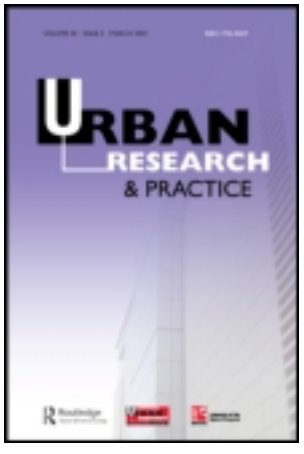


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# Self-organization in urban development: towards a new perspective on spatial planning

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# Self-organization in urban development: towards a new perspective on spatial planning

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To date, participatory spatial planning has produced disappointing results. We argue that one reason is that time and again participatory planning proposals remain controlled by public government, and that public government seems not to be very adaptive to initiatives that emerge from the dynamics of civil society itself. To find out why and how citizens could and would be motivated to contribute out of their own motivation to urban development, we propose turning the focus outside-in, instead of inside-out. In this article, we therefore introduce the notion of self-organization, referring to initiatives that originate in civil society itself, via autonomous community-based networks of citizens outside government control which participate in developing the 'urban fabric' too. We discuss some examples of self-organization and draw preliminary conclusions of the concept's usefulness for the theory and practice of spatial planning.

**Keywords:** actor-relational approach to planning; complexity theories; post-structuralism; self-organization; robust urban development; civic involvement



## 1. Introduction

Worldwide, co-operative methods for civic involvement are a major issue in spatial planning. We will begin this article by describing several arguments in favour of such citizen involvement in planning. A brief history of civic participation in public planning of the past 45 years shows its original incentives, successes and failures, primarily in the Netherlands but with some reference to developments elsewhere. However, to date, participatory spatial planning has produced disappointing results. We argue that one reason is that time and again participatory planning proposals remain controlled by public government, and that public government seems not to be very adaptive to initiatives that emerge from the dynamics of civil society itself, and thus is unable to address the growing complexity of present-day society. This challenges us to explore the theoretical background for a radical alternative view on social embedded spatial planning, which would be able to interact with these growing complexities. This view goes beyond an exclusively government-focused perspective (inside-out), but turns its focus to citizens and businesses themselves (outside-in). To understand why and how citizens could and would be motivated to contribute to urban development on the basis of self-motivation, we introduce the notion of self-organization. We will examine the various notions of self-organization, to come up with a

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definition which goes beyond that of complex system approaches. In the context of possible concrete citizen involvement, we define self-organization in urban development as initiatives for spatial interventions that originate in civil society itself, via autonomous community-based networks of citizens, outside government control. In the latter parts of this article, we will elaborate on various examples of self-organization in urban development and finally, we will suggest the possible implications and a future research agenda of the notion of self-organization for a more open post-structuralist planning approach.

## 2. Citizen involvement wanted

Worldwide, new co-operative methods for civic involvement in spatial planning are evolving. Interactive, collaborative and/or participatory planning approaches have been introduced in the United States (Innes and Booher 2000, Sandercock 2001), Italy (Balducci 2004), United Kingdom (Healey 1997, 2007), Belgium (Albrechts 2004), Scandinavia (Pløger 2004, Nyseth 2009) and even Brazil (Cymbalista and Nakano 2005) and China (Fingerhuth 2004). In the Netherlands, various attempts have been made since the 1960s to involve citizens from the very outset in spatial development processes, and co-operation is advocated between government agencies, entrepreneurs and civic organizations or between public, business and civic stakeholders, as a multi-actor approach to planning (WRR 2008). Recently, the idea of active citizenship has been added to this approach (Tonkes 2006). It entails, in various domains of spatial research, planning, exploitation and management, (1) opting to increase active participation of citizens and (2) sharing responsibility for the spatial environment between public government and civic communities. Despite the mounting criticism of interactive planning (Weinrich 1972, Woltjer 2002, Boelens *et al.* 2006), four arguments have been put forward for such citizen involvement in planning.

The first argument is *social*. It is expected that citizen involvement will contribute greatly to social coherence in an increasingly fragmented and (re)secularized society. For instance, in policies for deprived neighbourhoods, the lack of social cohesion and integration and cultural diversity are seen as forming a major obstacle to regeneration (VROM 2007a).[1] In this context, citizen participation or involvement is used as an instrument to improve social conditions in two ways. The first is through empowerment. Through participation, citizens learn to better articulate their views and desires – abilities that are also useful in their societal careers (Hazeu 2008). Additionally, when accompanied by participatory budgeting, active citizenship stimulates social cohesion and integration of minorities in Dutch society (Tonkes 2006). Those minorities will meet in new settings; new social networks will form; trust among residents will increase; and a new responsibility for the overall social conditions within deprived neighbourhoods could be developed (WRR 2005).

Second, it is assumed that citizen involvement stimulates new accountability for the *spatial* conditions of certain areas. It is expected that active and involved citizens will contribute to improving the spatial quality of their working and living environments (VROM 2007a). Participation would help create a better environment, as it would increase the involvement of residents with their environments, as well as furthering a sense of belonging and communal citizenship (WRR 2005). Concomitantly, it would increase the 'embeddedness' of spatial interventions in the local community and therefore improve the support for and the commitment to such spatial interventions (VROM 2007a, Hulst *et al.* 2008, Koffijberg and Renooy 2008).

Third, it is expected that citizen participation and involvement not only generate savings in the short run (increased social cohesion and commitment would shorten planning

procedures) but also enhance *economic* robustness in the long run. The importance of a well-functioning civic society (in terms of voluntary initiatives) for state and economy was indicated back in 1981 by Adriaansens and Zijderveld (Reverda 2004). Examples of active citizenship that generates economic robustness include a diversity of initiatives and self-employment (Adriaansens and Zijderveld 1981) and willingness to invest in the local community (VROM Raad 2006). In evolutionary terms, some economists even argue that such networks could strengthen the related variety of the economy itself and therefore also that economy's resilience to changing circumstances (Boschma and Frenken 2006, Atzema 2010). Furthermore, citizen participation and involvement could improve the connectivity of these networks with public welfare and would for instance improve the employment rate in deprived neighbourhoods (VROM 2007a).

And finally there is a *political* argument too. The Netherlands government aims to transform the Dutch welfare state into one that is more compatible with and supportive of a society increasingly based on self-motivation and voluntary work (MinAZ 2007). This is part of a wider debate on the perceived gap between government and citizens. Participation could help to bridge this gap, since it brings government and citizens together to deliberate on issues at stake (Tonkes 2006, WRR 2010). It therefore strengthens civic support for public policies. Since citizens' priorities can be better matched with policies, policies could become more focused, communication between governments and citizens would improve and, last but not least, participation would give citizens a more realistic expectation of government actions (VROM 2007b). This requires democratic renewal and a strategy to improve the democratic legitimacy and the problem-solving capacity of public policies by improving quality of the interaction between government and citizens and broadening support, thereby accelerating the policy process (Hirst 1994, Cohen 1997, Edelenbos 2000, Hirst and Bader 2001, Pierre 2001).

Thus, citizen participation is increasingly backed up by a broad range of structural arguments in the economic, social and political domains, as well as in the spatial domain. It is argued that improvement in both the quantity and quality of citizen involvement has become urgent, since there has been an unprecedented shift in the relative power of actors involved in spatial planning practice. Improved accessibility of information, individualization and increased empowerment, improved technical means (mobility, multimedia, Internet, etc.) for social organization and exchange of ideas on specific issues have resulted in a much more complex and heterogeneous setting. Moreover, the position of planning within local, regional and national governments has weakened because of ongoing globalization, governments' reduced position in land management and shrinking public funds (VROM Raad 2004). Both the room for manoeuvre and the legitimacy of unilateral government actions have thus decreased, and public policy and planning now have to increasingly rely on the 'resolving powers of civil society' (WRR 2005, see also WRR 1998). Governments simply cannot act on their own any longer.

Nevertheless, until now, the results of more participatory spatial planning have been meagre. In 2000, Judith Innes and David Booher even declared that the traditional methods of public participation in government decisions were bankrupt: 'They do not achieve genuine participation in planning or decisions; they do not provide significant information to public officials that makes a difference to their actions; they do not satisfy members of the public that they are being heard; they do not improve the decisions that agencies and public officials make; and they don't represent a broad spectrum of the public' (Innes and Booher 2000). Previously, Harald Weinrich (1972) compared participatory planning with what he called 'Die Diktatur des Sitzfleiches' – meaning that ultimately the citizens or agencies with the greatest stamina would achieve equality – while Woltjer (2002)

claimed that interactive planning would be nothing more than 'a support machine' to legitimize the decisions already taken by existing administrations in an insecure world. We will come back to this later. Here we wish to stress that the alternatives to public participation, which were based on sophisticated arguments about collaborative planning, are not very convincing. Take for instance the collaborative planning process in the Rotterdam neighbourhood Crooswijk, which, under the banner of collaborative stakeholder planning, has more or less bypassed the interest of the residents. It has stimulated protest groups and inertia, rather than commitment, involvement and support (see Box 1). The same goes for the pilot projects Patsy Healey described in her book on urban complexity (Healey 2007) and those in the afterword of the second issue of *Collaborative Planning* (Healey 2006). In the Netherlands too, instead of evolving into embedded, robust and indisputable planning strategies, collaborative development proposals led to a kind of hit-and-run mentality among project developers, who reaped the benefits and left the civic and public community with the environmental burdens (Boelens *et al.* 2006, Cammen and Bakker 2006).



Box 1: Crooswijk/Rotterdam Summer 2009

Large vacant and undeveloped plots lie waiting for the outcomes of yet another round of appeals. The residents of the neighbourhood – those that are still left – are again making plans for new protests against the demolition and renewal of their neighbourhood and are considering how the vacant plots could be used temporarily for neighbourhood events (unlikely to be authorized). Meanwhile, the municipality proclaims the importance of citizen participation in the new to-be-built neighbourhood of Crooswijk, and planning professionals stress the success of the collaborative planning approach to the redevelopment of Crooswijk. Perspectives on the success of the renewal of Crooswijk differ greatly. The redevelopment of Crooswijk seems to have been plagued by misunderstanding between citizens and planning authorities. What happened?

The initiative for redeveloping Crooswijk was taken in 1997 by the housing co-operation involved. During the planning process, citizens were allowed to submit their ideas and visions for the neighbourhood. This resulted in a shared vision for Crooswijk in 1999, in which the emphasis was on the renewal of the housing stock for the current residents. Meanwhile, in 2000, the Municipality of Rotterdam developed a vision for the housing stock of the city. It designated several neighbourhoods as suitable for large-scale redevelopment in order to renew Rotterdam housing stock. From that moment on, the municipality and the housing co-operation collaborated in developing a renewal plan for Crooswijk. Citizen involvement was temporarily put on the back burner. The Crooswijk residents, however, assumed that eventually they would participate in the process again. When this did not happen, and the master plan for Crooswijk was first presented in 2003, serious protests against the plan emerged. The residents of Crooswijk noticed that their ideas from 1999 for 'a renewal of the housing stock' had been taken literally: 85% of the present neighbourhood was to be demolished, and the replacement houses were intended not for the present residents, but for higher income groups. The residents started organizing protest groups and then in art projects concerning Crooswijk (cultural events, neighbourhood festivals, etc.). The municipality and housing corporation – forced to deal with the neighbourhood protest due to various legal appeals against the renewal plans – realized that their communication with the residents had been questionable but seemed incapable of incorporating alternative ideas, initiatives and the newly emerged energy of the neighbourhood in the plans. They reasoned that since the residents had the chance to participate since 1999 and to object, and that the plans had been approved by the city council, further revision of the plans was out of question.

The first building blocks in Crooswijk were demolished in 2008, but since then, the renewal has been put on hold. If planning professionals stress the success of the planning process for

Crooswijk, they tend to focus on the municipality and housing corporation that were able to combine their interests in a collaborative plan. The role of citizens in this process is ignored. And if the municipality stresses the importance of participation of residents in Crooswijk, they mean they are willing to co-operate with the new residents of the future neighbourhood. This account therefore raises questions on how citizen involvement is actually practised and whether the plea for citizen involvement actually addresses citizens in a meaningful way.

This short overview of the process of redevelopment of Crooswijk is derived from the following sources: www.crooswijk.com (23 July 2009); www.nieuwcrooswijk.nl (23 July 2009); Crooswijk De Ster, Tuesday, 13 July 2004; Account of the meeting of the city-district council of Crooswijk, 15 November 2004; Edwards, Arthur and Linze Schaap (2006), Burgerparticipatie in Rotterdam, Centre for Local Democracy, University of Rotterdam.



Our starting hypothesis is that this is because time and again the proposals generated by interactive, collaborative or participatory planning tend to remain and be developed within the regimes of public government, whether at the formal or informal borders of government planning. This tendency is remarkable given that those proposals for participatory or collaborative planning are at least partly based on Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action and on his plea to refocus on everyday life, beyond the rationalistic regimes or instrumental and strategic systems (Habermas 1981). We will show that the methods used to bring forth citizen involvement are nevertheless frequently largely based on government preconditions. In order to understand why and how citizens can and will contribute on the basis of self-motivation to urban development, we propose an approach that radically turns the focus to outside-in, instead of inside-out. To do so, in this article we will introduce the notion of self-organization, which rests on the idea that society is not the result of one – governmental – perspective only, but of an endless variety of elements, with all their diversity and dynamics. Thus we scrutinize initiatives that originate in civil society itself, via community-based networks of citizens at a specific place or over long distances, which are autonomous (i.e. beyond the control of government), yet also contribute to the development of the urban fabric. These ideas come very close to recent new ideas about a post-structuralist geography and an evolutionary and actor-relational planning (Murdoch 2006, Hillier 2007, Boelens 2009). In this article, we will show what that could mean for a new approach to participatory and collaborative planning, based on the notion of self-organization.

## 3. Three rounds of participation planning history

Citizens' participation in government decisions has a history of at least 45 years within Dutch planning. It was first introduced in the Netherlands by the 'New Left' of the Dutch Social Democrats from the mid-1960s (Meijer *et al.* 1981). It mirrored the emancipatory and democratic movements which were also evolving in the United States (as a result of the Vietnam demonstrations), France (the student revolt), Germany (Rudi Dutschkes '*Langer Marsch durch die Institutionen*') and post-war unrest in other western countries. Instead of searching for alternatives in new structures and (in)formal institutions beyond government, the New Left sought to improve from within. They criticized the existing programme of the Social Democratic Party, saying it no longer connected with the ideas and dreams of new generations. Young Social Democrats (such as Jan Nagel, Han Lammers and André van der Louw) identified 'a rejection of politics' among their peers, which they thought could be dangerous as 'it could lead to a complete rejection of society and its

undisputed revenues' (Lammers *et al.* 1966). Since these points were accepted at a Social Democrat congress in 1967 and some of the 'New Leftists' also came into power as governors, chairman of the Social Democratic Party or later even ministers in the national administrations of the early 1970s, the official programme of the Social Democrats soon stated the aim 'to channel unstructured protest movements and critical social voices in new parliamentary ways, so that it could have fruitful effects for the society as a whole' (André van der Louw, presidential statement, Social Democratic Party congress 1973 cited in Meijer *et al.* 1981, pp. 41–45). The official Social Democrat policy focussed on 'the education of citizens towards parliamentary self-control'. This became a central leitmotiv on the agenda of the national, regional and local administrations, which were also led by the Social Democrats. Citizens needed to be empowered and stimulated to participate in governance, management and communal responsibilities. Initially that should primarily take place in their living environment, and in public housing and especially in policies for urban renewal. But later on the stimulation to participate was also applied within the regional and national spatial planning agencies in general, not only via participatory legislation, but also within the general ideology of the Dutch Third Report on National Spatial Planning (1972–1983). Instead of blueprint planning, this spatial policy report focussed on a procedural and flexible plan with new facilities for participation and cybernetic adjustments along the way. In fact, it marked the first round of participation, which when introduced in practice merely enabled citizens to criticize and react to spatial proposals made by the government agencies. This form of participation was subsequently incorporated into formal planning procedures, and in certain countries was incorporated in legislation. Nowadays such citizen involvement has come to be regarded as a general right not only in the Netherlands but also elsewhere.

But, as mentioned above, these traditional methods of participation in public matters were also heavily criticized, for instance by Judith Innes, David Booher and Patsy Healey (Healey 2007, p. 4). Additionally, this first round of participation was also regarded as ineffective, as it was ultimately too concerned with the process rather than with the content of planning (Cammen 1986). With the impact of the economic crises of the 1970s fresh in people's memory, this was no longer acceptable. Instead, new ideas about co-production or about collaborative planning emerged, referring less to the planning ideas of Innes and Healey and more to the successful inner-city and urban revitalization processes in the United States of the 1980s (Kreukels 1985, Fainstein *et al*. 1986, Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). In fact, new kinds of public–private partnerships or a new kind of entrepreneurial style of planning evolved, in which local, regional or even national governments opted to collaborate with major stakeholders in business (at first mainly project developers or investors) and later also with those from civic society, in order to develop embedded and realistic plans in which each of those stakeholders would share responsibility. The result was the renowned Dutch 'polder model' and the covenant scheme of planning, which proved to be very effective in the 1990s and beyond (Kranenburg 1999). During the 1990s, approximately 1 million houses were built in the Netherlands, two mainports (the harbour of Rotterdam and Schiphol airport as major international transport hubs) were developed and several infrastructure networks were extended. Nevertheless, even these seemingly successful applications of collaborative planning evolved into a kind of undemocratic decision-making in back rooms (Logan and Molotch 1987, Sartori 1991, Imbroscio 1998). Accordingly also the collaborative/interactive planning advocated by Innes, Healey and Booher was increasingly criticized as merely a 'public support machine' (Hendriks and Tops 2001), which sidelined the more powerless and multicultural citizens (Sandercock 2001). A recent Ph.D. study by Sonja van der Arend (2008) which analysed the phases

of structuration, institutionalization and manifestation of several collaborative/interactive planning cases concluded that their instrumental use and connotation had come to overshadow the idealistic, democratic side of those planning approaches, transforming it into the opposite of what was originally intended.

For these reasons, and also because of experiences such as the one recounted in Box 1, the concept of collaborative planning is increasingly approached with distrust. The ideal situation as described by Habermas, Innes or Healey seems – despite their sophisticated arguments – far from realistic.

A third form of participation has therefore been developed: participatory budgeting, or 'citizens' initiatives backed up by government budgets' (IPP 2006). This scheme, which at this moment is creating a furore in some Latin American countries such as Brazil (Cymbalista and Nakano 2005) and even in China (Friedmann 2005), has a long history in the Netherlands too. Back in 1970, the project developer Eurowoningen developed a neighbourhood of some 500 living areas around 12 squares in Leusden, a small village near Amersfoort. Because the village administration had no experience with an urban extension of that size and were afraid that the costs of managing such an extension would escalate beyond their standards, it was agreed that the village administration would pay their standard amount for managing the public and green spaces in such an area (currently approximately €59,000 a year) to the residents' own organization (Green Foundation Rozendaal), which would then carry out the management. Using this sum, plus a small additional contribution from the residents (currently €42 per household per month), the residents' organization has managed the public and green spaces for nearly 40 years. It has built a swimming pool, tennis courts, adventure island (for the children), basketball field and put in a television cable for this small community; as a result, house values are about 10% higher than comparable houses nearby. Moreover, children raised in the area who now have their own families are queuing up to buy houses there (Heuvel 1992, VROM IPSV 2007). The success of this pilot project has stimulated other examples of collective management of public neighbourhood space, such as Chassépark in Breda, Eva Lanxmeer in Culemborg and Vondelpark in Utrecht. These are similar to the successful prototypes of semi-private or semi-public management of collective spaces in the United Kingdom and the United States, which have a longer history – see Section 8.

A recent evaluation of semi-private/semi-public management by the University of Delft showed that these initiatives have most chance of success if the relevant community is homogeneous in terms of age, lifestyle, income or presence of children. Moreover, the area needs to be clearly demarcated, if not with physical boundaries, then with respect to appearance, identity, spatial arrangement and so on. Very important is the long-term, more or less enforceable involvement of all residents, coupled with mutual trust, also in the case of residents who have been rehoused or are newcomers (Post *et al.* 2007). The government always needs to be in the background, ready to step in if the residents' collective management fails. Therefore participatory budgeting also needs to fit in with the general regimes, outlines and therefore path-dependencies of national, regional or local administrations.

## 4. Participation and its three persistent inclusionary premises

So it can be concluded that in the past 45 years citizens' participation in spatial planning has changed profoundly: from consultation, via collaboration towards a sort of delegated management. Nevertheless, time and again these activities are framed within the regimes and conditions of the government. Precisely this phenomenon – that is, the activities concerning

participation have always been practised within and therefore also based on government regimes – seems to be persistent. This is always the case even if interactive planning is an instrument for participating citizens as much as it is an instrument for process managers, bureaucrats, governors and some of their agencies (van der Arend 2008); planners still mainly work as civil servants or under the authority of government – serving government (political) interests (Flyvbjerg 1996, Pløger 2001). Therefore, government objectives still lead participatory spatial planning processes. Co-operation between government agencies and citizens is therefore time and again mainly based on government-led planning and participation, their inclusive path-dependencies and lock-ins. Despite all these changes, government administrations do not seem to be very open to initiatives that emerge from the dynamics of civil society itself. The call for more co-operation between government agencies, entrepreneurs and citizens thus merely results in a kind of advocacy planning, while government agencies expect the participating actors to execute government policies in the way these were broadly outlined before hand (Schaap and Van Twist 1997). Although the intentions behind government-led participation can be described as 'noble', many examples indicate that it does not work, partly because of the government's failure to accept its outcomes or to transfer it to legitimate policy actions (cf. Frissen 2007). As a result of this government centrality, three major problems crop up regularly with regard to participation:

- time-consuming procedures that only a few people have time for;
- the premises of the political system that sets the framework for the activities and that works through a decision hierarchy and structures of formal influence; and
- the lack of democratic distribution of authority and responsibility to local people, which causes conflicts at both political and local levels (Pløger 2001, p. 233).

Accordingly in his study of three empirical cases in the city of Utrecht, de Graaf (2007) concludes that participatory policymaking could indeed increase support for policy decisions, but at the same time would not increase the legitimacy of those decisions, since the actors involved in the processes are often preselected and are far from representative. It would therefore only improve relations between government officials, public servants and the 'professional citizen' (citizens familiar with government procedures) and would result in planning in which the instrumental use of participation predominates, meaning that, in practice, participatory policymaking is applied in order to strengthen and improve public policy rather than to improve democratic relationships between citizens and government.

Therefore, government-driven participatory trajectories – whether traditional, interactive, collaborative or participatory – are time and again accompanied by three major inclusion processes, each related to process, content and place.

First, concerning process, participation is always based on the idea of a conflict between the *powerful and the powerless,* in which the powerful determines the procedures along which the powerless shall participate. Participation as a practice in spatial planning started with the presentation of a 'ladder of participation' by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. In this ladder, she presented a typology of citizen participation, with each rung corresponding to the citizens' power in determining a plan/program. The eight rungs of the ladder are (1) manipulation, (2) therapy, (3) informing, (4) consultation, (5) placation, (6) partnership, (7) delegated power and (8) citizen control. The upper rungs of the ladder are levels of citizen

power with increasing degrees of decision-making (Arnstein 1969). These ideas were recognized by the democratic movement in planning during the 1970s and rapidly adopted as a legal right to be implemented in practice. Although new methods, such as co-production or citizen initiatives, may appear to be seeking going beyond and reconcile the conflicts between the powerful and powerless, the concept still allocates government a leading and deciding role. Government authorities decide who is invited to contribute and when, and determine the procedures along which influence is allowed, on which rung of the participation ladder the process is placed. As long as these procedures are determined solely by government, and government regimes, one can speak of participation by *procedural inclusion.*

Second, concerning content, planning actions are often also a result of a *problem definition* from a government perspective. This is the case, for example, for deprived neighbourhoods, which are identified using generic indicators, such as 'little social cohesion', which citizens are invited to help ameliorate (WRR 2005, VROM 2007a). Examples of the same preconditioned problem definition can be found in the participatory trajectories for the development of foundations to manage public space, as in the Leusden case described above. However, the issues at stake and the reasons why precisely these issues are addressed are usually already determined by government objectives. Therefore one can speak of participation by *thematic inclusion.*

Third, concerning place, planning actions often aim at *area-based policies*, in which the targeted area is chosen using administrative boundaries, not using spatial or social entities. It is still believed that administrative boundaries also delineate spatial social communities, although this has long been contested (Van Doorn 1955, Gans 1962, Murray 1984, Doevendans and Stolzenburg 1988, Reijndorp *et al.* 1998). Restricting the focus to a neighbourhood or other geographical entity denies the idea that processes and network formations take place across spatial barriers and on different levels, thus transcending administrative boundaries. As long as participation is set up according to administrative boundaries in their geographical representation, one can speak of participation by *geographical inclusion.*

Given that inclusion is often also the reason that people, issues, developments and so on that do not fit within the predefined definitions, objectives and target groups are excluded, it is not surprising that governments have difficulty dealing with the diversity that surfaces in dialogue with 'civil society' (Frissen 2007). This means that spatial policy is gradually becoming bogged down. On one hand, the legitimacy for unilateral government actions has decreased. On the other hand, governments are not always receptive to initiatives that emerge spontaneously from society but do not correspond with policy issues (Urban Unlimited 2004, Boonstra 2006, Doucet 2007). Governments ask for citizen involvement and shared responsibility, but, according to their path-dependencies, hold on to instruments that keep them in central positions, in a society that is no longer governable from that kind of one-dimensional perspective. Thus, participation leads to an impasse and lock-in of spatial planning rather than to the aimed-for shared responsibility between governments and citizens.

## 5. Participatory views beyond government

In order to develop a form of participation which would be free from these persistent inclusion processes – and as such develop forms of participation which would fit better with contemporary civil society, which is highly empowered, elusive and individually

fragmented, as well as increasingly organized along temporary, changing and multiple interrelations (Koffijberg and Renooy 2008) – one needs to go beyond the above-described path-dependencies of government and even governance. The resulting orientation would reflect current convictions that governments or their agencies are not the only actors who plan in space; they are even not the most prominent, while various actors in business and also in civic society increasingly plan their actions in space beyond the confines of government (Kreukels 1985, Boelens *et al.* 2006). Moreover, it corresponds with the recent shift within engaged planning theories and practices, towards a more post-structuralist view on space, geography and planning (Hillier 2007, Boelens 2009). According to Jonathan Murdoch (2006), that kind of post-structuralist geography regards spaces and places not as closed and contained, but as open and relational in a profound way. On the one hand, this means that particularly in our network society, certain spaces and places are always engaged with other places and spaces elsewhere. At the same time it means that space is not only a platform for social events or actions (housing, work, leisure, traffic and the like), but that it is in fact integral to those actions themselves. Performance of social practice and the performance of space go hand in hand (see also Castells 1996, 1997). But consequently spaces and places are therefore also multiplicities – that is, they are made of various spatial practices, identifications and forms of belonging. Therefore, there can be acute struggles over whose 'reading' of space should take priority. Strategies of domination and resistance, struggle and the composing of specific alliances are an integral part of how spaces evolve and are perceived along the way (see also Foucault 1979, Deleuze and Guattari 1980) or, as Lindblom (1990) suggests, a continuous probing of never-ending inconclusiveness. Moreover, post-structuralists believe that these struggles, forms of resistance, mutual alliances or domination are restricted not only to human actors and their regimes or agencies (see also Giddens 1984) but also to non-human actors and things (see also Law 2004, Latour 2005). According to this view, the (geo)morphological context is not something that needs to be overruled or conquered (modernistic) nor is it the driving force behind spatial developments (post-modernistic), but it puts it on an equal basis to be exchanged with other arguments and actor-networks, respectively (trans-modernistic). Therefore, and last but not least, post-structural geography starts from the notion that the 'performer' (e.g. the planner) and the context of performance (e.g. the given space or actor-network struggles within it) are not distinct from one another. On the contrary, post-structuralists are convinced that those distinctions need to be abandoned in order to come up with a more effective, embedded and therefore sustainable plan. Both the planner and the planned should from the outset be reciprocally entangled in heterogeneous processes of spatial becoming (Murdoch 2006).

Here the concept of 'self-organization' comes in. The concept refers to the notion of a complex society, one in which there is endless and continuous movement and interaction between all its different elements (people, places and institutions). This continuous movement results in patterns and unforeseen initiatives emerging spontaneously, without being controlled by one central manager or director. Such an emergence of social structures or patterns without the machinations of external agents – or in the words of complexity theorists: a process of autonomous development and the spontaneous emergence of order out of chaos – is called self-organization (Prigogine and Stengers 1984, Heylighen 2001, Teisman *et al.* 2009).

In the context of urban development, this notion would then refer to situations in which citizens and/or other stakeholders contribute to urban developments out of their own motivation and interests in specific actor-networks, if necessary to be facilitated (and not directed) by planners and governments. However, although self-organization has recently been given prominent window dressing in various policy documents about spatial

development (Rotterdam municipality is promoting the involvement of business communities in government-led urban regeneration, in Almere master plans are being made in order to make private commissioning for housing suggest organic growth of urban expansions – see Section 8) the notions of self-organization and participation are often mutually confused. Just as participation is mentioned as an instrument to be applied in urban renewal, self-organization is seen as a possibility to increase citizen involvement in public policy. In practice, no distinction is made between those two types of civic activities, and neither seems to have learned from the misfits of the recent histories of participation described in Section 3. However, there is a fundamental difference between collaborative participation and self-organization. On the one hand, participation refers to goals set by government bodies on which citizens can exert influence through procedures set by these government regimes themselves, resulting in processes of thematic, procedural, geographical – and so on – inclusion. On the other hand, self-organization stands for the actual motives, networks, communities, processes and objectives of citizens themselves, at least initially independent of government policies and detached from participatory planning procedures. In other words, in the case of participation, the initiative is taken by government agencies, while in the case of self-organization the initiative is taken by members of civic society or business, indifferent to public policy objectives. In this respect, the notion of self-organization brings forward a new perspective on the relationship between citizens and government and between civil society and public agencies.

To that extent, in the next section we will first analyse the theoretical assumptions underlying the notion of self-organization, in order to develop a more profound idea of our own. From here we will finally develop preliminary outlines for a possible new self-organizing approach in spatial planning, focussed on various possible domains of such planning.

## 6. Self-organization as a characteristic of complex systems

The notion of self-organization – although previously used in philosophy – is mostly associated with complexity theories, which introduced the idea of 'complex adaptive systems'. This refers to the idea that processes in society consist of such a large variety of components and interactions that these are hardly manageable if at all (Klijn and Snellen 2009). In fact, complexity theory is characterized by three key features: non-linearity, coevolution and self-organization (Teisman *et al.* 2009). Non-linearity refers to the idea that processes are always subject to dynamics and (unforeseen) change. Coevolution refers to the way in which different systems or subsystems influence each other, either opposing each other or synchronizing each other. Self-organization refers to the limits imposed on the steering capacity of a singe actor by the autonomy of other actors and their ability to behave and organize as they choose (Klijn and Snellen 2009, Boons *et al.* 2009). Non-linearity, coevolution and self-organization are the results of an infinite (and unforeseeable) number of interactions between various components of a system. These interactions can be both internal (the system reproduces itself in a self-referential manner) and external (the way in which the system reproduces itself in reaction to changed conditions in its environment). The evolution of new structures within or between systems can be understood in terms of emergence. Accordingly, self-organization can also be seen as the emergent property of complex adaptive systems. Despite this definition of self-organization, the concept can be interpreted in various ways, in relation to various public policies in a more or less urban setting (spatial, social–political[2] or economic). Without the assumption of being all-encompassing, the following interpretations reflect some of the various domains

in which the notion of self-organization is used and the different interpretations that tend to be given to the concept of self-organization.

An *economic* perspective of self-organization can be illustrated by the work of Paul Krugman (1996): *The Self-Organising Economy*. In this book, Krugman interprets self-organizing systems as systems that, even when they start from an almost homogeneous or almost random state, spontaneously form alternative large-scale patterns. He uses the notion of self-organization in order to explain how economies organize themselves in time and over space, especially with regard to the way cities differentiate themselves into specialized districts. This process is described as an initial random noise that contains components of the city, corresponding to many potential and forming patterns, with such dynamics that some of those patterns are more magnified than others. Planning and public policy can help to direct such processes in desired directions, since 'self-organisation is something we observe and try to understand, not necessarily something we want' (Krugman 1996: 5–6). As such, Krugman opposes a planned economy in favour of a self-organizing economy (in which market forces are leading). He pinpoints this opposition not only within the economy, but also in urbanization processes and land use in general: he states that self-organization appears frequently in cities where no planning or zoning entity predetermines the layout of the city (Krugman 1996: 9–29).

A primarily *spatial* interpretation of the concept of self-organization has been developed by, among others, Juval Portugali (2000), resulting in the idea of the city as a self-organizing system. In his concept, the system of a city consists of an infrastructural layer, being 'the space of houses, parcels of land, networks of streets and so on', and on top of that, a 'superstructure layer of free agents' (Portugali 2000: 86). The city is a reciprocal product of the initiatives of actors, influenced by personal/individual motives (caused by their environment), interacting with spatial developments that are in their turn product of collective actions. The outcomes of such processes manifest themselves in specific urban forms and patterns (morphological or functional), physical growth or the emergence of new socio-spatial groups as a result of certain geographical settings or characteristics such as houses, lots and housing blocks (Portugali 2000). When a planner or policymaker perceives cities as such, according to Portugali *'a new type of action in the city, a new type of city planning' is needed, in order 'not to control, but to participate'* in urban processes (Portugali 2000: 336).

A *social–political* interpretation of the concept of self-organization is illustrated by the work of Christian Fuchs (2006) on the self-organization of social movements. In his definition of social movements, he opposes the political system (constituting and enacting laws) to the civil society system (comprising all non-parliamentary political groups). Social movements are an expression of the civil society system, and by producing alternative topics and demands, they create the dynamic of the political system. They react to political and social events. Their output is the emergence of new protest issues, methods, identities, structures and organizational forms. Social movements are described as self-organizing systems because they have an internal logic which arises spontaneously. They are not closed, but open and coupled to an environment, with which they exchange resources, and they are dynamic. Self-organizing systems are complex networks of entities that synergize and produce novelty. Moreover, a social movement is not a single group, but a network of groups that are communicatively linked. According to Fuchs, 'self-organising' systems/social movements are the 'networked, co-operative, synergetic production of emergent qualities and systems' (Fuchs 2006: 133). Since social movements anticipate desirable settings of society, he states that it is the scientist's role to study those

movements and thus elaborate a critique of dominant structures in society and explore new potentialities for truly emancipatory movements.

These three interpretations of self-organization in the spatial, social–political and economic domains are used as a mere illustration to show how different perspectives and problem definitions can lead to various interpretations of the subject.[3] Moreover, the sequence of these three interpretations illustrates two important notions on self-organization. The first is the potential of self-organization to move from a dialectical interpretation to an interpretation based on multiplicity and pluralism, and the second is the potential to understand systems in a relational way. As such, self-organization offers new potentials for understanding planning as a multiplicity and relational process.

The first notion marks a shift from a rather traditional interpretation of self-organization as a dialectical conception of a planning government versus an unplanned society as illustrated by Krugman, towards a notion of a variety of simultaneously planning systems. The latter rests on an interpretation that makes the traditional view of self-organization as the counterpart of guidance and control (Teisman *et al.* 2009) untenable because, when the whole of society is perceived as a complex self-organizing system, even the organizations assumed to be in charge are in fact merely several among many self-organizing subsystems. Self-organization can be experienced or *perceived* as assemblages of actors fully in control of the actions they initiate. However, self-organization implies that an actor does not control the dynamics that occur after an action has been initiated. A specific governance initiative is just one manifestation of this self-organizing capacity within societies; another is citizen initiatives (Boons *et al.* 2009). Thus, self-organization refers to the idea that various systems operate (or plan) at the same time, and that because no single actor can oversee all the dynamics simultaneously, there is complexity. If an actor tries to overcome this complexity by trying to get ideas to converge, the result will be impairment and exclusion, not – as argued by Lindblom (1990) in relation to government and the self-guiding society – a reduction of complexity.

The second way in which the idea of self-organization is used is highly conducive to the system definition applied to a certain problem statement or objective. Quoting Niklas Luhmann '[ . . . ] there do not exist [ . . . ] such things as social systems per se' (Luhmann 1981: 236). Therefore, for each particular case, it should be clarified what will be put under the system directory and what is placed under its subject or environment directory (Luhmann 1981). This means that each observer needs to develop a certain system definition depending on the problem statement or perspective that is addressed. This system definition determines what is included and what is excluded from the problem in order to reduce the complexity, so the problem becomes understandable. The notion of complex adaptive systems adds to this that systems are never fully closed but instead are open, always interacting closely with their environments and conducive to processes of formation and deformation. The advantage of using system definitions is that elements considered relevant to the proposed problem are included in the system and those elements considered unimportant are excluded. As a result, the system becomes an aggregate: an entity consisting of components but considered as a whole.

This, however, is exactly the biggest pitfall of system definitions. Giving a system a definition – aggregate, for example – means that the system as a whole and its underlying logic, such as self-organization, must comply with that definition. Thus, self-organization may even be used to veil an inability to explain or even analyse unexpected actions and innovations outside that definition. Self-organizing systems become black boxes, without it being known whether the aggregate that is the construct of the investigator is relevant. Used in such a way self-organization cannot give satisfactory answers to questions such as

under which conditions do initiatives for a shared responsibility emerge, and what and how citizens contribute to urban development processes out of their own motivation and interest. Therefore, using system definitions in this way – defining a system beforehand and then studying its underlying presumptions – will eventually lead to a one-sided system definition and thus exclude multiplicity. Post-structuralists are very critical of this. Instead of probing the truths underlying predefined systems, post-structuralists focus on 'social and cultural systems that are open and dynamic, constantly in the process of "becoming" ' (Murdoch 2006, p. 10) beyond closed 'system definitions', with a clear emphasis on the 'multiple meanings and modes of identification that emerge from the constitution of relations' (Murdoch 2006, p. 9).



## 7. Self-organization beyond system definitions

Although complex system theories can help us to understand the complexity of contemporary socio-spatial systems, we do, however, conclude that complex system theory does not offer pro-active or effective instruments (strategies for dealing with unintentional or surprising initiatives) beyond government path-dependencies or even lock-ins. However, the multiplicity of space, and its continuous process of becoming (as derived from Deleuze, Foucault and post-structuralist thinking), demands more than a dialectical system explanation of society versus public government. In that respect, self-organization should be defined differently – not just in terms of its specific characteristics and/or as an alternative to predefined systems.

In order to understand *why and how* citizens contribute to urban development out of their own motivation and interest, we introduce the notion of self-organization to do justice to the complexity and multiplicity of processes like urban development. However, to apply this notion to spatial planning, we need to go beyond predefined systems and scrutinize the developing processes themselves: the changing and varying relations between places and people, places and places, people and people. Thus, we take into account the potential the notion of self-organization has for understanding planning as a multiplicity and relational process. In accordance with Teisman (2009), we distinguish system definitions made beforehand by the researcher and/or planner/governments and system definitions made by the actors themselves. The latter are much more important for understanding the motivations and interests of citizens contributing to urban development. We have to 'follow the actors themselves' – as Latour (2005) claimed – and the networks occurring between those actants. Therefore, here we introduce the actor-network theory, to develop self-organization in its relational and multiplicity direction, and the actor-relational approach (Boelens 2009) as a possibility to go beyond the confines of predefined systems, and to perceive urban development as a continuous process of becoming. These approaches are focussed much more on the heterogeneous, self-organizing actors themselves and how they themselves arrange fruitful associations.

Actor-network theory provides a detailed and accurate way to examine the relationships that determine a system. Latour advocates a sociology that is diametrically opposed to the more traditional forms of sociology that uses system definitions and social aggregates. Instead of beginning an investigation by defining systems first, Latour argues that one should end with them. Instead of defining systems a priori, enquiries should focus on tracing the associations that have created the system(s). Associations (or actor-networks) consist of humans and non-humans (such as physical objects) and therefore provide a perspective to explain how these networks exist in a constant process of making and remaking

(Latour 2005). Actor-network theory describes the emergence of 'society' as the outcome of heterogeneous relations between actors and artefacts. Associations between actors and artefacts are the basis of the networks from which 'society' is constructed: 'in short, there is no such thing as society: only (heterogeneous) networks. And space, too, is made ("materialized") by these networks' (Murdoch 2006: 74).

One of the strongest arguments of actor-network theory against some of the traditional social (network) theories is the statement that a system or network proves its existence by its associations. This is why it is impossible to determine the social network or system beforehand. It is possible to define a system only if actors, associations and influences become clear; defining a system is the final step for the actor-network approach (Callon and Latour 1981, Law 1986, 1992, Latour 2005). According to Callon (1986), through free association the observer abandons all a priori distinctions between defined boundaries; divisions are the result of an analysis rather than its point of departure.

The notion of 'society' – or any other social aggregate – is replaced by the notion of 'collective' or 'the network'. And to explain is to trace these networks (Latour 2005, p. 103). The focus of actor-network theory is on actors themselves, who, in networks, are capable of developing meaningful spatial connections, even heterogeneous ones (Boelens 2009). To understand how urban policymaking can address self-organization in urban development differently from more conventional participatory approaches, it is necessary to understand the processes of evolving networks and associations. Those networks organize themselves along an infinite variety of lines: they continuously undergo processes of group formation and deformation. Therefore, the focus of these networks is not on stability, but on the action of actors in the association (whether citizens, businesses, government or even planners). A further analysis of the actors, networks and institutions involved in self-organization helps elucidate those networks and even yields new possibilities for taking them into account and dealing with them.

The reasoning followed above leads us to our definition of self-organization: initiatives that originate in civil society from autonomous community-based networks of citizens, who are part of the urban system but independent of government procedures. With respect to spatial development, the initiatives are those relating to spatial interventions. Since the initiators are also the intended end-users, the initiative is more or less based on the self-interests of the community. This is similar to Lindblom's (1990) idea of a self-guided society, in which mutual adjustment between various groups of like-minded people exerts multilateral influence on government officials. According to Lindblom, this goes on continuously. Our approach adds a spatial dimension to this self-guiding society. A self-guiding society is an open society in which there are widespread inquiries from its members at many levels and in which impairments to such inquiries are reduced. Planners and governments in a self-guided society do not simply solve problems but merely facilitate this process of self-guiding (Lindblom 1990). Nevertheless, planners and governments could also participate in those associations as heterogeneous actors, making them more open, democratic and robust.

In short, though we build on the definition of self-organization as 'an emergent property of adaptive complex systems', we wish to extend it beyond predefined (complex) system definitions (such as 'government' or 'society') and add an extra layer to it that incorporates Lindblom's insights and the underlying forces, ambitions and procedures of actor-network associations in which government does not predominate. As such, our definition could also be useful for planning: it offers a way of dealing with the uncertainties and complexities of the present network society.

## 8. Urban development through community-based self-organization

This definition of community-based self-organization reveals many social, economic and cultural examples in the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Scandinavia and other western European countries in which self-organization in urban development is evolving, complementing a strong planning regime. In the old dialectical notion of society versus government it is hard not to see such community-based self-organizations as a countervailing power undermining public interest or common 'good'. However, in these countries, there are various examples of this dialectical notion being irrelevant and of the emergence of robust associations of actor-networks in which government does not predominate. We will illustrate this with three case studies: co-operative housing in Denmark, business improvement districts (BIDs) in the United Kingdom and Zwischennutzung in Berlin. All demonstrate how existing institutional arrangements adapt to initiatives and how robust associations have been able to grow from this.

A social variant of self-organization evolves in housing communities, in which people with comparable lifestyles or values collaboratively organize communal housing and can be found as a regular housing principle within Danish cities (like Copenhagen). Actually, co-operative movements, where each individual member owns part of the corporation, for instance in farming and consumer organizations, are common in Danish society (Busck and Poulsen 2008). In the case of co-operative housing, if you 'feel at home' in a certain lifestyle, collectiveness or living environment, you 'buy' the apartment from the co-operative and by doing so subscribe to the rules, values and organization of the co-operative. To leave, you sell it back to the co-operative. In this way, all owners of the building profit from rising property values. The board of the co-operative is democratically elected by the individual members, and the co-operative decides for itself on contributions, expenditure, investments and adjustments (Mortensen and Seabrooke 2008). The system of co-operative housing goes back to the nineteenth century, when workers started to arrange their own housing and amenities. The Danish government then instated an institutional arrangement for these co-operatives to manage and govern themselves. Over the years, this proved to be an efficient way to develop housing cheaply and efficiently, and even today many new housing schemes are developed by co-operatives, with the end-users also being the developers and administrators. The co-operatives do not focus solely on housing but also on the collective amenities and elements that contribute to a certain lifestyle as well. The co-operative never transforms into an independent institute, but continues to be embedded in the locality of the housing unit. Initiatives for changes or improvements always come from the community itself. As long as the initiative or the co-operative meets certain conditions (democratic legitimacy, voluntariness, openness of organization) the government merely facilitates so that the community's plans can be achieved (Richman 1995).

An economic variant of self-organization in urban development is BIDs: self-initiated consortiums of property owners or businesses that elect to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development and promotion of their commercial districts (Berg 2007) and aim to improve business opportunities by spatial interventions in their neighbourhood. BIDs were successfully developed during the 1970s in the United States and Canada, and the concept has recently been introduced in legislation in various European countries. The concept has taken off in the United Kingdom, where at the time of writing there were 120 BIDs in existence. One reason for this success is the relative freedom entrepreneurs have to develop their own institutional structure (Lloyd and Peel 2008). BIDs are assisted by

local government, which collects the additional taxes. The entrepreneurs in a certain area initiate and propose a BID plan, in which they determine the geographical boundaries, the kind of entrepreneurs involved, the organizational structure, the aims and projects and the time horizon for the BID. The target entrepreneurs are then balloted on the proposal. If the proposal is approved, the local government organizes institutional embedding into the local legislation and will collect any levies. A BID provides services for its members, such as sanitation, security, marketing and promotion. BIDs also function as advocates for their communities and coalitions of property owners, and lobby the executive and city council on matters such as beautification and commercial development; some even produce and manage development plans for their geographical area and its surroundings. Although BIDs can be initiated by businesses and by local governments, the business-led board takes the final decisions, and the businesses involved in the BID democratically control the board's actions and decisions. A recent study of the BIDs in the United Kingdom shows that BIDs often evolve around specific local problems or opportunities directly affecting local business opportunities. Businesses do tend to take over responsibility, especially when there is no funding available through regular public investment programmes. However, there are also examples in the United Kingdom of local governments imposing a BID organization on business areas; this creates problems since the businesses did not feel the need or urgency to take on such a self-managing position. BIDs succeed only if there is a strong local embeddedness and shared feeling of urgency among business members and local, direct measurable reciprocity of investments in the business community (Boonstra 2010).

One cultural variant of self-organization in urban development is the 'free zone', especially those free zones that function as artist communities in urbanized areas. One city in which such 'free zones' have emerged is Berlin. After Berlin was re-unified in 1990, many industrial buildings fell vacant due to the collapse of east-German economy, and large areas became vacant (some were former military zones). An economic downturn prevented these areas from being redeveloped. Meanwhile, Berlin was attracting artists and 'creative people' because of its recent history and its cheap rents. Artists' communities settled in many places, especially in the former east of Berlin. The scale on which this development took place produced the creative and artistic identity of the city that nowadays attracts many tourists. The *Senatverwaltung für Stadsentwicklung* realized the potential of these self-organized developments and invented the concept of *Zwischenutzung*: artists can continue to use the vacant areas for as long as there are no new development schemes. The *Zwischenutzung* concept has become an important element in the city planning, culture policy and real estate development in the city of Berlin. Commercial activity has even emerged from the concept, since various consultancy agencies are nowadays assisting the actors involved in *Zwischenutzung* (Overmeyer 2007).

In these three cases, an institutional arrangement was found in order to incorporate initiatives from society in such a way that the relative autonomy of the initiative was not disturbed. Existing institutions have bent around these initiatives, and fruitful and robust associations between non-predominant government actors have emerged.

Examples of community-based self-organization – civic groups influencing the development of urban areas – can be found in Dutch cities too, for instance, the informal settlements of artists within former industrial areas, co-operative networks among self-employed entrepreneurs, housing and lifestyle communities giving corporate commission for real estate development. The result of their actions and initiatives, or the eventual impact on spatial, functional or organizational layout of urban environments, may or may not contribute to goals set by public policy. However, there are instances of them contributing to

public policy goals even if these goals are not planning targets. Examples of this include corporate commissions for low-income housing, entrepreneurs' organizations aiming to improve business opportunities by spatial interventions in their neighbourhood, illegal use of land by artists contributing to the city's cultural life. For public policymakers, a thriving cultural, economic and social climate might actually be a major policy goal – and self-organization can contribute to that. This, however, often leads to tensions between policy objectives and the idea of achieving these through self-organization and the ways of the self-organizing networks themselves. Moreover, the emergence of robust associations is frequently challenged by governments that arrogate an initiative and claim a leading and decisive position.

In the Netherlands, corporate commissioning is stimulated by a government funding scheme, in order to encourage liveliness, social cohesion and architectural diversity in urban areas. However, stories abound of communities spending years before finding a municipality willing to 'host' their initiative, but only on the outskirts of one of the newest city expansions (SEV 2010). In the city of Almere, there is a strong stimulus for collective real estate development, but only in the specific areas designated in a government master plan. BIDs (BIZ in Dutch) have only just been introduced in the Netherlands, but it is important to ensure that the pitfalls that occurred in the United Kingdom be avoided. The same applies to the policy to stimulate free zones in Amsterdam and The Hague, since the subsidy strategy of the municipality of Amsterdam to help or provoke free zones does not react to initiatives from various (undefined) actors (like informal ground use by artist communities in other parts of the city) (Boonstra 2006). Instead, it tries to include and control the work of some artists, but at the same time excludes many other prominent actors in the field. Thus, this policy achieves the exact opposite of free zones, namely planned and prescriptive zones (Urban Unlimited 2004).

These examples illustrate how far-reaching government window dressing and/or actual subsidizing of self-organizing initiatives can be. But here again the question arises of whether the initiative is framed by the government agencies or by the associated communities within society. Will the self-organizing examples presented here fall into the same trap as collaborative planning? Will their multiplicity and dynamism again be taken over by one final decision-maker, prescribing process, content and place? Before governments can even think about intervening in these unintended and promising initiatives in society, they first have to understand the implications for their own policy actions.

## 9. Challenges to be met

This brings us back to the initial question, which is the dilemma of planners aiming at involving citizens from the outset of planning processes, but hardly being able to think beyond the confines and path-dependencies of government. We argued that the concept of self-organization might provide a way out of this dilemma. Moreover, it could also prove to be a more suitable perspective for planners who act in an increasingly fragmenting, networked world, but also a world in which development must be sustainable. We argued that the earlier mismatches of interactive policymaking/participatory planning could be deconstructed to yield the conclusion that interactive policymaking/participatory planning is prescriptive and inclusive (and as such also exclusive) in content, process and place. Participation, collaboration, participatory budgeting and every associative perspective are always set up by planners and government officials. This is not necessarily wrong, but the experience of recent decades has shown that this is far from sufficient for, and in some cases even counterproductive to, achieving the current aim of responsibility being

shared by members of the public, business and civic society. In turn, we argued that self-organization is not focussed on predetermined 'grand ideas' or ambitions, such as the democratic promise of empowerment or political renewal. It simply happens or not. But when it does happen (and of course planners can play a crucial role in 'making it happen' by being part of the initiating actor-network assemblages), it does represent the needs and urgency for translating existing place characteristics, institutions and communal activities emanating from society itself. Thus, self-organization is neither prescriptive in content, nor process nor place.

As such, and while government-led participation has become obsolete, we reached the conclusion that community-based self-organization may be the next step in the process of embedded spatial planning. Without pleading for total abolition of government-led planning, we argue that such community-based self-organization may contribute to the spatial, economic, social and political objectives of citizen involvement. Community-based self-organization is in fact an articulation of the diversity of issues, lifestyles, organizations and spatial interests within urbanized areas. It is important to recognize community-based self-organization as an influential part of how areas develop; true co-operation among stakeholders cannot evolve only in the last instance. Accordingly, spatial planning can only retain reciprocal connections with the diverging society in the long run. By acknowledging self-organization, planning will open up to all the multiplicity and pluralism present in society, and thus move away from the dilemmas concerning participation, geographical, institutional and procedural inclusion.

This implies the approach should be outside-in, instead of the predominately inside-out approach of planners (operating from the comfort zones of public administrations). It implies that planners adopt an open, unbiased and un(pre)structured view to deal with upcoming socio-spatial initiatives 'on the outside'. As Frissen also argues (2007), current governments are fairly incapable of dealing with, or even making productive use, of diversity. Instead policies are preferably standard, uniform guidelines for conduct, to which large groups of actors and citizens must submit themselves. These policies are supported by comprehensive systems of control and accountability that destroy all creativity. If the aim is for true co-operation between stakeholders, there is less need for government preconditions. Instead, what is required are institutional arrangements that allow non-predefined relations to evolve independently. Only then can one go beyond the convergence of multiplicity into a single one-dimensional vision, towards productive use of heterogeneity, diversity and thus achieving far more socially embedded results.

Planners cannot position themselves as neutral researchers and scientific observers (as some complexity scientists would do), nor can they continue to operate as neutral directors from their (often government) comfort zones. It is far from unusual for planners or policymakers to fall into the trap of imagining a general and neutral decision-making process, for the sake of society (whatever that might be at this moment). Planners should abandon that perspective and position themselves in the middle, as actors integrated in the self-organizing process itself. Because in order to play a role in connecting individual self-interests to a common interest of higher added value, to contribute to robust and sustainable urban development, environmental quality or otherwise, the planner, as merely one of the many players in spatial actor-networks, needs to engage with those associations, to be able at least to promote and implement these worthy issues. This means that planners can no longer do so from comfortable general, often abstract and generic criteria and/or objectives (that are often implied in the path-dependencies of government actions with regard to civic participation and business collaboration). Given the obvious self-interests of the other players, planners constantly need to focus precisely on the issue at hand, not only to

convince the other actors (what is in it for them) but also to achieve manifest added value for the entire specific assemblage and in the long run. This can only be done from outside the government, where multiplicity and pluralism are the rule rather than the exception. Planning does not stand above or outside space and its users, but is an integral part of them.

Following on from actor-network theory, planning would then not be a pre-given guide or conditional system for self-organization, but should be the outcome of self-organizing principles. Planners should consistently trace and follow those initiatives with an open and unbiased mind, trying to become a respected member of those heterogeneous associations. Developing an understanding of such a reciprocal intervention is one part of our future research agenda. This would require analyses with respect to the following:

- Who are the relevant actors and what are the relevant factors, what are their motives and objectives (like ethnicity, politics, spatial issues, transnational identities, economics)?
- What are the networks and associations, how are the actors and factors organized, what keeps them together, on what is their 'collectivity' based (endogenously by self-defined rules or, for instance, exogenously by administrative divisions, etc.)?
- What is the relation of the network with its institutional environment (aiming at taking over tasks, being complementary, seeking autonomy, etc.)?

So in order to overcome the problematic encounters between planning and society, the acknowledgement and incorporation of self-organization in planning (without all kinds of well-intentioned inclusionary processes or imposed convergences) might be a successful next step. However, following the four points mentioned above – the fundamental acknowledgement of diversity, outside-in planning, planning seen as integrated acting and the need to trace and follow self-organizing actor-networks – some decisive shifts are needed in our current spatial planning practice – this being also part of our future research agenda. It will mean going from an approach based on averages to an approach based on differences; from an approach based on generic aspects (such as instruments or indicators) to an approach based on the specific; from an approach based on planned and measurable outcomes, to an approach based on unexpected, unplanned and unforeseen outcomes; from an approach based on the reduction of complexities and the stabilization of dynamics to an approach based on the embracing of complexities and processes of 'becoming'. Instead of perceiving self-organization as an incident and instead of approaching it by trial and error, niche planning or subsidiary rules, self-organization needs to be perceived as structurational for present-day society. In order to achieve this, planning needs to discard the old modernistic principles of the past century and to reinvent itself in a multi-vocational, fragmented and actor-relational way.



**Notes**

1. In 2007, an urban renewal programme was launched by the former minister of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration, Ella Vogelaar: 'the 40-strong neighbourhood approach'. The programme aims to involve not only municipalities and housing corporations but also residents and voluntary organizations.
2. No distinction is made here between a social and a political interpretation of 'self-organization' because in social sciences or public administration sciences, the tasks of explaining society and defining political projects (for instance by Durkheim) or empirical research and normative prescriptions (Schaap 1997) are often merged.

3. Considers the city as a system, in which actors, physical features and economic activity are the relevant elements. Krugman opposes a planned (spatial) economy in favour of a self-organizing (spatial) economy: the first comprising government, planning authorities and public policymakers, the latter comprising market forces. As such, the planner is opposed to the observed system and has a role in directing and controlling it to a certain extent. Portugali considers the city as a system, in which actors and physical features are the relevant elements. The system comprises all individual agents, within a physical environment. These mutually interact, and the planner finds himself/herself, just as any other agent, within the observed system. Fuchs in his term considers the social as a system, in which people – or to be more precise: social groups – are the relevant elements. Fuchs distinguishes a civil versus a political system. Accordingly, the civil system is described as a networked, self-organizing system within the political system as its mere environment. The researcher stands as an observer outside both systems, but does have a role in addressing political implications.



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