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**Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship**  
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# **Doughnut Economy Amsterdam**

**A reimagination of urban sustainability policies and citizenship**

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## Introduction

The environmental crisis, the pandemic, and increasing global inequality have made it inevitably clear that the current social and economic systems are vulnerable. An increased number of political organizations, academics and citizens have become concerned with the state of society, a reason for them to propose potential answers to the perceived problem. On that account the municipality of Amsterdam has announced a plan in 2020 to move towards a new economy inspired by Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economy<sup>1</sup>. Raworth's 'Doughnut Economy' advocates for ecological sustainability within planetary boundaries, as well as for social equity envisioned by the Sustainable Development Goals. Both ecological sustainability as social equity are to become equilibrated within a Doughnut. In collaboration with research institutes and the Doughnut Economy Action Lab, the municipality has created a snapshot of the present situation of Amsterdam. This "mirror" demonstrates how Amsterdam, with the hegemonic linear economy that remains directed towards growth, surpasses the ideal limits from the social foundation as well as those from the ecological (see Appendix 1) (Doughnut Economics Action Lab et al. 2020).

Sustainability transitions are recognized to have the power to open-up debate, either critical or enthusiastic, decision-makers, experts, and citizens are moved in discussions about the future (Miller and Levanda 2017). News articles quickly followed that criticized the municipality's plan towards this Doughnut-paradigm for its "hollowness" and use of "empty" language (Swanborn in Het Parool 2020). Najah Aouaki, city strategist and economist, is concerned that the municipality of Amsterdam is not prepared to change its hegemonic economic linear system. She is cautious about the social foundation of the Doughnut that is not sufficiently considered for Amsterdam's citizens (in Het Parool 2020).

Yet, sociologist Pels argues that the city is creative, and therefore able to function more effectively as a backlash against neoliberal ideology in combating social inequality and climate change, than the nation-state (Pels in De Groene Amsterdammer 2019). However, a citizen-led project called the Kaskantine - that enhances the Doughnut-values from both sides in a creative manner - does not feel sufficiently backed by the municipality (van Geuns in NRC 2021). In Amsterdam, as the first city to embrace a Doughnut Economy, a public debate has emerged that envisages a contestation. Policy-makers and citizens are both looking for ways how they can implement the Doughnut in Amsterdam. But they seem to have a different

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<sup>1</sup> Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL), Biomimicry 3.8, Circle Economy, and C40 (2020). Stadsdonut voor Amsterdam. Een instrument voor verandering. Gemeente Amsterdam. Accessed on December 6th, 2021.

perspective on how such a sustainability transition is set in place. These articles have sparked my interest in understanding how the implementation of the Doughnut-framework can help to move towards a different paradigm for society that preserves the important values of ecological sustainability and social equity.

### **Research goal and question**

This thesis has aimed to outline what has happened since the ambition towards a Doughnut Economy was introduced. Both looking at the municipal system, and a bottom-up initiative the Kaskantine, I have aimed to analyze what conceptualizations of sustainability are practiced, and used. According to Voß and Bornemann (2011) researchers can play a critical role in examining controversies over sustainability transitions and can uncover how various actors and institutions understand ‘the goals and policies for sustainability, and, more broadly, the future of their communities and cities’. The goal of this research was to use ethnography to compare how both main-actors in sustainability-transitions are conceiving of the Doughnut Economy in order to obtain a sustainable and just city with the Doughnut. I have situated my findings within the debate Degrowth-thought that demands for an holistic approach of sustainability. I have extended notions of citizenship, by studying it by ‘acts of citizenship’. I have tried to disclose what forms of citizenship are emerging in the context of an ongoing search for sustainable equilibrium, by seeing its manifestations in the contexts and discrepancies that occur within the city. Herewith I have aimed to give a more diverse and plural understanding of pathways towards sustainability in cities.

The main-question in this research was:

*How do Amsterdam's sustainability strategies compare to citizen-led sustainable initiatives in terms of how they conceive of and practice the Donut Economy?*

## **Debate**

### **Introduction to a Doughnut Economy: A different imaginary?**

#### **Cities of growth and its impacts**

Academics have discussed the long-standing tendency in which cities operate in a global competitive economy (Leitner et al. 2007), and are controlled and lived in accordance with entrepreneurial values, influenced by the idea of economic growth. According to researchers Peck and Tickell (2002), a framework that encourages and normalizes entrepreneurial city governance has altered cities. A "growth-first" approach is frequently adopted in urban development, with social welfare coming after investments are made (ibid.). Molotch and Logan (1984) claimed that cities can be thought of as 'growth-machines', with economic expansion serving as the only avenue for urban survival and development. This urban growth means an increased demand on resources, making cities the largest engines of environmental pollution, on a local as well as on a global scale (Scott 2019).

Scholars contend that cities have now entered an era of 'roll-out neoliberalism' (Brenner and Theodore 2002), which has established various supplementary mechanisms and modes in local city-governing that reorganized the city's social infrastructures, political climate, and ecological underpinnings as repurposed into economic assets in an effort to foster economic competitiveness and growth (Leitner et al. 2007).

To give some more context in the confluence of such 'roll-out neoliberalism' within the city of Amsterdam, scholars have recognized how city-branding has involved specific features of Amsterdam citizens. Peck (2012) has critically analyzed how for example in Amsterdam 'creative city' branding has led to an appropriation of creativity, to attract affluent inhabitants, without actually promoting the inherent values of the cultural sector. Instead of being policies that foster artistic and creative activities, creative city policies are more often neoliberal urban growth tactics (Grodach 2017). Another research on such branding strategies has shown how Amsterdam's city marketers incorporate 'diversity' into the city brand, being primarily motivated by economic logic, which views diversity as a requirement for economic progress (Belebas et al 2020). The growth that has prevailed city-governing seems similarly intertwined within ambitions and city-branding in Amsterdam (Savini et al. 2021).

If sustainability ambitions follow the same pattern, and ecological policies become included within the 'promotion of economic competitiveness' through neoliberal logic, this can effectuate rather contradictory outcomes (Leitner et al. 2007: 91) Many scholars, anthropologists among them, have become concerned about the impacts of sustainability

policies and strategies for urban residents; as they often remain directed towards economic growth they have exclusionary outcomes (Dempsey et al. 2009 Campbell 2013 Hagerman 2007 Checker 2018). Through the logic of growth, assets within the boundaries of the city are limited and thus highly valued, risking that poorer social groups are excluded, and keep getting excluded from the city sphere if economic growth is pursued without limits (Savini et al. 2021).

### **A new imaginary for the city**

In April 2020, the Amsterdam municipality announced their ambition towards becoming a ‘Donut Economy’ by 2030. Amsterdam is the first city worldwide to embrace this economic model and to actively put it in practice. Marieke van Doorninck, Amsterdam's Director of Spatial Development and Sustainability at the municipality, aspires with this goal to make the city more accessible and liveable for everyone (van Doorninck in Tegenlicht 2020). The Doughnut-model, invented by economist Kate Raworth, reimagines the economic growth-paradigm by a tool that strives to promote environmental sustainability and social equity at the same time. The Doughnut model serves as a compass that indicates the limits in which people flourish and thrive most successfully (Raworth 2017: e48).

The ‘Social Foundation’ from the Doughnut is based on The Sustainable Development Goals from the United Nations, encompassing the minimal standard of living that everyone can claim their rights in random order: health, food, culture, community, peace and justice, (gender) equality, education, and labor <sup>2</sup>. The ‘Ecological Ceiling’ is defined by nine planetary boundaries that have been established through scientific research: climate change, air pollution, ozone layer depletion, waste generation, excessive land use, freshwater withdrawal, overfishing, excessive fertilizer use, and the acidification of the oceans (ibid.).

On a global scale, the Doughnut portrays a safe and just space for humanity as a whole. This means that the city keeps an eye on the ecological impact of cities that extends far beyond their own borders, due to the intensive use of raw materials and other natural resources for the consumption of food, clothing, electronic equipment, and building materials<sup>3</sup>. Linked with this extensive flows of materials and consumption goods are the impacts of this for people worldwide.

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<sup>2</sup> “Stadsdonut voor Amsterdam. Een instrument voor verandering.” Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL), Biomimicry 3.8, Circle Economy, and C40 (2020). Gemeente Amsterdam. Accessed on December 6th, 2021. <https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/coalitieakkoord-uitvoeringsagenda/gezonde-duurzame-stad/amsterdam-circulair-2020-2025/>

<sup>3</sup> “Stadsdonut voor Amsterdam. Een instrument voor verandering.” Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL), et al. (2020). Gemeente Amsterdam.

But equally important when the Doughnut-model is implemented on a city-level, is a local lens (Appendix 2). In this way the Doughnut becomes both a guideline and a perspective towards different imaginable pathways for a city, as a renewed vision on policy-development, city-goals, and a tool of action for citizens. Raworth sees cities as a nestle in a ‘unique niche of Earth’s living web’ (Raworth in Klomp & Oosterwaal 2021: 281). It is necessary that the built environment from cities become resilient and adapted to the nature that surrounds the city. On top of that comes the social lens on a local level. An equitable city is one in which there are no ‘exclusionary’ practices hindering individuals from participating economically, socially and politically in society (Pierson 2002). This means that inhabitants from cities can aspire and reach their perceptions of ‘the good life’: this aspiration does not only involve affordable housing, education, and reliable infrastructures, Raworth underlines the necessity that citizens feel safe, that they feel they have a voice, and are surrounded by community (Raworth in Klomp & Oosterwaal 2021: 281).

### **Sustainability contested**

Over time, cities and their local councils seem to become more receptive to sustainable solutions and are responding with strategies that become reframed by environmental and social equity goals. In the case of Amsterdam, the growth-paradigm that appears to be historically entangled in urban policy planning (Peck and Tickel: 2002, Molotch and Logan: 1984), seems to have become reimagined with the Doughnut Economy.

Nonetheless, sustainability discourses, policies and transitions have been received cautiously by researchers. Social-, ecological- and economic- concerns demand for a holistic understanding of sustainability. Since the early 1990s, academics have recognized that sustainable development has a ‘Janus-faced identity dilemma’, in which economic growth remains to serve as both ‘protagonist and antagonist’ in the development tale (Borowy & Schmelzer 2017). The word ‘sustainability’ itself and its use in different contexts has led to a contestation that has been investigated by several scholars. According to environmental politics researcher Ingolfur Blühdorn (2009), conventional sustainability discourses continue to remain stuck within a growth paradigm, allowing eco-politics to reframe global warming and the environmental catastrophe as an opportunity of innovation and growth, leading to rather contradictory outcomes of a state of ‘unsustainability’. The most difficult task for achieving sustainability is to better comprehend the complex interconnections between ecological, economic, and social processes of sustainability and to integrate them efficiently (Matthies et al. 2019).

Therefore post-growth, degrowth, or agrowth thinkers and scholars have addressed the importance of a critical observation of sustainability transitions, discourses and strategies mostly to overcome the still widely accepted idea that ‘green growth’, remains the answer to ecological breakdown (Hickel 2020: 137; Kallis in Klomp & Oosterwaal 2021). In the degrowth conference from 2008, an assembly of researchers in the field of social movements, eco-economics, anthropologists and bio-economists have termed degrowth as: ‘a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society’, by moving beyond growth (Khmara and Kronenberg 2020: 2). The objective of degrowth is ‘to meet basic human needs and ensure a high quality of life, while reducing the ecological impact of the global economy to a sustainable level, equitably distributed between nations’ (ibid.). Degrowth scholars have since long been thinking about the complex interconnection between social and environmental challenges, addressing both dimensions as equally important in a transition towards sustainability.

Furthermore degrowth gives insights in post-growth imaginaries. Many anthropological studies have attributed to degrowth thought. A comparative study on different continents has discovered many instances of a ‘cosmology of sharing’ in which community members’ relationships with one another and with the natural environment are formed as interdependent partnerships (Bird-David et al. 1992 in Kallis et al. 2018: 299). The concept of ‘buen vivir’ has evolved as an alternative to capitalist development in Latin America, nurtured by deep cultural traditions that stress ecological balance and community wellness (D’Alisa et al. 2014 in Kallis et al. 2018). Grassroots initiatives can similarly contribute to different imaginaries for the development of sustainability transitions. Degrowth-scholars have addressed that building up different imaginaries has a high leverage point since it challenges and rethinks ‘locked-in’ systems that are ‘designed towards continuous growth’ (Videira et al. 2014: 64). I have tried to understand how the Doughnut has developed different imaginaries beyond growth and how they are conceived and practiced both in a citizen-led initiative, as at the municipal government.

### **Cities and citizens**

In the face of unfulfilling change and action towards environmental and social justice, citizens have been taking the lead in contesting the neoliberal manifestations of cities, and demanded for a broad conceptualization of sustainability.

Renewed theorization of citizenship gives insights on how citizens are claiming rights within fields of contestation. Throughout the twentieth century, the dominant figure of citizenship

from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries started to shift. The creation of new rights, such as ecological, sexual, and indigenous rights, as well as the blurring of lines between human, civil, political, and social rights, and the articulation of rights by (and for) cities, regions, and across states have become emergent (Isin 2009b). Citizenship is a concept in flux, and can be further understood through the ideas of Ong (1996) as she showed how citizenship is a dual process. Taking an ethnographic approach, Ong considers Citizenship as a ‘cultural process of subject-ification’ in the Foucauldian sense of ‘self-making’ and ‘being-made’ (Foucault 1989 in Ong 1996: 736). Hegemonic notions of citizenship, often attributed to broad ‘legal-political’, and formal aspects, ignore the equal importance of everyday processes whereby citizens situate and position themselves in the world (Ong 1996). This notion exemplifies how not only the state is shaping ideas of how citizens should give meaning to their lives, but gives equal importance to citizens’ agency by negotiating citizenship within ambivalent relations with the state through ‘self-making’ (ibid.). This concept is relevant as it shows how citizens can make claims on their political rights of organization, structuring their relation with the state as with the wider world. Isin (2009) takes a similar line of thought as Ong (1996), as they both argue that citizenship is not merely defined as membership of the state, both recognizing the importance of daily practices and manifestations of citizenship. ‘Activist citizenship’, a concept that is used by Isin (2009), has guided me specifically in understanding in what way citizens actively shape the contested fields in which they are embedded. Citizenship is to be studied by its ‘acts’, shifting focus from what people say, to give a fuller comprehension of how citizens are claiming their rights in the world that exists around them (Isin 2009).

Citizens also unite in order to obtain rights to urban (sustainability) decision-making. In 2017, municipalists - neighborhood assemblies, political parties, hyper-local social initiatives, and nationwide movements - have gathered in Spain in a ‘fearless city’ conference (Thompson 2020: 317). Municipalists aim at a democratic transformation of cities, to resist growing inequalities, democratic deficits and social injustices (Barcelona en Comu et al., 2019). Despite internal differences, new municipalists are united by two distinct features: first, utilizing the urban or municipal scale to achieve strategic ends, which - secondly- aim at a transformation from entrepreneurial, neoliberal austerity urbanism, towards more proactive, expansive programmes (Thompson 2020). In the light of this new movement, I have aimed at analyzing how such renegotiations compare to the situation of Amsterdam, as it can give a fuller comprehension of what tools and practices are used to reclaim decision-making.

## Research population and location

Local governments and citizen-led initiatives are the two primary actors that are at the fore-front of the sustainability transition that is put on the policy-agenda with the Donut Economy. Whereas the local government has initiated the Doughnut Economy in its policy-plans, citizen-led initiatives play an important role in the transition towards such new imaginaries. Therefore, the population of this research is twofold.

**Municipality of Amsterdam:** I have focused on the municipality of Amsterdam, as the initiators of implementing the Doughnut-paradigm. Previous ethnographic research has demonstrated how local councils and policymakers have an important impact on the development of sustainability in the city (Checker 2011; Hagerman 2007). Another aspect which makes the municipality of relevance for this research, is the given that a large part of the land of Amsterdam is owned by the Amsterdam Municipality, which means that citizens that organize initiatives are partly dependent on the municipality. Local councils therefore have a relatively large agency in setting up policies and facilitating initiatives that gather around the Doughnut. To find out which departments of the municipality were acquainted with the implementation of the Doughnut Economy, I have looked on the website and the strategy-plans. I have been able to find three interlocutors from different spheres within the organization. The first interlocutor was from Amsterdam Circular Economy. I figured that the Doughnut Economy was an initiative from the Circular Economy strategists. The Circular Economy Amsterdam is a strategy that focuses primarily on organizing, monitoring, and improving three chains: food and organic waste streams, consumer goods, and the built environment<sup>4</sup>. My second interlocutor was someone from the CTO Innovation Team. The CTO Innovation Team, intends to be an important link that collaborates with all departments from the municipality to make innovation happen in the city<sup>5</sup>. Lastly, my last interlocutor was a municipal official from the local district Nieuw-West that was in direct contact with the citizen-led initiative that I have been studying as the second part of my population. The contacts that I had with the municipal officials took place via the phone and through Google-teams. One interview, with the interlocutor from CTO took place at the town hall on Waterlooplein, Amsterdam.

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<sup>4</sup> Strategie Amsterdam Circulair 2020-2025

<https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/coalitieakkoord-uitvoeringsagenda/gezonde-duurzame-stad/amsterdam-circulair-2020-2025/>

<sup>5</sup> "CTO Gemeente Amsterdam". Donut Coalitie Amsterdam. Accessed on December 6th, 2021

<https://amsterdamdonutcoalitie.nl/organization/6132/gemeente-amsterdam--cto-innovatieteam?deelnemen=true>

**The Kaskantine:** The policy-plans from the municipality have articulated that the transition towards the Doughnut-Economy is a ‘citizen-driven transformation’<sup>6</sup>. The second part of the population has therefore focused on citizens that are assembling themselves in a grass-roots/bottom-up initiative that organizes around Doughnut-principles. In preparation for my fieldwork I wanted to find out which ‘Amsterdam Donut Coalitie’ offers a platform that pops up as soon as ‘Amsterdam Donut Economy’ is looked up on the web. This is a Coalition that is set up by citizens of Amsterdam, an interesting point of departure. Apparently citizens of Amsterdam themselves feel the urge to unite, discuss and move towards action around sustainability, now reframed by the Doughnut. The platform gathers projects and changemakers that unite around the Doughnut Economy (Amsterdam Donut Coalitie w.d.). This platform exists outside of the realm of the municipality. Although the overlapping goal is for both claimed to be a sustainable and livable city, citizens feel the urge to organize themselves. These were the first hints for me to understand that citizens might have different perspectives on how sustainability is to be obtained in the city. It was therefore that I wanted to understand better what perspectives, goals and conceptualizations of sustainability a grassroots initiative is foreseeing. On the website of the Donut Coalition I found the initiative that I have investigated in this research: ‘The Kaskantine’. In a recent news article I found out that the Kaskantine struggled to obtain a fair price for the land that they are renting from the municipality. The owner of the initiative is disappointed with the lack of support from the municipality, despite their aspirations in planning towards a just and sustainable city by conceiving of the Doughnut Economy (van Geuns in NRC 2021). This gave a first insight that there exists a contestation between the municipality that leases land, and the rights citizens are trying to claim. The Kaskantine is a non-profit initiative that gathers around urban farming, an off-grid installation, and it used to have a restaurant providing meals with ecological produced food or food leftovers (Kaskantine w.d). The Kaskantine is situated in Amsterdam Nieuw-West.

### **Methodology, positionality and ethics**

For my research at the municipality, it was less easy to obtain access as compared to a citizen-led initiative, as one can not just walk in and contact is only possible through setting up appointments. It was thus necessary to find several key-informants, or ‘local gate-keepers’ (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011: 45) that are able to represent the ideas and policies around the

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<sup>6</sup> Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL), Biomimicry 3.8, Circle Economy, and C40 (2020). Stadsdonut voor Amsterdam. Een instrument voor verandering. Gemeente Amsterdam. Accessed on December 6th, 2021.

Donut Economy by the municipality. By conducting three in-depth interviews, I have tried to obtain insights of how the implementation of the Doughnut is taking place in the municipal organization. Before I conducted these interviews, I have investigated thoroughly the policy-plans that are available online, and used some quotes and examples from the texts for the interviews.

At the Kakantine, I could easily get access through signing myself up as a volunteer. I have conducted participant observations during three months of fieldwork. During my fieldwork I was an ‘active participant’, which means that by actively engaging in activities I could learn the cultural ways of behavior (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011). In the beginning of the fieldwork I volunteered in the garden, attended book- and climate- discussions. Later in the research, when I obtained trustful relationships with the initiators, I have been attending (online-) meetings with other neighborhood- and citizen-assemblies. During these moments I could obtain more in-depth conversations with these persons, that have led to ethnographic interviews (O’Reilly 2012).

As this research was going to investigate people and their values, it was important to reflect on my own positionality and identity. I find myself often concerned about the current state of society, the future, and those of cities. I am worried about how sustainability promises and policies often fail to materialize into real change for the unsustainable current.

My own concerns have shaped my stance in this research. Although anthropology is inherently subjective as the topic one chooses starts already with a normative that is mostly linked to the field of interest or tension that a researcher may experience. Anthropologists are therefore expected to be conscious of the different positions and lenses one uses to observe social life (Grassiani 2019 Reinhartz 2011). It is important to be aware of the values that I hold on to, therefore I have reflected and written about them frequently during my fieldwork. In anthropology obtaining trustworthy relationships with interlocutors has proven to be crucial in obtaining reliable and in-depth data (O’Reilly 2012). One way I have obtained such relations is by respecting and adapting to the codes of the diverging populations that I am researching.

From my own perspective, I think it is very important to be humble towards my interlocutors, since this is a value I hold on to deeply. To make sure that I could share this feeling with my interlocutors, I have been as open as possible about what I was researching, taking on an overt role. As the American Anthropological Association (2012) argues, it is important to ‘Be Open and Honest’ to our interlocutors, regarding the work. I have been clear about my

intentions for the research, which are mainly built on my enthusiasm and hope that the Doughnut Economy will be implemented successfully. Furthermore I have made sure that I 'Do No Harm' (AAA 2012) to my interlocutors through asking for informed consent about all the ethnographic data that I have obtained.

As the question for this research is based on a comparison of two different actors in the Doughnut Economy, it is necessary to reflect on how I could do this in an equal manner. The access to the municipality was less easy than to the Kaskantine. Due to this, I could not use the same methods for both populations. Nevertheless, I have tried to balance my attention to both populations in a way that was as equal as possible. I did this by making sure that the topics and questions for both populations were the same. I have also tried to be open and curious in both of the populations, sharing the same enthusiasm in both populations.

I have taken on an active role as researcher, not only extracting information, but I wanted to understand better and help to evolve the Doughnut Economy as practiced by different actors. This position of the researcher is similar to what Casas-Cortés et al. (2013) have called 'activist research' through which the researcher is 'weaving' by actively creating social relations and generating understanding between a diverse set of actors and concerned people (199). The goal of my research was to improve the connections and the overarching goals of the different actors, instead of opposing them with one another.

## **Outline**

In the first chapter I have tried to shed light on the municipal system and how the Doughnut Economy has been implemented in its organization thus far. I have compared the transition towards a Doughnut Economy with likewise sustainability-transitions. I have discussed the ramifications that occur within the system of the municipality to obtain an holistic approach of sustainability.

In the second chapter I will discuss the findings that I have obtained at the Kaskantine. I have tried to lay bare what specific ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin 2009) are used by the initiators of citizen-led initiative the Kaskantine, in order to challenge, and change the ‘unsustainable’ hegemonic ideas and systems that are guiding the city. I have tried to document how the Kaskantine hereby claims ecological, and social justice rights. These acts give important insights in how sustainability is perceived and claimed with a holistic approach.

Lastly I have discussed how citizen-led initiatives in Amsterdam Nieuw-West have been able to open up the debate on the sustainability transition that is intended with the Doughnut Economy. The introduction of the Doughnut Economy has led to a collaboration on a local-level between the Kaskantine and a local municipal official from the municipality of Amsterdam.

Before diving into the chapters,

I want to thank the participants that have helped me doing my research. I want to thank all municipal officials that I have interviewed, for making time to discuss and reflect on The Doughnut Economy. I want to thank them for sharing their honest insights. Furthermore, I want to thank the initiators from the Kaskantine, for all the (climate-)knowledge, rescued food, garden-tips, and discussions that they have shared with me. I have learned a lot from you. I also want to thank the fellow-volunteers for all the good talks and fun days at the Kaskantine. Last but not least, I want to thank my supervisor Joost Haagsma for having patience with my writing-process, and guiding me through this thesis.

I hope you can enjoy reading it.

*All names in this thesis are pseudonymized in respect with the choices from my interlocutors.  
All photos are made, and shared with permission from the people that are visible.*

## **Chapter 1 The municipal apparatus tries to embrace the Doughnut**

I was curious how - in the first years after sharing their aspirations - the municipality has been able to use the Doughnut thus far. What does it actually mean to integrate these ambitions in a municipal organization? This is a question that I have raised in the first part of the research to understand how the Doughnut becomes conceived within the municipal organization. While the implementation of the Doughnut is still in progress, I have tried to investigate what steps have been made to implement the Doughnut in the organization of the municipality.

The goal of this part of the research was not to focus only on what policies and strategies are made, as these can be found online on the website of the municipality of Amsterdam. Rather I have intended to use an ethnographic approach and read through the lines of policies and strategies of the local government, to lay bare the experience from municipal officials, and the possible obstacles that are experienced in order to work out the Doughnut. Using in-depth interviews, I have looked at the municipal system that embraces the Doughnut with an ethnographic approach, not only reading the ambitions and strategies as shared in online available plans, interpreting them and comparing them with what municipal officials experience and say.

In this first chapter I have analyzed the current situation and the attempts to implement the Doughnut. The Doughnut Economy demands for a structure that combines different lenses to intersect social equity and ecological sustainability (Raworth 2017). It demands the municipality to think in a holistic ‘whole-system approach’, combining the economy, the social, and the environment (Kallis in Klomp & Oosterwaal 2021). The transition towards sustainability can be discussed and compared to Degrowth-thought to stress the importance of understanding it as a multi-dimensional transition that demands for changes in various spheres; technological, material, organizational, institutional, political, economic, and socio-cultural (Khmara & Kronenberg 2020). I have investigated how the Doughnut Economy is implemented thus far, compared to the holistic paradigm such transitions demand for, to give an insight on complications and achievements in such transitions. Furthermore, I have aimed to analyze how the municipality of Amsterdam has adopted the Doughnut Economy, compared with previous revisited sustainability-policies and strategies, that shed

light on the complications in obtaining equal importance for social- ecological- and economic concerns (Seyfang and Smith 2007, Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012, Murray 2017).

Although based on a limited amount of insights that I could gather, these interviews have given an impression of how the apparatus of the municipality is currently functioning, and how the division of departments in the structure may form a barrier in the transition from a linear towards a Doughnut Economy. The municipal system consists of a large organization with diverging clusters and departments. Integrality - which is needed to obtain a holistic vision as one of the main principles from the Doughnut-theory - between the different spheres within the municipality is not yet a natural *modus operandi* for the municipality.

In the beginning of this research, it was challenging to find respondents. I could not directly figure out which departments, strategies, or sub-organizations were concerned with the Doughnut Economy, it not being indicated clearly on the website nor in the available strategy plans of the municipality. Nevertheless, I decided to start contacting officials that work for the Circular Economy strategy, since from what I could read online on the website of the municipality the Doughnut is partly intertwined with this strategy<sup>7</sup>. I received a few emails from officials that appeared to be preoccupied to excerpt interviews. One appointed interview got canceled the night before. Yet, after around fifteen emails I received a friendly answer from a policy-advisor that functions within the Circular Economy and Sustainability and Spatial development. We were supposed to meet each other in one of the office buildings but the interview took place via Google Teams, since there was a heavy wind coming over the Netherlands on that day in mid-February. Both in front of our computers in our home-setting - something we had already become accustomed to since the Corona outbreaks - we started talking.

As soon as my interlocutor (from now on Elly\*) began to introduce herself, I was overwhelmed by all the sub-fields and clusters that she began to list. It remained unclear to me how the structure of the municipality is pieced together, which subclusters are intertwined or not, which departments work together, and how - with all these different wings - they can maintain a holistic vision on what happens in the city. My disorientation became slowly dispelled when I asked my first key-interlocutor about the structure of the municipality.

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<sup>7</sup>Gemeente Amsterdam, Strategie Amsterdam Circulair 2020-2025  
<https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/coalitieakkoord-uitvoeringsagenda/gezonde-duurzame-stad/amsterdam-circulair-2020-2025/>

\* I have used a pseudonym in respect to the choices of the interlocutor

“I am in the Central City. I am a policy advisor within my team, and I have to advise the alderman and the city council about policies. If the alderman has certain objectives, about the Circular Economy and Doughnut, then I have to think very carefully about, okay what is needed for that and how are we going to achieve that? For this we develop instruments such as subsidies, we sometimes commission specific studies, or we organize with all kinds of parties from the city to see how we can achieve things together. There are several services in Central City. I'm in Space and Sustainability. It is actually a bit crazy, the rest of the service is actually very physical, and then there is a very small part is Doughnut. That is why it is a bit odd, you see. Because in completely different buildings there are the services for Work & Income, Poverty alleviation, Education.. That is just somewhere else and we actually have very few contacts with them. That also means that it actually still demands a lot of internal tweaking... And then around that we have the city districts, seven city districts. They are actually the most practical.”

Through Elly's explanation, I could dismantle which points of departure are taken to work towards the Doughnut. By making an overview (Appendix 3) of her explanation I could figure out what different spheres of power with diverging abilities to work towards the Doughnut exist. The Central City - of which my respondent is part of - has the ability to make policies and has direct contact and impact on where, and for what money is used. They are in direct contact with the alderman - in her case with former alderman Sustainability & Spatial Development Marieke van Doorninck. Through this route, policymakers from the Central City have a large influence in obtaining goals. The municipal system also includes seven districts with district-councils. These councils have expertise about what happens in the city since they are in direct contact with citizens (and their initiatives and projects). Local officials in this sphere are, in Elly's words, “the eyes and ears” of the different neighborhoods. However, Elly admits that these districts have less means: “They are very important to know what is going on, to signal things, to organize meetings, a lot of things, but they don't really have much money. So that's always the tricky part”. To reach certain goals these municipal officials often have to reach “higher up” in the system in order to receive approval, money, or expertise. The seven districts that Elly describes hereinabove have less means and influence to for example effectively help Doughnut-projects come off the ground. This

part of the interview was important in understanding how the municipality relates with citizens and their assemblies. Raworth has argued that the ‘local social lens’ (Appendix 2) entails that citizens feel heard in the city, seems to be partly impaired by this distribution of power.

Building on the same excerpt, I want to point out the way Elly describes the physical distance between the departments. The way she does, gives an impression that there is an actual detachment in the structure of the municipality. Apparently there are no arranged physical spaces to come together, to discuss different issues, expertises, and perspectives from the different fields and clusters within the municipality. I could not understand how a holistic vision, as Raworth (2017) had imagined, could be obtained in the way the Doughnut is implemented in the system.

Since Elly has an active role in the Circular Economy (from now on CE), the department that initiated the Doughnut Economy, I presumed that she could explain to me how the CE would be concerned with making sure that the Doughnut becomes achieved on a larger scale in the municipal system. However, the best method for doing so has yet to be determined:

“It really is that.. We are still searching. Who feels dedicated at this moment? The capacity has not been thought through, neither where the Doughnut has to function. But me, indeed, I am very dedicated, yes. Because I do know what is going on, and I personally find it very important”.

It seems that there is no method yet that helps to keep track on how the Doughnut is implemented in the system, rather its success has become a matter of personal beliefs and values. She explained to me that “Doughnut-thinking” was something that she felt was very important whereas other colleagues and councilors still needed more time to understand and use the metaphor. This is another level on which the system still misses the ability to yield an integral vision.

Before diving further into these excerpts, I want to introduce the second interlocutor (from now on Rob\*) that I spoke with. A few weeks later, I spoke with another official from the municipality. This time I have an appointment at the town hall at the Waterlooplein, where Rob arrives on his bike at the stroke of 17:00 a.m. Together we enter the big modern building,

where I immediately mention the photos of the alderman of which some of them are missing due to the upcoming elections. Arriving at security gates, he checks in with a card and we enter a part that is reserved for municipal officials. We use a long escalator to arrive on an open floor with several office spaces. The building now empty, I get the opportunity to see the inside of the town hall that is normally preserved for municipal officials. I mention some minimalistic modern furniture, plants, and natural colors with wooden tones. Curiously watching around while I walk behind Rob I am suddenly interrupted by his question: “Which office do you prefer?”. He shows me one room with two lounge couches and a little table, the other a more traditional setting with a desk and chairs, I choose the one with couches. Sitting opposite to Rob - each on our own little bench - we talk for approximately 90 minutes.

Rob is working at the CTO (Chief Technology Office) of the municipality. He proudly tells me that the municipality of Amsterdam is the first public organization with a CTO. This service focuses on technology from companies, in order to see how the municipality can set up product- and service innovation based on these technologies. The respondent tells me this service does not only work with “hardcore tech” but also focuses on “social innovation”, and how this can be used to make sure that the transitions flow successfully. From the information that I gathered online beforehand I derived that this office ‘collaborates with all departments from the municipality’<sup>8</sup>. I wondered if and how the CTO could ensure that both social and ecological sustainability are combined in moving towards the Doughnut.

Firstly, Rob narrates the situation in the beginning of the Doughnut-Economy project in 2019, when it was about to be set on the municipal agenda. He tells me that they (he was involved in this process) intended to set Raworth’s philosophy “as high as possible in the organization”. To do so, an extensive session wherein Raworth proceeded on her theory was organized with the urban directors from Gemeentelijk Management Team (Municipal Management Team). This assembly is charged with municipal governance, and tightly related with the aldermans (Appendix 3). From there the CE had hoped to safeguard the Doughnut on the municipal agenda and to spread it to other departments, but the outcome was less efficient than intended. He explains to me that it is hard to maintain consistency and to make sure that the Doughnut remains on the agenda:

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<sup>8</sup> Amsterdam Donut Coalitie  
<https://amsterdamdonutcoalitie.nl/organization/6132/gemeente-amsterdam--cto-innovatieteam>

\* I have used a pseudonym in respect to the choices of the interlocutor

“It is extremely difficult to apply integrality in such a large organization. It is a big challenge to have such a large cumbersome system, we are talking about 19,000 civil servants at the municipality.. So yes, if you do the math, and you look at the numbers.. Then there are maybe twenty, thirty people in Circular Economy that are really dedicated to it, on a file of 19,000 civil servants. So it is very difficult to get everyone involved.”

Elly was concerned about the physical distance between the departments of ecological sustainability and social departments, that might lead to a lack of integral praxis wherein both lenses of sustainability are combined. Rob adds that due to the big structure, it is complex to remain consistent, and have one integral vision on how the Doughnut has to become Implemented. Later in the conversation, Rob says that he is not sure about where the Doughnut would fit best within the municipality's apparatus:

“It is good to make the distinction between circular and Doughnut. And the Doughnut is, actually it lies, it is now glued to Circular Economy.. But actually, I think you feel that conclusion now, it is not quite with us in the right department. Circular is only one way to work on the Doughnut, but the other side of the Doughnut has to be worked out from the other department.. The Social Foundation, things such as inequality and things like that.. We are not going to solve that from Circular, we can participate in it and stimulate it. But it really is in a completely different department”.

He argues that there is often a misunderstanding that the Doughnut equates to the CE, but he stresses that the Doughnut is not situated at the right place in the municipal apparatus. The CE strategy remains mainly focused on obtaining ecological sustainability. The other side of the Doughnut - the social foundation - is partly under their consideration but, as Rob has narrated, is not the responsibility to be obtained for the Circular Economy. He argues that the Social Foundation of the Doughnut is something that has to be worked and thought through from the ‘Social Cluster’ of the municipality (Appendix 3). In the current situation and working practice it seems thus that the Doughnut and its various boundaries are viewed, executed, and operated separately from each other.

## **A Doughnut Economy demands for a holistic conceptualization of sustainability**

### **Shifting values**

In the first two years after the Doughnut arrived on the political agenda for the municipality, it has mainly been used as an ideological framework. Within the Circular Strategy, the paradigm has helped to start shifting certain values. The Doughnut has called for a way of thinking that combines lenses on local and global issues. This new approach demands for a vision that combines the social, ecological and economy, or as my first interlocutor called this “Doughnut thinking”. I could understand that the Doughnut has helped in thinking beyond internalized ‘value systems’ (Khmara & Kronenberg 2020: 4). For example, as Elly explained to me, social values and the importance of these within the CE strategy were previously seen as “soft values” and as separated from the CE strategy. She explained to me that she often felt that the social dimension of sustainability was often regarded in a “denigrating manner”, as CE strategists think primarily through “materials and technology” in their conceptualizations of sustainability. She concludes that since the Doughnut was introduced, she could more easily adopt social values, and explain the relevance of this more efficiently to her colleagues within the CE. This finding implies that the previous dichotomous discourse -“soft values” opposed to “materials and technology” - is starting to shift. Such reimaginings of the discourse are necessary first steps in moving towards a new paradigm in which both values become equally important. Degrowth-thinkers are implying that such ‘de-construction’, and ‘reconceptualizations’ of the imaginary from institutions are necessary in order to move towards a new paradigm for the economy (Demaria and Latouche in Demaria and Kothari 2017, Kallis 2018). However as both interlocutors agree, this way of thinking is not yet natural for all councilors in the apparatus. It has proven to be not easy to obtain awareness of the importance of the Doughnut-Economy and to create a consistent vision on policy-making through this vision in the large apparatus of the municipality.

### **The local social lens**

Although my respondents were definitely acquainted with the importance of an integral vision and practice, the interviews have shown how both respondents were concerned about how a holistic vision could be achieved in a (in Rob’s words) “cumbersome” system. As I have illustrated with the excerpts, the current structure and working practice of the municipal apparatus effectuates that the Doughnut and its social foundation and ecological boundaries are not seen through one and the same lens. The clusters that deal with social and ecological issues remain both physically and conceptually separated. This might impair the ability for the municipality to obtain a holistic vision on sustainability. In line with several scholars I argue that working towards integrality is a crucial feature for a Doughnut Economy and

sustainability policy-making (Kallis in Klomp & Oosterwaal 2021, Matthies et al. 2019). Raworth designed a Doughnut, a model that combines lenses and modes of practice, giving equal importance to ecological and social sustainability with a holistic approach. Both sides of the Doughnut need to be taken together in policy-making and strategies that tend to work towards sustainability.

The Circular Economy strategy that initiated the Doughnut is still foremost the main driver in obtaining the Doughnut Economy. CE strategies have been studied by previous scholars to analyze if the strategy could equally include all pillars of sustainability: -social, environmental, and the economic (Murray et al. 2017). Their interdisciplinary analysis of sustainability approaches, has shown that a social dimension often fails to fit within CE conceptualizations of sustainability development. From the interviews I could derive that the CE strategy of Amsterdam has a primary focus on ecological sustainability. Rob narrated that in the Circular Strategy they mainly work on ecological sustainability, while “The other side of the Doughnut has to be worked out from the other department. The Social foundation, things such as inequality and things like that.. We are not going to solve that from Circular”. The ‘Social cluster’<sup>9</sup> - with their domains varying from work, income, education, poverty reduction, and youth - has more expertise on the Social foundation. But the shortage of physical and intellectual connection from the CE with this department, as both of my interlocutors had mentioned, may lead to a lack of integral vision for a holistic conceptualization of sustainability.

This lack of connection with the social pillar of the municipality, can have exclusionary outcomes especially when one considers the local lens: the Social Foundation on a city level. While it has been noted that a global approach beyond municipal or national boundaries is required to achieve sustainability (Raworth 2017, Haughton 1999), the local scale is crucial in light of the everyday experience of the built environment.

The concept of sustainable development has been defined in ‘Our common future’ as ‘development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED 1987: 43). This definition implicates the internal interconnection between the economic, environmental and social dimension of sustainability. Social sustainability, I borrow a concept from McKenzie, is the state that “occurs when the formal and informal processes, systems structures and relationships actively support the capacity of current and future generations to create healthy and livable

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/organisatie/sociaal/>

communities” (2004: 18). Social equity and social sustainability principles in an urban context mean that everyone has equitable access to the urban environment, green spaces, and local community (Dempsey et al. 2009). If the Doughnut intends that everyone has the same access to the urban environment, green spaces, and local community (ibid.), now and in the future (McKenzie 2004), it means that the municipality gives equal importance to the impacts of climate change for Amsterdams citizens.

Environmental justice movements have since long shown how environmental legislation may benefit one over others, leading to ‘exclusionary sustainability’ (Campbell 2019: 75). It is therefore necessary to bear in mind what spatial in- or exclusions may appear through environmental sustainability programs that focus primarily on ecological sustainability. Ethnographies have shed light on the outcomes when environmental sustainability and development policies and strategies in cities are not concerned with the impacts and outcomes for social equity. Checker (2011) has shown how urban development combined with environmental sustainable goals, can lead to more attractive neighborhoods and higher valued assets. Eventually this can lead to ‘environmental gentrification’, a displacement of low-income residents and people of color. A similar process is studied by ethnographic fieldwork from Hagerman (2007) that shows how planners and policymakers often combine contradictory concerns such as green spaces, environmental remediation and redevelopment of urban spaces under an umbrella of ‘planning for livability’, which leads to a reappropriation of the urban space followed by rising prices.

These ethnographies emphasize that the social dimension in environmental legislation and policies are crucial if a city has to remain accessible for everyone. These ethnographies rearticulate the idea that a holistic approach within an organizational system is important.

The elaboration and conceptualization of different dimensions of sustainability are now carried out separately from each other in different departments in the municipal apparatus, leaving uncertainty about how sustainability is viewed from a holistic vision that the Doughnut demands for (Raworth 2017), and as degrowth

### **Grassroots innovation**

Since the CE strategy remains to focus mainly on the ecological dimension of sustainability, it might impair another part of social sustainability; the ability of citizens to enter the debate on sustainability. The exclusion from the social dimension in a sustainability discourse can lead to a lack of connection with Amsterdam’s citizens, and the social, grassroots innovation that happens in the city, in the debate on sustainability transitions. The discourse of the CE is

based in a ‘Smart city’ approach, and focuses historically mainly on technological innovation developed in collaboration with ‘businesses and private partners’<sup>10</sup>. Scholars have been critically analyzing ‘smart city’ approaches that are often invoked in order to solve urban problems and sustainable development. They often lack holistic vision since these approaches mostly focus on technological development, rather than seeing cities as complex socio-technical systems. ‘Smart City’ approaches often fix on technological development without assembling sustainability with ‘human, social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors’ (Mora et. al 2019). Scholars in environmental politics Seyfang and Smith (2007) have compared various strands in sustainability transitions, and recognized that macro-level technology innovations have often obtained a prominent role in comprehending sustainability transitions, whereas the impact of the social, grassroots, and community action remains less recognized. If sustainability discourses, as Miller and Levenda (2017) put it, remain disproportionately shaped through the idea that technological solutions are the main-solution, public participation and social equity issues can become sidelined in the practice and research of sustainability transitions. Local, grassroots actors in the city have expertise on what happens on a societal, street level, in neighborhoods, as they see the ‘daily reality’ that Raworth (2021) mentioned to be important, from closeby. Local-scale innovations that are obtained at a grass-roots level in urban contexts, are necessary in the transition towards a Doughnut, as these spheres have proven to be leverage points in changing existing regimes (Miller and Levenda, 2017; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). Elly is acquainted with the importance of this and tries to connect with initiatives in the city more frequently. Rob admitted that he felt “ashamed” of the lack of connection with grassroots innovation within the CTO department. There thus seems an awareness of the importance of the grassroots-level, but the current system for now lacks to integrate these initiatives within the larger strategy.

With the Doughnut environmental concerns and social justice principles are to be introduced in an holistic approach of sustainability. In the current situation the departments in the organization are physically, and conceptually separated. The CE strategy has made first attempts towards including social values more oftenly in their discourse on sustainability, but this way of thinking is not yet obtained for everyone in the large municipal organization.

The current structure of the municipal organization generates a discourse of sustainability that

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<sup>10</sup> City of Amsterdam. Policy: Circular  
<https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/policy-innovation/policy-circular-city/>

lacks to integrate sufficiently, the social dimension of sustainability: thereby social equity-principles are not sufficiently included within the sustainability discourse, and the ability for citizens to have impact in decision-making around sustainability is not yet visible.

In this chapter I often discussed the obstacles with implementing the Doughnut, it being an ongoing project. In the third chapter - after I will extensively explain how a citizen-led initiative is working on ecological sustainability, and social equity rights in the following chapter - I will show how the municipality is able to work more efficiently on a local level Doughnut in co-creation with citizen-led initiatives.

I was surprised by the honest way that my respondents could talk about these systemic obstacles. The way in which the municipality officials could reflect on the perceived bottlenecks in the municipal system, gave me insight on both the complexity to obtain integrality, as well as the openness to discuss improvement.

**Chapter 2 The Kaskantine, a movement from the bottom-up**



Figure 1: Gloves for the gardeners (photo by author)

While the municipality is still trying to find the best route to effectively implement the Doughnut, radical action and change is arising from the bottom-up. At the same time for the new paradigm from the municipality to spread, and most of the time ahead of it, citizens have been actively engaging and changing towards more sustainable solutions themselves. The bottom-up movement that I talk about here comes from citizen-assemblies, more specifically the ones that work both on ecological sustainability, and social equity-principles while

intersecting them naturally. The Doughnut frame begins to reappropriate what bottom-up initiatives have been doing since long; on the municipality's website and in the strategy-plans the Kaskantine and other initiatives are portrayed as part and examples of the municipal strategies<sup>11</sup>. The Doughnut Economy and its success is to a large extent dependent on how citizens organize around the Doughnut principles, it being called a 'citizen-driven transformation' in the strategy plans from the municipality<sup>12</sup>. This suggests that the achievement of the Doughnut seems to rely on how citizens take up the ideas and put them into practice. Hereby confirming research that has shown how governments increasingly focus upon the social economy as a source of sustainability transformation, active citizenship, and public service delivery (Seyfang and Smith 2007). This focus could be directed to the influence of roll-out neoliberalism that has led to an 'outsourcing' of traditional welfare state functions to community groups (ibid. 587). As I have shown in the previous chapter, municipal officials are aware of the importance of citizens for the Doughnut Economy. But, as similarly mentioned in the previous chapter, the structure of the municipality is organized in such a way that leaves small space and means for local municipal officers that are in direct contact with citizens. Citizens depend on the municipality since they rent municipal owned lands, they need expertise, permissions, or subventions. But in the current organization, the - what Elly called - "eyes and ears" of the city, do not have many means (appendix 3). Coming back to Raworth's envisaged ideas, she argues that local governments' should be constantly bearing in mind what the 'current state of city life' looks like, and that the local government is acquainted with making sure that the voices of citizens are heard (Raworth in Klomp & Oosterwaal 2021). But how such support is organized was not necessarily clear when I was interviewing the municipal officials.

In order to gain access and to acquire insights from a bottom-up perspective, I signed myself up as a volunteer for the garden-team of citizen-led initiative the Kaskantine. As soon as I started entering the field, I discovered that the vision and strategies that the Kaskantine wants to put in practice can give fruitful insights in implementing Doughnut-thought and combining the social, ecological as well with a local lens. Yet, citizen-assembly Kaskantine does not always receive the support they had hoped for from the municipality, notwithstanding nor interfering their urge for radical action.

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<sup>11</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam. Amsterdam Circulair 2020-2025 Innovatie- en uitvoeringsprogramma. <https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/coalitieakkoord-uitvoeringsagenda/gezonde-duurzame-stad/amsterdam-circulair-2020-2025/>

<sup>12</sup> Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL), Biomimicry 3.8, Circle Economy, and C40 (2020). Stadsdonut voor Amsterdam. Een instrument voor verandering. Gemeente Amsterdam. Accessed on December 6th, 2021.

Instead of taking the Doughnut Economy as a point of departure in this chapter, I have documented what kind of practices are put off the ground by citizens independently, oftenly challenging systems that are ‘orchestrated’ by governments and markets (Cao 2015: 164). I have aimed to analyze how the Kaskantine has helped (independently) to open up and widen the debate of ecological sustainability and social justice principles. More specifically I have documented what forms of citizenship occur in the context of an ongoing arrangement of rights that intersect concerns over ecological degradation, decreasing social justice, and access to the urban area. Therefore I have borrowed Isin's conceptualization of ‘activist citizenship’ to recognize what ‘acts of citizenship’ are executed at the Kaskantine, and how these are used as a counterweight to the perceived fields of contestation. Instead of seeing neoliberalism as an ‘economic tsunami’ I have borrowed Ong's lens to understand neoliberalism as ‘a mobile technology’, hereby zooming in on the locally perceived effects of the neoliberalization of the city (2007: 3), and the growth paradigm that has altered cities. Furthermore, I have argued that citizens demand for a more holistic interpretation of sustainability, through which they shift ‘environmental citizenship’ towards ‘sustainability citizenship’ (Barry 2006: 24).

### **Entering the field**

(The names in this vignette are pseudonymized in respect to my interlocutors preferences).

In the following vignette I want to take you with me to the Kaskantine:

The sun is shining and the air is blue and calm, in big contrast with a heavy storm that passed Amsterdam a week before. When I arrive around 10.00 a.m. at the Kaskantine for my first volunteering-day, I walk past a line of around forty people waiting in front of the greenhouse. While the people in line are chit-chatting with one another, they receive coupons with a number. Four volunteers are busy sorting out crates with vegetables, fruits and other rescued products, redistributing them to the people one by one. I enter the garden, where I find the two initiators of the Kaskantine, Rose and Peter, who kindly greet me. Rose is arranging some chairs in a circle, while Peter is seated in a chair, his ankle wrapped up in a brace since it got broken in a bike accident a few weeks before. The volunteers are arriving, and ending up with around eighteen people. As we sit in a circle, Peter starts mentioning that the Kaskantine got off well from the storm that passed, only one of the solar panels blew off the roof. Concerned,

he continues that the neighbors' building - which consists of an apartment-complex for young starters and refugees - has lost a large part of the roof. After an introduction round, we get some instructions about the tasks and responsibilities. Slightly dejected Rose tells the volunteers that one can only enter the buildings if necessary to grab tools or to go to the dry-toilet. She explains that this restriction will last for the time that it takes to obtain the necessary permissions from the municipality. For now, the organized activities will remain outside. This first day aims at making the garden ready for spring and to fix some damage from the storm. The garden-volunteers receive a pair of gloves and shovels, while the construction-volunteers are equipped with screw machines and hammers. In companion with the garden-volunteer group, we scoop up last-years' produced soil and replace it in large buckets, we move woodpiles, and prepare a new pile of compost. Rose gathers all volunteers to the corner of the land where a new compost-system is to be set in practice. Thoughtfully she explains to the volunteers how the compost-system works, letting us smell, touch, and help during the preparation of the compost in a large bucket. Peter - ignoring the impractical crutches he has to walk with for his broken ankle - helps the volunteers with tasks. Towards the end of a few hours of gardening and construction, he cheers up the volunteers. Thankful for the work and being there he calls us 'climate warriors', after laughingly improving himself 'climate heroes!'. Before we leave, the volunteers are asked to take as much as possible of the leftovers from the food-rescue. With a bag full of greens and my shoes and jeans covered with dry mud I step on my bike as I slowly disappear back into the crowd and bustle of the city.

This vignette gives an insight on what a day at the Kaskantine looks like. I have narrated a few of the many activities that the Kaskantine organizes on a weekly basis. The Kaskantine is a place that brings together a multiple variety of people, either helping them, providing them knowledge, and giving space for experimentation and learning with each other.

This vignette brings me back to the first experiences and feelings that I had and felt by being at Kaskantine. As soon as I got to know the initiators, I was endeared with their enormous patience and perseverance, not only with obtaining what they envision, but also to help people, involve them, and share what they have. At first the anthropological practice felt odd to me, as I felt that my position of researcher was irrelevant compared to the work that the initiators did. I felt that I had to prove myself for not only being there for my research, but equally for the urgency that I felt in doing something for the climate and society. It helped that

I could adapt and recognize myself in the thoughts and ideas that the Kaskantine tries to bring off the ground. Through volunteering, I could actively help and hereby slowly obtain relationships with the initiators of the Kaskantine that led to conversations.

This vignette also gives an insight on the ongoing arrangement for permissions that the Kaskantine wants to establish with the municipality. The Kaskantine tries to obtain a fair price for the land, to be able to fulfill the various functions they have set up. The permission will allow the Kaskantine to reopen their doors for visitors, something they were able to do in their previous locations when they rented land from private-owners. They could receive people from the neighborhood inside, to serve as a meetup place, for affordable dinners with rescued and organically produced food, and climate discussions. But in contrast to the previous landlords, the municipality - from which they rent the plot - is tied to legal procedures, and regards the Kaskantine as a commercial party. It seems that the municipality is still paralyzed within an neoliberal mode of governing, despite their ambitions to move towards a Doughnut that should promote citizen-led initiatives. Over the past decades, neighborhood movements and assemblies that peaked in the 60s and 70s and emancipated the city from the bottom-up, have lost influence due to cutbacks and privatization of the public sector (Leitner et al. 2007). As the grassroots organizations are ‘constrained by the contractual relations with their funders’ (ibid. 100), it is necessary for the Kaskantine to reclaim recognition for their work.



(From left - to right:) Figure 2: Volunteer preparing seedlings while caressing frequent visitor ‘Loki’.  
Figure 3: Planting cabbage in March. Figure 4: The garden in Mandala design. (All photos by author)

### **Extended forms of citizenship: Acts of rupture and resistance**

Slowly but certainly I came to unravel, that a disagreement about the price of the land, was just at the surface of another contestation. One that is revealed in several practices that are executed by the Kaskantine by which they are resisting the hegemonic paradigm of growth as orchestrated by markets and the state (Leitner et al. 2007; Peck and Tickell 2002), while simultaneously opening up debates about social and ecological rights for citizens. The struggle over certain rights in the city, as I will argue, demands for a specific form of citizenship, since the rights that the Kaskantine perceives to be accessible for everyone are under pressure. As I have witnessed in several discussions and talks during my fieldwork, the organizers of the Kaskantine are concerned with the ongoing growth paradigm that remains hegemonic in the city and its consequences for ecological sustainability and social justice. The Kaskantine is actively looking for solutions and alternatives, that are expressed through several practical acts that I will discuss hereunder.

Citizenship notions become expanded by conceptualizing what ‘acts of citizenship’ are manifested, in this way zooming in on what way citizens are positioning themselves in society (Isin 2009). In this part of the research I have tried to lay bare what specific ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin 2009) are used by the initiators of Kaskantine, in order to challenge, and change hegemonic ideas and systems that are guiding the city and society as a whole.

While I was attending volunteer-days, book-discussions and climate-talks at the Kaskantine, I have come to understand what practices the initiative is putting off the ground to challenge and change the conventional systems of agriculture, food distribution and consumerism, waste-infrastructure, and the hegemonic culture of growth that are perceived to remain persistent in the city.

One of the main-activities from the Kaskantine nowadays is facilitating the experimentation and the sharing of knowledge about gardening in urban areas. Inhabitants of urban areas have largely lost the ability and knowledge of growing food. By gardening in the city, the Kaskantine wants to prove that it is possible to grow food close to the livelihoods of consumers. By using Permaculture-principles the Kaskantine works together with the systems of nature. For example the garden is designed in a mandela-form, to bring plants in connection with each other and make them grow through nature’s systems, unnatural pesticides and fertilizers are therefore not needed. Gardening in this way becomes an ‘act’ against monoculture, the agricultural practice in which pesticides and fertilizers are used to grow as fast and efficiently as possible. Through organized activities around gardening, the

Kaskantine provides people in cities with a reappropriation of local know-how on how to grow food locally and sustainably.

The lands and soil that the Kaskantine is situated on, were very poor when the initiators started gardening in 2019. As Rose told me, the soil consists of lots of sand and therefore lacks many nutrients for plants and vegetables to grow. Slowly, by collecting organic waste that the initiators and volunteers collect, the Kaskantine is creating a more nutrient soil through composting. Composting is an important activity for the Kaskantine that goes further than its practical existence, into a more political ‘site of contestation’ (Isin 2009: 371). Composting is a practice that has become almost impossible in the city of Amsterdam. Besides ‘Worm Hotels’ that are placed in neighborhoods as an initiative from citizens<sup>13</sup>, the municipality is not organizing a city-wide infrastructure. In the current waste-management regime, organic waste is not separated from the waste that is burned in the waste-to-energy (WtE) plant that collects Amsterdam’s waste. I have encountered several moments during my fieldwork that have shed light on the critical stance that the initiators of the Kaskantine take towards the waste-management that is set in practice by the municipality. The initiators of the Kaskantine are concerned about the current state of affairs: a lot of organic waste becomes burned instead of reevaluated into healthy soil. With a tone of rage Rose tells me that it is “absurd” how fast waste is taken “away from our eyes, before one can mention”. Waste no longer becomes separated in groups, rather all waste is collected together, and becomes burned in masses (in Peter’s words) “to feed the monster”, to eventually ‘sustainably’<sup>14</sup> extract energy. According to a research from Savini (2021) that has analyzed the waste-management from the municipality of Amsterdam, an WtE is inherently contradictory to the ambitions of a circular city. The WtE survives only on more waste to generate energy and is therefore dependent on waste; ‘attempts to reduce consumption are subverted’ (Savini 2021: 2128). The act to collect organic waste and to revalue it, becomes an act of resistance to the current waste-management by making sure that organic waste is prevented from being burned. The Kaskantine has set up a system that makes sure that organic waste can be used effectively with several compost piles and buckets. They have the ambition to scale up this infrastructure to collect organic ‘waste’ more efficiently, for which a few initiatives and a cafe in Nieuw-West have already agreed to participate. Through a self-organized waste-recovery

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<sup>13</sup> Nieuw Amsterdams klimaat, Duurzame wormenhôtels, 16 mei 2022  
<https://www.nieuwamsterdamsklimaat.nl/actueel/duurzame-wormenhôtels>

<sup>14</sup> AEB Amsterdam  
<https://www.aebamsterdam.nl/duurzame-afvalverwerking/>

system, the Kaskantine tries to create an autonomous system from the municipality and creates healthy soil.

As narrated in the above written vignette, the Kaskantine organizes a food-rescue system called the ‘Voedselkringloop’. This is an act that is set-up to contest a system that throws away a lot of food-waste. The Kaskantine has developed a system that makes sure that food-waste is collected by volunteers from supermarkets and companies. This food can not be sold (anymore) since it has passed the indicated expiration date, or because the products are not sellable in the first place since they do not conform to the physical guidelines and demands that are orchestrated by supermarkets. This food would be thrown away normally, but the system that the Kaskantine has set up, makes sure that food becomes redistributed for free to people that need it, and/or that want to reduce food-waste. In this way the Kaskantine acts up against consumption- and waste-culture.

The organization of open and accessible climate-discussions, and book-discussions, is an act of the Kaskantine that aims to create a safe place for talking about the future with citizens. In the ‘Climate-garden’ scientific knowledge, for example from IPCC, or books including several essays on climate-solutions are shared, read and discussed collectively between volunteers, the initiators, and visitors. In this way, the Kaskantine is constantly trying to think, discuss and reflect on climate-change processes, but also about solutions, and other paradigms. Other conversations, for example one about communicating ecological concerns, also focus on feelings, of being hopeful, but more oftenly about fears. Climate-anxiety<sup>15</sup> - which I felt was a widely-shared feeling among volunteers and other visitors during several conversations - is taken seriously while concerns are shared. The initiators are often thoughtfully asking how one is coping with these feelings, and actively encouraging people to keep communicating with one another.

One of the most obvious acts, that one can witness when walking through the upcycled containers and greenhouses, consists of an inventory installation with ‘off-grid’ techniques that the Kaskantine sets up with volunteers. The built environment of the Kaskantine is equipped with various installations that provide them with energy and water supply from natural resources, such as solar panels, rainwater harvesting and greywater filtration systems. An important aspect is that the off-grid installations give sustainable alternatives and solutions to conventional infrastructures for energy and water. When moving

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Climate anxiety, also called eco-anxiety and climate distress, is a form of psychological distress related to the climate crisis—an overwhelming sense of fear, sadness, and existential dread in the face of a warming planet’. Coping with Climate Anxiety. JSTOR Daily. October 21, 2021. Accessed June 10, 2022 <https://daily.jstor.org/coping-with-climate-anxiety/>

around at the Kaskantine one inevitably becomes aware of the value of clean water, energy, green spaces, and the reused materials. Becoming off-grid is not merely about the efficient and sustainable materiality. Off-grid-installations are habitually designed in order to achieve relative autonomy from formal infrastructures - including electricity, municipal water supplies, gas, and sewer systems (Hesselberth 2019 in Dankert and Pannekoek 2019). This autonomy brings them relative freedom in experimenting, and creating the space to share knowledge, food, and community. Being off-grid gives them the ability to show an example that living sustainably does not have to cost a lot of money, and that it is accessible for everyone to live and eat healthy and sustainably in the city <sup>16</sup>.

### **Opening up the right to the city and the right to participation**

In the previous part I have shown what acts are manifested in order to contest locally perceived manifestations of neoliberalism and growth. But these acts are not to be perceived as stand-alone, isolated practices. Rather they are a set of practices that form a web of tactics in order to open up debates of contested rights. Thinking about citizenship through ‘acts’ means to implicitly accept that citizens are made through their claims to justice: ‘to break habits and act in a way that disrupts and opens up already defined, practices, orders, and statuses’ (Isin 2009: 384). Citizens can make claims on rights based on their ‘right to claim rights’ (Isin 2009: 371). Within the acts that I have described above, one can find underlying rights that are contested. The acts can be seen as an attempt to broaden up rights, not only for themselves but more importantly for the community and city as a whole.

By organizing these above-mentioned acts, the Kaskantine first of all claims ‘the right to the city’. This right, first discussed by Lefebvre (1996), is often invoked in literature as a right that is claimed by citizens through judicial actions, as it offers an utopian image of a better city (Lefebvre 1996 in Low et al. 2018). But Purcell (2002) argues that Lefebvre’s ideas are often undone from the more radical, and more indeterminate tone than he has intended to conceptualize. Purcell argues that Lefebvre has used the claim of the ‘right to the city’, to reveal an ‘ongoing process’, rather than an end-process, through which citizens are both opening up and stretching up the rights and challenging hegemonic neoliberal ideas of city-governing (2002: 99). Citizens can make claims on these rights, in order to call for a ‘radical restructuring of social, political, and economic relations’ (Purcell 2002: 101).

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<sup>16</sup> De Kaskantine. “Groene Hackaton De Kaskantine”. 2020. Youtube. Accessed May 23, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWxMqZ9iDxE>

As I have encountered in several conversations with Peter and Rose during my fieldwork, it remains a challenging process for the Kaskantine to obtain the permissions for the land that afford an acceptable price to create a place that is not necessarily commercial, but rather functions for the community. If the Kaskantine wants to open their doors for people from the neighborhood to distribute affordable food (one can pay whatever they feel like, or eat for free), the Kaskantine will have to pay a double amount for the land. The ability for the Kaskantine to obtain an affordable urban plot to function for the community, are restrained by the ‘neoliberal way of governing’ by the municipality that seems to have permeated in the way that citizen-assemblies are treated (Leitner 2007). The Kaskantine tries to draw attention to this friction through the act of claiming the right to land, and going off-grid, herewith they hope to restructure the political and economic restraints that are effectuated on citizens.

Due to the struggles to obtain affordable prices for land in the city, the Kaskantine manages to build off-grid, as ‘one of the few ways left for citizens to get access to land in the city’<sup>17</sup>. Being off-grid affords a nomadic character, hereby they can rent lands that are temporarily available or have low market value. Through sympathizing with this form of ‘activist citizenship’ (Isin 2009), the Kaskantine is broadening up the debate of the ‘right to the city’ (Purcell 2002). Through the act of being off-grid the Kaskantine found a way to raise awareness of the right of citizens to land in the city and the contestations that occur when citizens are trying to make this claim. The way the Kaskantine claims plots of land since 2013, reveals an ‘ongoing process’ through which Kaskantine demands for an expansion of rights.

The complication of arranging a plot of land is not the only contestation they are trying to expose with this act. The way the Kaskantine uses and arranges the land goes beyond its physical materiality, into a democratic right of being able to participate in what happens with the urban area. Herewith the Kaskantine invokes the ‘right of participation’ (Lefebvre in Purcell 2002). The Kaskantine claims and creates urban green space and tries to make it accessible for citizens, by being a space that is open and affordable for everyone. The land that the Kaskantine rents offers citizens the right and space to experiment, to find and develop solutions to the climate problem and the social problems that the Kaskantine observes from close by; both in the neighborhood as in the city and society in general. The goal is to show how things can be done differently, to create and envision a new imaginary for an ecologically responsible and just city. Besides the idea that citizens should have the ‘right to

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<sup>17</sup> Kaskantine. Can we be Off-Grid? Accessed on June 1, 2022. <https://www.kaskantine.nl/>

the city' as expressed in their negotiation for affordable land, the Kaskantine claims the 'right to participation' in claiming that citizens should play a central role in any decision that contributes to the production of urban space (Purcell 2002: 102).

By arranging the space in a nonconventional way (reused materials, off-grid building, permaculture principles), the Kaskantine creates a deliberate contrast with the current organization of the city. The Kaskantine connects people, with or without knowledge, people from the neighborhood, people who are new in the city, interested people, but also many concerned people. At the Kaskantine they can participate in producing urban space 'so that it meets the needs of inhabitants' (Purcell 2004).

Through the acts that Kaskantine has set up, a form of 'activist citizenship' is invoked by the initiators of the Kaskantine, to ensure that citizens and their ideas are seen and recognized by the municipality (Isin 2009: 368). The Kaskantine hereby hopes that the ideas of how urban areas can be created, can be extended. In line with Purcell's (2004) revisited interpretation of the ideas from Lefebvre, I have thus observed from closeby how citizens are claiming not only the right to physical urban plots, but equally the right of decision-making, by claiming the right to the production of urban space. Hereby, a 'restructuring' of power relations is set in place, whereby citizens and inhabitants hope to gain more access to the production of space in the city (Purcell 2004). However, the Kaskantine does not necessarily aim at, as Purcell would call this 'shifting control away' from the state and capital (2004: 102). Rather the Kaskantine acts and moves parallel to the market and state system, creating their own systems within (Voedselkringloop), but simultaneously beyond and in addition (off-grid, compost, permaculture-gardening) of established infrastructures. Their goal is not necessarily to oppose what happens on state-, and city-level, rather by showing how urban space is produced differently, they hope to be an example for the local government to implement this on higher levels too, as they re-negotiate a relationship within the local government. I will discuss more thoroughly how this is established in Chapter 3.

### **Rights of sustainability and social justice**

The establishment from the above narrated acts of citizenship can be further understood through the concept of 'sustainability citizenship'. This form of citizenship combines direct active engagement and participatory activities, to act upon unfulfilling sustainability policies from governments that remain 'unsustainable' (Wals & Lenglet 2016: 64). Whereas 'environmental citizenship' is insensitive to the underlying non environmental effects - that are; the political, structural, and economic causes- of 'sustainable' development, the concept

of ‘sustainability citizenship’ shifts away from this form of sustainability (Barry 2006: 23). ‘Sustainability citizenship’ is the manifestation of citizenship that exerts an idea of sustainability that equally includes the importance of participation, human rights, and equality that are often contested in urban areas (Barry 2006; Beza et al. 2016).

The ambitions from the municipality to move towards a Doughnut economy, make it seem that the local government has understood that a wider conceptualization of sustainability is necessary. However, the Kaskantine foresees and uses more radical change in restructuring and reimagining the hegemonic infrastructures and therefore evokes a form of ‘sustainability citizenship’.

The Kaskantine acts, in the peripheries of market-, and the local government, in the spheres where the perceived demand for change is not established yet. Therefore the initiators and volunteers have become active agents in shaping and broadening sustainability discourses (Barry 2006). The establishment of the several acts by the Kaskantine, are both to provide and demand rights, and indicate that the hegemonic culture, the state of society, and the city are still lacking to provide these rights for everyone in an equal manner. The Kaskantine has established the above narrated participatory ‘acts’ (Climate-garden, Permaculture, Off-grid, Voedselkringloop, composting) in order to provide answers to ‘unsustainable’ infrastructures (Wals & Lenglet 2016: 64), and making them affordable and accessible for the neighborhood. The rights that the Kaskantine hereby perceives to be accessible for citizens are among other: climate-knowledge, ecological produced food, healthy soil, access to green spaces, and knowledge about gardening and off-grid building.

Creating social and green spaces have proven to be crucial in obtaining both social equity, and ecological sustainability in urban areas (Demspey et al. 2009). I found the initiators of the Kaskantine often concerned about people in the neighborhood of Amsterdam Nieuw-West: ‘energy-poverty’, ‘poverty in general’, ‘the heat in the city for people that can not go on holidays’. Wherever they can, the Kaskantine tries to improvise on these perceived inequalities by organizing summer school activities for children, the distribution of free food. In this way, they hope to diminish ‘exclusionary’ or discriminatory practices hindering individuals from participating economically, socially and politically (Pierson: 2002). Through their acts, they give insights into how sustainability is not only about environmental and ecological improvement, but also about how to include everyone in debates, solutions, and rights around sustainability. The Kaskantine hereby develops a broad conceptualization of sustainable development and citizenship, as they practice ecological sustainability in a way

so that everyone has access to it underpinning that sustainability intersects with social equity and environmental justice principles.

Given special attention to the activities that The Kaskantine organizes on a community-level, I have aimed to give an insight into how these acts are embedded in contested fields of neoliberal governance and growth. By creating alternatives in urban spaces, the Kaskantine can both 'critique ideologies by demonstrating the viability of alternative arrangements of urban space' and thereby hopes to potentially loosen the limits imposed on these spaces (Wright 2012: 20). The Kaskantine invokes a form of Isin's (2009: 371) 'activist citizenship' with the purpose to open up and articulate the demanded rights of citizens in accessing the city, decision-making, and ecological and social justice rights.

By setting up participatory practices, the Kaskantine invokes a form of 'sustainability citizenship' to actively experiment and broaden up ideas of ecological sustainability and their attempt to make ecological rights accessible for everyone (Barry 2006).

Both these forms of citizenships can give notions in how to obtain a holistic and inclusive pathway towards a Doughnut Economy.

Green and social innovative grassroots collectives have been previously studied to address the importance for sustainability development and transitions in cities (Seyfang and Smith 2007). Their research has proclaimed that social movements agitations serve as 'pressures' against conventional regimes, but are perceived as distinctive from the goals of grassroots innovations (589). In contrast to this previous research, I have tried to demonstrate that social movements and the rights they try to obtain, are intrinsically linked with the tactics, goals and practices of grassroots initiatives, in this case the Kaskantine. By using an anthropological lens, I have observed how social equity and environmental justice principles that social movements address, are both inspirational and actively supported by the Kaskantine through its several 'acts of citizenship', through which they redistribute affordable (free) green space, food, knowledge and solutions (Isin 2009).

Social movements and grassroots innovations are often left out of the debate in sustainability transitions and urban planning (Dempsey et al. 2009; Campbell 2013; Seyfang and Smith 2007). It is therefore that I have tried to demonstrate how the citizen-led initiative Kaskantine actively participates in the creation of different infrastructures and imaginaries. Hereby the Kaskantine attempts to open up the debate on sustainability transitions, and to participate in the 'production of urban space' (Lefebvre 1996 in Purcell 2004).

Whereas in this chapter I have mainly focused on how the Kaskantine acts in a radical way, in the last chapter I will more thoroughly describe how the Doughnut frame that was adopted by the municipality, has helped the Kaskantine to slowly get more recognition and to express their efforts more efficiently in collaboration with the municipality.



Figure 5: Rose with elderflower in her hair

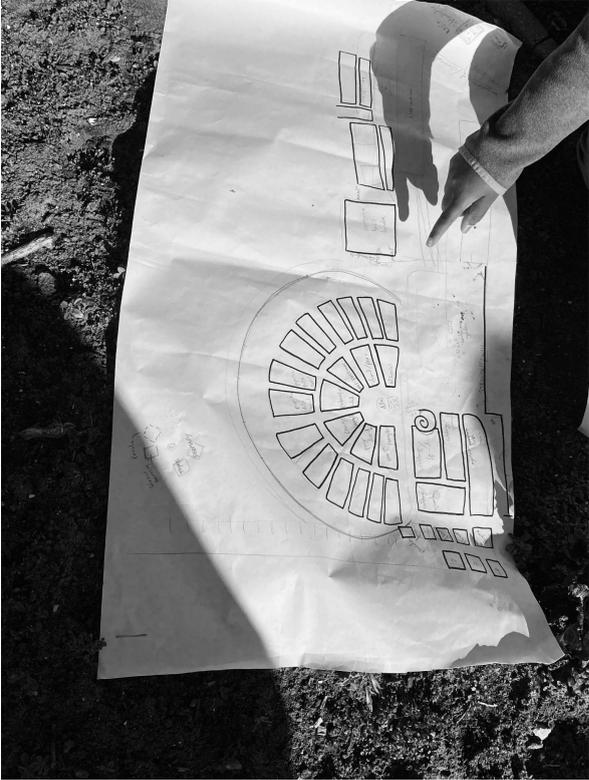


Figure 6: Permaculture mandala design

### **Chapter 3 A bottom-up coalition**

The previous chapters have shown the divergent routes that the municipality and a citizen-led initiative take in order to obtain a more ecological and socially just city. In this chapter I want to focus on how the Doughnut Economy has also led to collaboration. Although on many aspects diverging, the municipality and citizen-led initiative Kaskantine have found common ground by using the Doughnut Economy paradigm. This chapter will combine fieldwork-data that I obtained at the Kaskantine, an interview with a municipal official, and online-meetings between initiators with the same municipal official. Citizens that demand for change are slowly coming into notice in the municipal organization. The Doughnut has opened up a debate between citizens and the municipality, as citizens that conceive of the Doughnut-framework, can use the tool to demand for more action. Some municipal officials are slowly recognizing the importance of actually engaging citizens in obtaining a Doughnut Economy.

I will discuss my findings by comparing it with new forms of Municipalism. Municipalism is in short the democratic autonomy and reformation of municipalities over political and economic life vis-à-vis the nation-state, and it is reviving (Thompson 2021). Municipalism also entails and mostly comes from the autonomy that citizens themselves demand within a municipality, as smaller fields of (re)politicization compared to the nation-state level. In this light, I will discuss the fieldwork-data that I have obtained in conversations with citizen-assemblies and an active municipal official in Amsterdam Nieuw-West as I see a similar opening of the spheres of urban decision-making. Russell (2019: 3), argues that municipalists see the local state as a ‘strategic entry point’ for developing broader practices and theories of transformative social change aimed at a radical redistribution of economic power and political decision-making. There are many different ways through which citizens demand for such change, the municipalisms that are manifested are highly dependent on the confluence of local, social and economic contexts in which the citizens that demand for change are embedded (Russell 2019).

The relation citizens have compared to local government and ‘the capitalist state’ are described by Thompson with three distinct ideal-types: ‘Platform Municipalism, Autonomist Municipalism, and Managed Municipalism’ (2021:322). I have compared the ethnographic data that I obtained, with Thompson’s (2021) conceptualizations to discuss that the Kaskantine relates to the local government in a specific way. In Amsterdam Nieuw-West, citizens and municipal officials are finding each other in the interstices of the system and the

field. They have become bound together by the Doughnut-paradigm.

I have described how the initiator of the Kaskantine, a local councilor, and organizations in the neighborhood are aiming to implement a Doughnut on a small, community-level scale in Amsterdam-Nieuw West. By working on a smaller level with the Doughnut-frame, activist and sustainability citizens can help to grasp local social and environmental struggles from closeby.

### **From autonomy towards collaboration**

Citizens are demanding for space to think outside of hegemonic systems and culture, and towards more radical action against climate-change and societal problems. The Kaskantine does so by experimenting through the several ‘acts’ that I have described in the previous chapter, among other the waste-recovery system, off-grid building, and free food-distribution. These acts are created in a space of autonomy, the pieces of land that the Kaskantine rents serve as autonomous spaces for experimentation. Autonomy has proven to guarantee more freedom of experimentation, than initiatives organized by public institutions, as was seen in Urban Living Labs in Amsterdam-Noord (Cuomo et al. 2020). The acts that they can perform here, demands for ways of thinking that move beyond hegemonic growth-paradigms and infrastructures that are nestled in the city. At the first sight the Kaskantine might therefore seem similar to ‘Autonomist municipalism’. An example of this form of municipalism is Cooperation Jackson, a citizen-led cooperative project in Jackson, Mississippi as studied by Akuno and AkuNangwaya (2017). Similarly as the Kaskantine, this initiative looks for economic autonomy by self-organized systems of food growing, renewable energy, and circular waste reuse. But the objective and the range of such autonomy seems different. Whereas Cooperation Jackson moves ‘progressively away from engaging with the local state towards building autonomous alternatives’ (Thompson 2021: 329), the Kaskantine uses autonomy as a state in between. At the moment the Kaskantine needs the space to experiment, and uses a form of autonomy, to develop sustainable solutions and systems, hereby moving both within and alongside capitalist and local-state infrastructures, as a way to create imaginaires beyond these. But, as I have already argued in the previous chapter, the Kaskantine is not trying to - as Thompson (2021: 328) has conceptualized Autonomist municipalism- ‘build a new polis outside’ the local state and the government. The Kaskantine uses relative autonomy to create alternatives, to give another example of how the city can be organized differently. I have discovered that this does not stay by giving an example; the initiator of the Kaskantine simultaneously actively tries to look for interstices, working

together with the municipality to build up relationships that can help to bring change within the local government. I will show how the Kaskantine uses the paradigm of the Doughnut, to find recognition from the municipality.

I want to go back to some insights that I obtained at the Kaskantine after a few weeks in the field. In the beginning of my fieldwork I had trouble finding the right opportunities to ask things for my research. I did not want to take up too much space, bearing in mind that the initiators of the Kaskantine were already busy enough. Yet:

After a day of working in the garden at the Kaskantine, I attended a ‘Climate-garden’ discussion about a newly available IPCC report. The discussion gathers around ten individuals who came to talk about the new available data. The main discussion point was about communication of climate-change and impacts. One of the important outputs of this discussion was, in the words of the initiators of the Kaskantine, that one can not educate people, “but you can show another example!”. At the end of the discussion, people are standing up and keep chit-chatting. I walked towards Peter, and decided to ask him about the progress of the permissions that are to be arranged with the municipality. Unfortunately, there was no news yet, but he did tell me more about a project that he is working on. It was then that Peter felt trust to involve me in the projects that he had been developing over the past months. He asked me if I wanted to participate and help him with some tasks. Later that day, he forwarded me an email with an update of his work, including a document that he had proposed to the municipality. This proposal was made in collaboration with several other initiatives and neighborhood-assemblies in Nieuw-West. The plan was made in collaboration with a local municipal official, and summarized a plan to implement and experiment with Doughnut-thought on a neighborhood level. They had sent it to a department in the municipality that would examine it, and were now waiting for approval.

After Peter had sent me these documents I have been invited to several meetings with other grassroots initiatives and organizations in Amsterdam Nieuw-West. During these meetings, I came to understand that the initiator of the Kaskantine is trying to actively engage with other initiatives to unite them, and find collaboration. These meetings are also aimed at learning from each other, about how to obtain subventions, and how initiatives can communicate certain goals more efficiently.

It was in these moments that I came to discover that besides the more practical activities that the Kaskantine executes, the initiator of the Kaskantine is also involved in a negotiation with the municipality in order to obtain recognition, not only for the Kaskantine but similarly for and with other citizen-led initiatives and neighborhood associations in Nieuw-West. The Kaskantine is thus, despite their radical demand for change and their autonomous systems, also looking for a way through which they can find common ground as a way to work together with the municipality. In this way, the Kaskantine expands their sphere of influence, by actively negotiating for citizens to participate in decision-making within the local government.

### **Collaboration within the interstices of system and daily life**

A few weeks later I had an interview with a municipal official (from now on Lizzy\*) that functions for the local district council of Amsterdam-Nieuw West. The ambts-position that Lizzy has to her, was described by my first respondent Elly as the “eyes and ears” of neighborhoods since they are in direct contact with citizens (Appendix 3). I had heard of her from Peter, as she had helped him with the proposition that they had submitted to policy-makers from the municipality.

In parallel to her work for the municipality, Lizzy has been volunteering for the ‘Amsterdam Donut Coalitie’ since 2019, an assembly initiated by citizens for Amsterdam residents, researchers, initiatives and projects that unite around the Doughnut Economy. The Donut Coalitie aims to bring people and their activities together to form a network of changemakers<sup>18</sup>. Lizzy sees importance in the Doughnut-framework, in her position at the Donut Coalitie she is acquainted to connect with bottom-up movements.

Lizzy has obtained her position in the municipal’s local district council through a freelance-project, for reducing trash in the streets and the neighborhood of Amsterdam Nieuw-West. This project was initially not related to Doughnut-thought. But as soon as Lizzy was discovering the social reality of Nieuw-West, she realized that there are a lot of connections that she could make with the Doughnut-paradigm. The project was not merely about ecological sustainability, but more importantly also about the citizens, their perspectives, and struggles that they perceive. Lizzy thus made an attempt to broaden up the ideas about sustainability within her work for the municipality, she shifted away from the idea that sustainability is merely defined by its ecological dimension, and gave importance in

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<sup>18</sup> Amsterdam Donut Coalitie. Accessed on May 6, 2022. <https://amsterdamdonutcoalitie.nl/>

including the social aspects and struggles that live in Amsterdam Nieuw-West. In this way one can call her a 'sustainability citizen' (Barry 2006). She decided that her connections with active citizens and neighborhood-associations, that she had obtained in her volunteering-work for the Donut Coalite, could help her get better insights in what is happening on a neighborhood-level. She could discuss the challenges that these citizen-assemblies perceive in their neighborhoods, but also the qualities of certain neighborhoods, streets and squares. Like sustainability citizens do, through her own "creative thinking", and active negotiation she has introduced the Doughnut in her work for the municipality. Although the tool of the Doughnut was already announced by the municipality, she was demanding to use the Doughnut within these projects on a local level as this was not done yet. It is in this way, that Lizzy occasionally forgets which "cap" she should put on: that of a municipal official, or as a volunteer. This suggests that she can not separate easily the work she does for the municipality, and the volunteering which she possibly does with a more personal drive. This duality within herself might have had influence on to the way she tries to combine both of these caps within her work:

"The way I see myself, I am a bit of a cross-border worker, so someone who works very much at the interface of system and daily life. So I am now a hired municipal official for a certain period, but I can also identify very well with the residents' organizations and initiatives such as Peter's. I am really trying to see how we can work together more. That is my job".

In the three days that she works for the municipality now, she helps neighborhood-assemblies in organizing their initiatives more successfully. Although the local district council that she works for, has less means than other spheres in the municipal organization, Lizzy can help improve the links between the citizens and the spheres that do. It seems that in the interstices between - "the system and daily life", local district officials and active neighborhood assemblies - small opportunities for change are occurring.

Soon I was invited to online-meetings that take place once a week, with Lizzy, Peter, and an initiator from a neighborhood association in Amsterdam Nieuw-West. During these meetings the initiators discuss the progress on the local Doughnut Economy that they are trying to implement in Amsterdam Nieuw-West. During my fieldwork they were still waiting for approval and subventions from the municipality where they proposed their plan. In the

mean-time Lizzy has a facilitating role during these meetings as she asks how everyone is doing, and if the initiators need help or expertise from her. Together they are obtaining insights on which steps are to be made to move further on their project.

A collaboration is emerging in the interstices of the citizen-led initiatives and in the smaller spheres of the local government. The New Municipalist movement that is identified for its demand in the reconceptualization of politics, becomes vivid in these moments. Previous scholars have recognized a ‘feminisation of politics’ (Thompson 2021, Russell 2017). The specific roads that municipalists take towards ‘how politics is done’ (Roth and Baird 2017), are reimagined through feminist thought. Such feminisation of politics can be recognized in the ability of cooperation, collaboration, and transversal decision-making by moving beyond hierarchical and competitive relations towards more open, honest, and transparent ones (Russell 2017). In the meetings that I attended, I recognized such collaboration, not merely between different citizen-organizations, but equally between citizens and the municipal official. Mutual listening is an important value during these meetings, the municipal official and the citizen-initiatives recognize each other as equal in their conversations, sharing the knowledge they all have from different fields.

Another aspect of this feminization of politics that flows from such collaborations, is that citizens reassess their influence over the plans that are initiated at the local government level. The mentality of governing shifts from ‘a politics of separation’ (Russell 2017: 1005) the idea that governing of the city happens ‘from afar, alienated from the everyday’, towards a governing that is connected to the experience of the everyday (ibid.).

The plans that the municipality has made for Amsterdam Nieuw-West are assembled in a 20-year scoped Masterplan Amsterdam Nieuw-West<sup>19</sup>, become re-politicized. Although this plan was already communicated closely through resident meetings in Nieuw-West, they become further re-analyzed and reconceptualized through the knowledge that citizen-assemblies have about their neighborhoods. Together with the municipal official, the citizen-assemblies are looking for overlaps of what citizen-assemblies (already) cover, or intend to cover with upcoming Doughnut-experiments that they described in their plan. In this way, citizens are re-evaluating certain policy-plans from a bottom-up approach, and they reframe certain goals within the Doughnut-paradigm, since this was not done in the original Masterplan yet. In this way citizens try to refocus decision-making and policy-plans towards

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<sup>19</sup> “Tijdljn Masterplan Nieuw-West”. Gemeente Amsterdam. Accessed on June 25, 2022 <https://www.amsterdam.nl/stadsdelen/nieuw-west/masterplan-nieuw-west-denk-mee-buurt/tijdljn-masterplan-nieuw-west/>

a local neighborhood level. Hereby a ‘restructuring’ of the power relations about decision-making of urban space is set in practice (Purcell 2002). The municipal system hereby becomes restructured through the Doughnut, from citizens outside, as from within the municipal organization.

### **Demanding for recognition**

In order to fulfill the work that citizen-assemblies provide, citizens remain dependent on recognition. To obtain and broaden up recognition, the citizen-assemblies of Amsterdam-Nieuw West are collaborating, and coming together to join forces. In this vignette, I want to narrate how such meetings are manifested and what tools citizens use to obtain recognition and support from governments.

After a few hours of working in the garden and preparing compost at the Kaskantine, I walk together with Peter to Casa Sofia, a meeting space for the neighborhood in Amsterdam Nieuw-West. We chat about the progress of my thesis as we walk along a small desire path to the building. When we arrive we are welcomed generously by Ahmed\*, the organizer of Casa Sofia. He offers us something to drink and we get a piece of freshly baked banana-bread in the cafe. We sit all three of us together at a table. Peter puts his leg on a chair, he calls back and forth with someone while on a laptop I open the MAEX-platform together with Ahmed. One by one, now all three of us again, we discuss and fill in the questions, sometimes surprised about the ineptitude as it is hard to estimate certain things in quantities. Ahmed proudly elaborates on the various purposes and activities of his initiative. In addition to being a meeting place for local residents, Casa Sofia allows people to read and borrow books, listen to musical concerts, and attend cultural evenings. In the summer, Casa Sofia organizes a summer activity around theater and story for children who can not go on vacation. According to Ahmed, spreading and sharing culture is the way to connect people. He expresses his disappointment that culture is not included as a form of education or capital in the MAEX-measurement. Meanwhile, the friend with whom Peter was just calling comes in. He tells him that the cargo-bike is ready for him. I realize only now that Peter probably had such a pain in his ankle that he asked for help from a friend. We finish the questions within an hour and a half. When we are shown the results, Peter is surprised at the relatively low score. But the organizer seems satisfied that he can now be found on the MAEX platform. Before we leave the cafe, Peter and I both get another piece of

banana-bread from Ahmed as he waves us good-bye. Peter lets me get in the front of the electric cargo bike while he pedals us back to the Kaskantine.

This vignette shows how organizers of various (neighborhood) initiatives come together to help each other in creating stronger neighborhood coalitions. During this meeting Peter told me that he had (successfully) requested the municipality to get the MAEX-platform off the ground as a recognized tool for social and ecological initiatives in Amsterdam. The MAEX ('Maatschappelijke AEX', Societal AEX) is a tool through which initiatives can calculate and express their social, and ecological impact on the scale of Sustainable Development Goals<sup>20</sup>. This tool helps to redefine values beyond the hegemonic approach in which material wealth is solely expressed in monetary value and GDP-measurement. With the MAEX, as Peter argues, organizations can express their "social and environmental capital" that they create through several activities. The initiatives on this platform can be found by governments, municipalities, and companies. These on their turn, can send impulses in the form of money, (leftover) materials, or through volunteering.

Although not ideal, as some values are not (yet) easily quantifiable, the tool helps to find recognition and support for the assemblies. The work from citizen-assemblies is often not rewarded or seen, despite the far-reaching efforts that initiators put in their work for the community. The platform helps to give insight in their work, where this was not done before. The MAEX-tool can be seen as a response to 'Platform urbanism', the idea that cities are increasingly using technological platforms (as part of the Smart City approach), to monitor and govern the flows in the city (Thompson 2021). Research has shown that Smart City approaches often fail to cover the social, human, and cultural dimensions of city life (Mora et al. 2019). The municipality of Amsterdam has for example launched the Monitor, an online dashboard that keeps track on the material flows through the city, accessible for everyone<sup>21</sup>. This tool was launched by the Circular Economy strategists, in this way the city can trace which material streams are circular or not, and where more circularity can be pursued. But according to Peter "We do not need monitors". 'Platform municipalists' appropriate different platforms to compensate for the values that are not captured in such platforms from the local state. In this way, with the MAEX, they counterbalance the Monitor platform that is merely focused on materials, and solely looks at the ecological lens from the Doughnut. Peter

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<sup>20</sup> "Voor initiatieven en sociale ondernemingen". MAEX. Accessed on June 5, 2022 <https://maex.nl/#/initiatives>

\* I have used a pseudonym in respect to the choices of the interlocutor

<sup>21</sup> "De circulaire economie in Amsterdam". De Gemeente Amsterdam. Accessed on June 5, 2022 <https://onderzoek.amsterdam.nl/interactief/monitor-circulaire-economie>

proposes that “change needs to be accelerated”, and therefore the municipality needs to focus more efficiently on smaller local levels, the local social lens from the Doughnut (Raworth 2017). The Kaskantine, together with other citizen assemblies intend to visualize the impact from their initiatives to emphasize the importance of the local, neighborhood level to obtain sustainability and social equity, as they perceive that this is not considered enough within the current implementation of the Doughnut yet. In reaction to ‘Platform urbanism’ (Thompson 2020), The Kaskantine and other initiators are implicitly working on a refocus of the sustainability practices from the municipality. From a focus on ecological, and material sustainability, the initiators hope to move the conceptualizations of sustainability from the municipality towards a more holistic form of sustainability including social, neighborhood, and the experiences of the daily realities of the built environment in Amsterdam Nieuw-West.

In this chapter I have compared the practices of neighborhood-assemblies, and citizen-led initiatives in Amsterdam Nieuw-West with municipalism. Whereas Thomson (2021: 328) conceptualized Municipalism either as ‘moving away’ (Autonomist municipalism) from the local state or ‘retooling the state from the inside’ (Managed municipalism), I have identified the Kaskantine as a grassroots initiative which finds itself in between these two forms of municipalisms, while simultaneously building up tools that conform with ‘Platform municipalism’ (2021). This shows that besides the radical acts through which they contest state- and market-regimes in an autonomous space, the Kaskantine is also trying to find recognition from the local government. To claim rights for change on a higher societal level, the Kaskantine looks for collaboration with the municipality. A ‘feminization of politics’ is set in practice that helps to restructure politics towards the ‘experience of the everyday’ that is cautiously observed by neighborhood-assemblies (Russell 2017).

This shows that on a small local scale level, the municipality and citizen-led initiatives are finding each other, and can together, refocus towards an urban degrowth, that has addressed for smaller scale economies, that rely on sharing, commoning, community-networks, and sustainability practices and solutions (Khmara and Kronenberg 2020).

## Conclusion

This research has aimed at understanding how the introduction of a Doughnut Economy has revived the sustainability debate in Amsterdam. Through three in-depth interviews I have analyzed how the local government is implementing the Doughnut thought within its organization. The way the municipal organization is currently set up, results in a detachment of the department that sets up policies and strategies for ecological sustainability (The Circular Economy strategy), and the department that sets up policies related to social sustainability (The Social Cluster). The detachment of these departments effectuates that sustainability is not seen through an holistic lens. Yet, it is only in the intersection of the two lenses that the Doughnut comes to its full right.

Furthermore, the lack of the social dimension within the CE-strategy, that is now the main-driver for the Doughnut, insufficiently includes the social, human, and cultural dimension of sustainability transitions. Miller and Levenda (2017) warn that the disproportionate focus on technological solutions as the main solution, public participation and social equity issues can become sidelined in the practice and research of sustainability transitions. Grassroots and local actors in the city have expertise on what happens on a societal, street level, in neighborhoods, as they see the ‘daily reality’ that Raworth (2021) mentioned to be important, from closeby. The local-scale innovations that are obtained at a grass-roots level in urban contexts, are necessary in the transition towards a Doughnut, as these spheres have proven to be leverage points in changing existing regimes (Miller and Levenda, 2017; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). Yet there are no arrangements on how citizen-led assemblies that invoke experimental grass-roots solutions for sustainability, can influence sustainability-related decisions within the CE strategy yet.

Citizen-led initiative the Kaskantine, uses various ‘acts of citizenship’ to make claims on sustainability and social justice rights within the city of Amsterdam. The neoliberalization of the city, and a competitive growth paradigm have been altering cities over the past decades (Peck and Tickel 2002; Molotch and Logan 1984). Despite the renewed paradigm for the city of Amsterdam, ‘roll-out neoliberalism’ remains visible in the way the Kaskantine fails to receive the support they need to obtain affordable land (Leitner 2007). I have tried to disclose what forms of citizenship are emerging in the context of an ongoing search for sustainable equilibrium by seeing these manifestations in the contexts and discrepancies that occur within the city. The Kaskantine manages to invoke and claim the ‘right to the city’ by going off-grid, which gives them the opportunity to experiment in an autonomous space. The ‘acts of

citizenship' gather a set of tactics and infrastructures that not only serve to broaden up ideas of ecological sustainability, but equally give emphasis to social equity and justice principles (Isin 2009). Seyfang and Smith (2007) addressed the importance of green, and social grassroots innovations that emerge from the bottom-up. This research has proclaimed that social movements' agitations serve as 'pressures' against conventional regimes, they are perceived as distinctive from the goals of grassroots innovations (589). In contrast, I have shown how social movements and the rights they try to obtain, are intrinsically linked with the practices, tactics, and goals from grassroots initiative the Kaskantine. By using an anthropological lens, I have observed how social equity and environmental justice principles are practiced through several 'acts of citizenship', through which they redistribute affordable (free) green space, food, knowledge and solutions (Isin 2009). The Kaskantine hereby performs insightful conceptualizations to an holistic idea of sustainability. By creating alternatives in creating urban spaces, the Kaskantine can both 'critique ideologies by demonstrating the viability of alternative arrangements of urban space' as obtaining the potential that the limits imposed on these spaces are loosened (Wright 2012: 20).

Yet, citizen-assemblies can count on the local municipal government that functions on a smaller scale - "the eyes and ears" of the city - prove to be strategic entry points. On a smaller scale, on a neighborhood level in Nieuw-West, a collaboration between the two is occurring. The Doughnut has helped to establish this alliance. Neighborhood-assemblies and citizen-led initiatives come from far, and need to re-establish recognition, they do so by conforming with 'Platform municipalism', and counterbalance platforms that are used by the municipal government, with the MAEX to re-focus attention on social and ecological capital, values that they could normally not express in numbers. Together, citizens and the municipal official find each other in a 'feminisation of politics' as they work transparently, in an equal manner, and both learn from each other's expertises (Russell 2017: 1005). In this way, citizens are re-accessing policy-making, as they re-evaluate the policies that are made by the municipality, and reconceptualize them through the Doughnut-paradigm.

Whereas in the large system of the municipality, the Doughnut Economy needs time to come along. On a local level in Amsterdam Nieuw-West, citizens are renegotiating their rights over decision-making, and the sustainability debate. The Doughnut has helped to establish a collaboration with the municipality.

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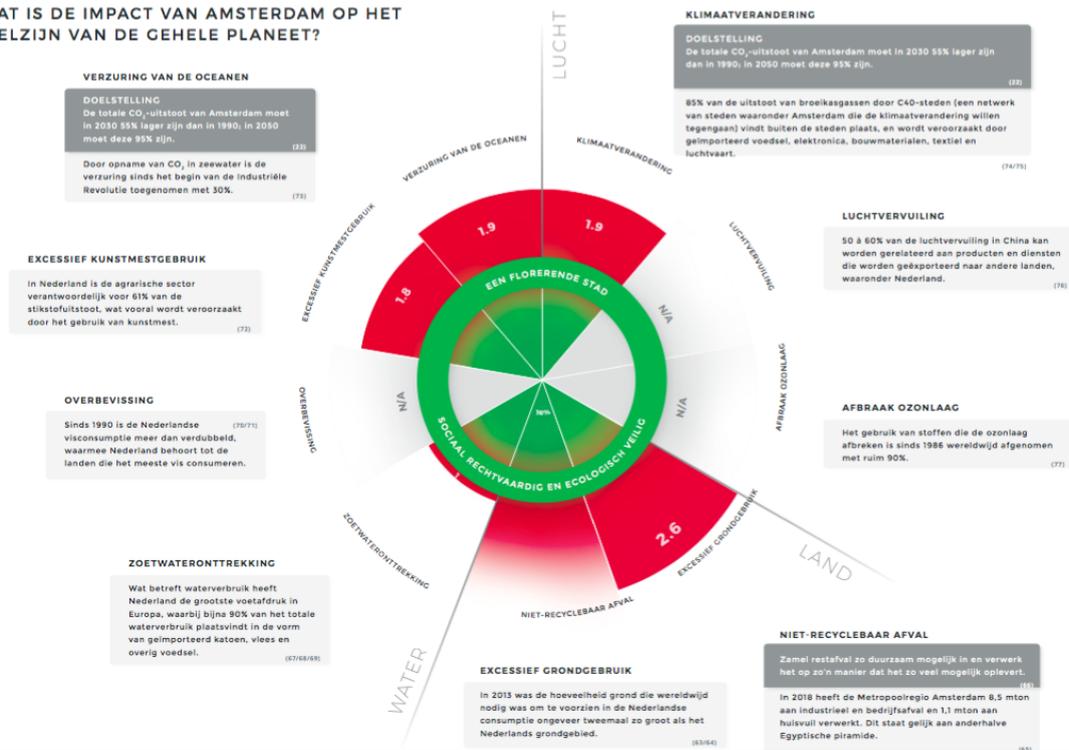
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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Amsterdam's Donut, exceeded boundaries

### WAT IS DE IMPACT VAN AMSTERDAM OP HET WELZIJN VAN DE GEHELE PLENEET?



**Appendix 2** The four lenses of the Doughnut for a city <sup>22</sup>

	SOCIAL	ECOLOGICAL
LOCAL	<p>What would it mean for the people of Amsterdam to thrive?</p> <p>1</p>	<p>What would it mean for Amsterdam to thrive within its natural habitat?</p> <p>2</p>
GLOBAL	<p>What would it mean for Amsterdam to respect the wellbeing of people worldwide?</p> <p>4</p>	<p>What would it mean for Amsterdam to respect the health of the whole planet?</p> <p>3</p>

<sup>22</sup> Raworth, Kate. "Introducing the Amsterdam City Doughnut." April 8, 2020. Accessed July 6, 2022 from <https://www.kateraworth.com/2020/04/08/amsterdam-city-doughnut/>

Appendix 3 An overview of the municipal organization (drawing by author)

