move away from the strict dichotomy of “just” and “unjust” when examining urban environments and especially Amsterdam, instead recognizing the intricacies and pendulous nature of policy. Given that this dichotomy is often predicated on the simplistic notion that social housing is wholly beneficial and the private market is wholly detrimental, cooperatives offer a means to add nuance to this debate by demonstrating that a housing arrangement can be just internally while also contributing to some level of exclusion.

## 6.2 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

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The chosen research method of combining content analysis with semi-structured interviews proved effective for contrasting the small-scale nature of justice in housing cooperatives with the wider context of housing (in)justice in Amsterdam. The content analysis aspect allowed me to delve in-depth into the everyday practices of justice on the scale of cooperatives, and the analysis of a variety of cooperatives allowed me to contrast these findings in an interesting way. Further, the interviews allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of the overall context of justice in Amsterdam, which was useful for placing housing cooperatives and their small-scale benefits into a larger picture. The diversity of questions that were prepared allowed for an understanding of many different aspects of justice in Amsterdam's housing market. While participant observation—which was impossible due to the COVID-19 crisis—may have provided further insights into everyday practices, the methods that were used did provide detailed insights that were able to effectively answer the research questions without a need for further methods.

One key limitation of my interviews is that they had to be conducted in English, as I do not speak Dutch, which resulted in interviewees who were less comfortable in their second language being much less open and able to express their perspectives. This was evident in the length and depth of the interviews, as those that were more comfortable in English would speak for much longer in response to each question than those who were not. The language barrier may also have created limitations in my content analysis, as most of the pages were originally in Dutch and were translated using basic Google Translate features, which may have obscured some nuance in descriptions and terminology. This was an unavoidable limitation due to my lack of familiarity with Dutch, but it may have reduced the depth of my findings to a small extent.

An additional strength of this research is that the findings provide a degree of analytical generalizability. While most of the findings are indeed specific to the Amsterdam case, there is generalizability in the notion that housing cooperatives can offer an inspiring alternative to the commodified, profit-focused understanding of housing that is prevalent in many different countries. With regard to theories of justice, including the just city, the right to the city, and the good city, it has been found that the organizational structure of cooperatives tends to satisfy these criteria. Although particular contexts may impact the effectiveness of cooperatives in changing discourses, it can be said that cooperatives generally provide an inspirational alternative that engages with the wider community to share their message. The finding that cooperatives can create and spread this new non-profit ideal is therefore applicable to understandings of justice and housing in the theoretical debate more broadly, providing a basis for further research into the role of cooperatives in other contexts.

### 6.3 REFLECTION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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If I were to redesign this study to improve my research, the most suitable alternative approach would be a comparative case study design. This is because the Netherlands emerges from a very different context than many other countries, given the long tradition of social housing that has been discussed thoroughly above. Additionally, the Netherlands has a government that actively encourages and supports cooperatives, which was reflected in the generally favourable perspectives of my interviewees. A comparative case study may allow for a deeper understanding of housing cooperatives and justice more widely, as the context may have a strong role in influencing how cooperatives operate and are perceived.

Accordingly, further research may build upon these findings by examining the role of cooperatives in contributing to justice in a comparative context. My research provided a foundation for examining housing cooperatives as more than an eccentric niche but as an important—albeit small-scale—player in the housing market. Given the key finding that cooperatives can offer an inspiring alternative that may contribute to a new narrative for systemic change, it would be interesting to examine the role of cooperatives in a country that has already established the “cooperative ideal”. As previously mentioned, Denmark and Sweden have a long tradition of housing cooperatives; this is situated in research by academics such as Bruun (2011), Larsen and Hansen (2015), and Vogel, Lind, and Lundqvist (2016), who find that the cooperative ideal is engrained in these cultures. A relevant study by Ganapati (2010) investigates support structures for cooperatives in Sweden, India, and the United States in a comparative context, but does not examine their larger role in fostering a just housing market; the justice perspective therefore offers an interesting and understudied avenue for future research.

An analysis of the impact of this cooperative ideal on justice in the housing market—how it was created, how it operates, how it is perceived, and how it impacts other sectors—can provide deeper insights into how this narrative shift may be created, and the extent to which it may be effective. The context of housing justice in these societies can then be compared to a case in the Netherlands where the ideal is not present, such as Amsterdam, in order to better understand what changes such a shift may bring. It may be most insightful to contrast Amsterdam with the Scandinavian context first, since it is more similar, then apply these more robust findings to an extremely different case in Canada or the United States. The research that has been developed in this thesis offers a crucial call for future studies to take seriously the potential of cooperatives, not necessarily for becoming large scale themselves but for inspiring a large-scale shift towards justice in the housing market.

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## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COOPERATIVES & COOPERATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Each interview is based on the following general set of questions, although the discussions vary due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews. The standard questions are as follows:

*What is the role of your organization in the Amsterdam housing market?*

*The Amsterdam housing market has long been considered "just" in the academic literature as housing was affordable and accessible, partly due to its large share of social housing – do you think that ever was the case? Is it still the case today?*

- In your view, what are the key characteristics of justice in housing?

*What does affordable housing in Amsterdam look like to you?*

- How do you understand the term "affordability"? To whom is this affordable?
- Do you understand affordability differently for different groups, or the same for everyone?

*What do you believe to be the role of your housing cooperative, and housing cooperatives more widely, in contributing to a context of widespread housing justice in Amsterdam?*

- What would the ideal role of housing cooperatives look like? What needs to change in order to get there?

*Is there a lot of diversity among members of the organization?*

- What does that look like in practice (e.g. is it primarily among social classes, or other identities as well)?
- Do you think diversity could further be improved? How?

*How do you select new residents?*

- How often do you take in new residents?
- Do many people seeking housing through this organization get rejected? For what reasons?
- For those who are rejected, do you provide them with other resources for obtaining housing? If so, what?
- For those who have decided to leave, what have their reasonings been?
- What other options do individuals seeking housing have when you are not accepting new residents?

*How would you characterize the neighbourhoods in which cooperatives are located?*

- For example, is it mostly artists and an alternative cultural space, or integrated with other types of housing?

*What has the relationship been between your housing cooperative and gentrification?*

- Has it contributed to gentrification against your will? Or has it been an effective force for preventing it?

*How do you understand the concept of "choice" in the housing market?*

- For example, should people of lower incomes have the option to live any neighbourhood, or is it ok for their choices to be based on their incomes levels?

*What kind of housing structure do you think would be best for fostering feelings of belonging and community in Amsterdam?*

*How do you think the greatest democracy can be achieved?*

- Similarly, what does the "right to the city" look like to you? In other words, how can people best shape their surroundings according to their own desires?

*What difficulties or challenges have you faced/do you continue to face in trying to promote housing justice in Amsterdam?*

- Have you ever felt that something you would consider to be unjust has occurred either in your housing cooperative or others that you know?
- Have any members ever complained about what they perceived to be injustices? What were these injustices?

*What, if any, is the role of the state in the functioning of cooperatives?*

- Would you ideally prefer a greater or lesser role for the state in housing cooperatives?
- How do you envision the ideal role for the state in making cooperatives and housing more broadly more just? E.g. should it provide more regulation in the housing market, incentivize cooperative living, encourage inclusivity, etc.?
- Have you received any support from the state in forming your cooperative? If so, what did this entail?
- What does the legal process look like for setting up cooperatives?
- What happens to the rent money collected after the investments into the building are paid off?

*Do you think housing cooperatives could provide a large-scale alternative to the housing crisis, or will they probably stay limited to smaller projects?*

- If yes (to large-scale): what do you think needs to change in order for housing cooperatives to be achieved on a larger scale, if anything, or else what is preventing them from already being more widespread?
- If no: why not?
- Do you see other ways of organizing a just city that could complement housing cooperatives?

## APPENDIX II

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR GOVERNMENT, REALTORS, ACADEMICS

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*What do you perceive to be the role of your organization in Amsterdam's housing market?*

*What in particular does your research look at?*

*The Amsterdam housing market has long been considered "just" in the academic literature as housing was affordable and accessible, partly due to its large share of social housing – do you think that ever was the case? Is it still the case today?*

- In your view, what are the key characteristics of justice in housing?

*Following an understanding of equity as fairness, meaning that it benefits the worst off, do you think Amsterdam exhibits this feature of justice?*

*What does affordable housing in Amsterdam look like to you?*

- How do you understand the term "affordability"? To whom is this affordable?
- Is it about offering affordable spaces for artists and cultural workers, for the most vulnerable members of society, or something else?
- Do you understand affordability differently for different groups, or the same for everyone?
- How can we ensure that people who need this affordable housing can actually access it, given the current problem of long wait lists?

*How do you understand the concept of "choice" in the housing market?*

- Should people of lower incomes have the option to live either in the social housing sector or the private market, or is it ok for their choices to be based on their incomes levels (e.g. when choosing neighbourhoods)?

*Have you heard of housing cooperatives/woongroepen?*

- What do you believe to be the role of housing cooperatives in contributing to a context of widespread housing justice in Amsterdam?
- What would the ideal role of housing cooperatives look like? What needs to change in order to get there?
- Do you have any criticisms of housing cooperatives?

*Do you think housing cooperatives could provide a large-scale alternative to the housing crisis, or will they probably stay limited to smaller projects?*

- If yes (to large-scale): what do you think needs to change in order for housing cooperatives to be achieved on a larger scale, if anything, or else what is preventing them from already being more widespread?
- If no: why not?

- Do you see other ways of organizing a just city that could complement housing cooperatives?

*In your view, what should diversity in housing look like?*

- Is it primarily among social classes, or other identities as well?
- Has this been accomplished in Amsterdam?
- Are diverse groups in Amsterdam integrated, or segregated based on certain aspects of identity?
- Do you think diversity could further be improved? How? For example, how can identities other than socio-economic status be included?

*What do you perceive to be the impacts of gentrification on the Amsterdam housing market?*

- How can displacement be prevented in cases of gentrification?
- What other options for affordable housing do residents have if they are displaced from their communities?

*What difficulties or challenges have you faced/do you continue to face in trying to promote housing justice in Amsterdam?*

- Have you ever felt that something you would consider to be unjust has occurred either in your housing organization or others that you know?
- Have any members ever complained about what they perceived to be injustices? What were these injustices?

*What should the role of the state be in promoting housing justice in Amsterdam?*

- Would you ideally prefer a greater or lesser role for the state in complementing your efforts (compared to what currently exists)?
- How do you envision the ideal role for the state in making housing more just? E.g. should it provide more regulation in the housing market, incentivize certain types of housing, encourage inclusivity, etc.?
- Should this be the responsibility of the national, provincial, or municipal government?

*How do you think the greatest democracy can be achieved?*

- Is it the traditional liberal democratic notion of state involvement, or giving everybody a role in everyday decision-making?
- Similarly, what does the "right to the city" look like to you? In other words, how can people best shape their surroundings according to their own desires?

*What kind of housing structure do you think would be best for fostering feelings of belonging and community in Amsterdam?*