Practicing co-housing: towards an understanding of the ongoing production of housing by citizen collectives

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Housing constitutes more than simply a roof over your head. Next to this narrow conception of a house in terms of its use-value, housing can also have other functions. A house is a composite good of material and social amenities of the dwelling itself and its environment. This composite good aspect of housing is what people conventionally base their housing choices on (Michelson, 1977). However, there is a possibility of mismatches between housing aspirations of households and the available offer on urban housing markets, which has been a recurrent theme in literature about housing choices (e.g. Michelson, 1977; Clark & Dieleman, 1996). In considering these mismatches, an important aspect is the problem that the housing choices people make are strongly constrained by the extant housing stock and what housing developers have on offer. Institutionalised housing developers do not always proactively develop housing based on the changing preferences of households. Because of the intended long-term usage of housing, a large share of current housing markets usually reflect the demand of decades ago, and not contemporary demand. Societal developments precede the development of the housing stock, which only grows incrementally with newly built housing, usually only by few percentages every year (Brandsen & Helderman, 2012, p. 176). In the Netherlands, the housing market historically has developed towards a focus on housing for individual households, built on the nuclear family model, with public housing for the lower incomes and the middle-to higher incomes predominantly occupying the owner-sector (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016). However, contemporary demographic developments that are changing the typical household composition, as well as societal trends, such as the perceived anonymity of urban neighbourhoods, increasing attention for questions of ecological sustainability and citizens that are actively seeking to increase their control over the way they are housed make the lack of adequate offer on the housing market for some groups of people more visible. Combined with the seeming inability of the housing market to respond timely to changing housing needs, these contextual developments have contributed to the emergence of group-based citizen-led initiatives in housing development that reflect the aspirations and demands from citizen collectives themselves. Although the modern housing alternatives that result from such initiatives do not yet constitute a significant share of the housing market in most countries, it does seems that demand-driven alternatives to conventional individual single-family housing in the form of group-based citizen initiatives are becoming a trend in Western European countries (Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012; Bianchi, 2015; Boonstra, 2016), including in The Netherlands (Tummers, 2011; 2015; 2016).

The concept of co-housing

Multiple forms of group-based housing alternatives to the standard individual family dwelling, often initiated by citizens themselves, have been indicated with the umbrella-term ‘co-housing’. The multiplicity and often situation-specific nature of co-housing makes a universal definition of the phenomenon difficult. Unsurprisingly, there is some variation in the way scholars conceptualise the phenomenon, which can also partially be attributed to the specificities of national housing markets (e.g. Krokfors, 2012; Jarvis, 2015; Tummers, 2015; 2016; Vestbro & Horelli, 2012). The hyphen separating the “co” from “housing” in the spelling hints at the wide variety of “co’s” involved: collective, collaborative, cooperative, communal, and so on. Vestbro (2010, in: Vestbro & Horelli, 2012) developed a simple framework for the various housing types captured by the term ‘co-housing’ (see Table 1).
Table 1: Proposal for definition of different types of co-housing (based on Vestbro, 2010, in: Vestbro & Horelli, 2012, pp. 315-316):

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<th>Cohousing</th>
<th>Housing with common space and shared facilities</th>
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<td>Collaborative housing</td>
<td>Housing oriented towards collaboration by residents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective housing</td>
<td>Emphasising the collective organisation of services in housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communal housing</td>
<td>Housing for togetherness and sense of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Living without individual apartments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative housing</td>
<td>Cooperative ownership without common spaces or shared facilities, therefore not co-housing</td>
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It should be noted that these categories are not all mutually exclusive, for instance, the first category, co-housing, is very likely to include collaboration between residents as well as that it could contain the collective organisation of services. Criteria for co-housing are often linked to the collective intentions of the groups that initiate these projects, specifically aspects such as preventing anonymity and stimulating more neighbourly interaction, or, said differently, facilitating more ‘community’ in urban living. However, some variants of co-housing initiatives also blend in more practical considerations, such as the development or retention of affordable housing in tight urban housing markets. In this respect co-housing encompasses a much wider range of initiatives than those belonging to the international co-housing movement (the first category in Table 1), which relates to a specific model of clustered housing with individual units and shared spaces originating from Scandinavia (Tummers, 2016, p. 2034). Although Vestbro argues that cooperative housing does not qualify as co-housing because it primarily indicates a legal form, it does not exclude the sharing of spaces and facilities in housing projects, as well as that it could be said to be similar to collaborative housing as such resident associations can imply self-management of housing projects.

Although co-housing projects can be developed by commercial parties, they are often initiated by citizen collectives themselves, making the co-housing phenomenon interesting as examples of citizen initiatives in housing development. Emphasising the initiatives that are led by citizen collectives, co-housing is argued to represent a movement where people are taking their housing situation in their own hand (Tummers, 2015). By their involvement in the planning and design of their own housing projects, resident groups enter domains of professional practices that are typically not performed by the ‘consumers’ of housing themselves. Consequently, the success of co-housing initiatives depends on the internal collaboration between citizens themselves and the mutual capacity for cooperation between co-housing initiatives and the relevant external stakeholders, such as local governments and various types of housing developers. Because such cooperation is by no means an easy process, many co-housing initiatives ‘fall in action’ and do not materialise into a concrete housing project. Despite the difficulties involved in getting various co-housing projects off the ground, these types of user-led approaches to housing still seem to be gaining ground, or at least attention. While the trend clearly reflects the persistence and expectations of co-housing initiatives themselves, some regional and local governments in various European cities also seem to expect something out of more self-organised, demand-driven housing development and respond in various ways, for instance by reserving developable land for co-housing initiatives and with facilitation of projects by providing counselling and sometimes even financing (e.g. Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012; Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Brandsen & Helderman, 2012; Fromm, 2012; Provincie Gelderland, 2017).

From the above it becomes clear that there is a wide variety in the forms co-housing can take. Co-housing initiatives range between or combine aspects of utopian aspirations and pragmatic
stances to changing societal and economic circumstances. These intentions and background motivations initiate processes of group-formation and citizen involvement in domains of spatial planning, housing design and development, and sometimes even the construction process itself. Co-housing in this research is understood in the same way as in Tummers’ work (2015; 2016): as a prominent user-led approach to housing, driven by collectives of citizens who seek to realise their collective housing aspirations. As such, co-housing can be seen as a form of co-production by citizen collectives with various stakeholders in the housing domain. Co-housing initiatives often translate into housing projects with shared spaces and facilities, however, what kind of shared spaces and facilities result from these initiatives is not defined beforehand. Instead, the emphasis in this study lies on the collective housing aspirations of the initiators that go beyond the individual dwelling, the self-reliant and collaborative sides of initiatives and the dynamism of co-housing as initiatives gradually materialise into concrete self-managed housing projects. Hence, co-housing is seen as part of a cooperative movement in housing with alternative ways of planning, developing and managing housing.

**Co-housing research**
The co-housing literature thus far has been largely explorative in nature, pinpointing what co-housing is about, defining the phenomenon, where it comes from, zooming in on the involved motives of these citizen initiatives and the potentials and difficulties facing realisation of projects. Most research is focused on single cases of co-housing and tends to emphasise the highly specific nature of each local instance. Tummers (2016, p. 2026) has made an important contribution by reviewing the co-housing literature of the last decade and classifying it into 5 thematic clusters of research:

1. Advocacy: empirical studies and publications by residents and/or advisors of the projects themselves. These publications are often important information resources for aspiring co-housing groups (e.g. SNFGW, 2005).
2. The addressing of demographic change: publications of this type associate co-housing with altering traditional family structures, challenging conventional gender roles and addressing an ageing population, for instance in intergenerational living arrangements (e.g. Stavenhuis & Van Dongen, 2008; Fromm, 2012; Vestbro & Horelli, 2012; Meijering & Lager, 2014).
3. The architecture of co-housing administered by residents themselves: the search for (design) criteria that are needed for social cohesion and interaction, emphasising the participation of (future) residents in the planning and design phase of housing projects (e.g. Fromm, 2012; Bianchi, 2015).
4. The potential for larger scale neighbourhood regeneration and strategies for urban development (e.g. Fromm, 2012; Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012).
5. New fields: technical research on legal and economic aspects (e.g. Scanlon & Fernández Arrigoitia, 2015).

According to Tummers, a pitfall of co-housing research to-date is that a large part of it has advocacy at its core and overlooks the opportunities that co-housing offers for reviewing citizen-led challenges to conventional planning and housing development practices and the capacity of planners and developers to respond to this demand-side of housing. Boonstra (2015; 2016) has done research from this perspective by taking a post-structural view on co-housing and its relation to spatial planning. She rethinks the role of planning as an “act of adaptive navigation” (Boonstra, 2016, p. 275), which ideally should be performed equally by professional spatial
planners who work for responsible authorities and the case initiators of co-housing. Proposing a dynamic view on co-housing, Tummers (2016, p. 2037) argues that the co-housing phenomenon could and should be studied beyond its idealist features, and what rather should be considered is the relevance that co-housing initiatives have as “micro laboratories for new urban models for social interaction, both during and after the design process”.

Approaching co-housing as such new models for social interaction between citizen collectives and professionals in the domains of housing development and spatial planning is compelling when doing research in The Netherlands, where since the 20th century the housing market has developed in a highly institutionalised fashion, with important roles for the state, social housing corporations and commercial developers, and the standard ‘consumers’ of housing mainly taking a passive role by simply choosing based on what is available (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016; Boelens & Visser, 2011).

1.2 Relevance

Scientific relevance
Summarising the view on co-housing explained above, this research can contribute to the scientific debate in two ways. Firstly, this research can contribute to the debate about collective citizen involvement in housing development in The Netherlands. Co-housing initiatives of course do not operate in a vacuum; by their involvement with various stakeholders and their professional practices, co-housing group members can be seen to ‘infiltrate’ professional housing development and management practices, and vice versa, housing professionals become involved in the life-world of co-housing members, which potentially blurs the boundaries between the conventional ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’ of housing (c.f. Boonstra, 2016). By considering under which conditions co-housing initiatives can materialise, this research can offer a view on organisational change in the domain of urban housing development and the role of citizen initiatives in urban planning and development in general. In the context of the strongly institutionalised Dutch housing market, a sensitivity to this aspect can also contribute to theoretical insight into the potential effects that citizen initiatives can have on institutionalised professions.

Second, this research makes use of theories of practice, which haven’t been used in the study co-housing as of yet. Instead of focusing on individual agents on the one hand and invisible, impersonal social structures on the other, practice theory suggests to study practices which are “extra-individual” (Trowler, 2014, p. 20). Considering the relevance of practice theory for understanding the dynamics of human action, it can be contrasted to behavioural approaches. Whereas behavioural approaches study individualistic behaviour and the possibility of influencing this behaviour through contextual factors, practice theory has a more holistic approach and sees context and behaviour as bound up through the continuous performance of practices. Hence, behavioural theories tend to see processes of change as causal, while theories of practice sees processes of change as emergent. While behavioural theories see ‘social norms’ and context as variables that act as external pressures on the actions of individuals, practice theory argues that this context is part and parcel of precisely those human actions that behaviourists try to influence. In Rouse’s (2007, p. 505) words: “at one level, practices are composed of individual performances. These performances nevertheless take place, and are only intelligible, against the more or less stable background of other performances”.

While the co-housing literature often mentions co-housing as constituting a practice in itself, this study conceptualises co-housing as a ‘meta-practice’ of various interrelated and
temporally arranged practices. This approach enables a view on the horizon within which co-housing initiatives coordinate their organisation, which in turn can affect this action-horizon (c.f. Nicolini, 2009; Shove et al., 2012). Seeing how the ‘practice of co-housing’ in different social contexts changes and how those changes are related to the elaboration of structure (Trowler, 2014, pp. 23-24) in the field of housing may offer valuable insights for scholars of civic participation in urban development and housing. If co-housing truly can be seen as a viable housing alternative that changes the way we think about and act upon our housing situation, and the source of this changed behaviour lies in the development of specific practices, understanding the emergence of co-housing as a ‘meta-practice’ makes a useful contribution to debates about housing alternatives. In essence, then, this research aims to add to the debate insight into “the extent to which forms of practical knowledge, meaning and competence are themselves forged and reproduced through the process of doing” (Shove et al., 2012, p. 144). In this endeavour, I will draw from multiple theorists of practice, most notably Shove et al. (2012) and Nicolini (2012), and develop a theoretical framework that is attuned to studying a relatively novel practice such as co-housing, which is also hoped to contribute to enriching the knowledge and application of practice theory.

Societal relevance
As an issue that affects all urban dwellers, housing is a continuous theme of societal attention. This research contributes to three broad strands of societal debates in The Netherlands. Firstly, this research sheds a light on the capacities for enabling a bigger role for the demand-side of housing in the housing market. For an increasing group of people individual single-family dwellings no longer represent the ideal housing situation. Co-housing initiatives are reflective of the lack of the housing market to respond to the self-perceived changing needs of a growing group of people, who wish to organise their housing situation in a manner that emphasises more collectiveness, mutualism and self-control.

Secondly, this research contributes to the debate about the role of citizen-involvement in various domains previously dominated by welfare-provision. This need for more citizen-involvement can be placed in a context of a general retreat of welfare-state provision in multiple domains, such as (social) housing provision itself, social cohesion in urban neighbourhoods and (light) care-facilities for specific demographic groups (Bianchi, 2015; Tummers, 2016; Fromm, 2012). Over the last decade Dutch society has witnessed an increase in calls for more active citizenship and responsibility for self-provision in these spheres (see Boonstra, 2015).

Lastly, this research can bring into view the potentials of an emerging cooperative movement in housing. Co-housing can be placed in wider debates about housing alterity in a context of a polarised Dutch housing market, with private ownership solutions for the self-reliant middle-to high income groups on the one side and top-down managed social rental housing for people with low-incomes on the other end (Nijboer & Gruis, 2016; SEV, 2011). Increasingly, social housing associations are forced by the national government to target people at the socio-economic margins of society, while the other end of the housing market demands high budgets, resulting in deteriorating housing opportunities for people who can’t afford private rentals or a mortgage, but are also not eligible for social housing (Qu & Hasselaar, eds., 2011; Garcia & Haddock, 2015). In this debate, co-housing is being thought of as a potential ‘third way’ in the housing market by experimenting with new models of citizen cooperation (Bianchi, 2015; Qu & Hasselaar, eds., 2011).

Because it remains difficult for co-housing initiatives to realise their housing ambitions, it is useful to understand how various parties need to become involved in the process. As Brandsen
& Helderman (2012, p. 191) comment, understanding the emerging demand-side in relation to the dominant supply-side allows for reviewing the potential that institutionalised housing developers, especially the non-profit led Dutch housing corporations, can play in facilitating social innovation without compromising their traditional position. Additionally, co-housing may provide interesting insights for the capacity of civil society to become more self-reliant in the social as well as physical management of their living environments. Understanding co-housing could contribute to discussions about the capacities of citizen-initiatives and housing professionals to realise the demand-side of housing, citizen-involvement with social and physical aspects of living environments, and more generally, the potentials of emergent housing alternatives that are springing from a wider cooperative movement in society.

1.3 Research objective and research questions

The topic of co-housing as a new way of thinking about and acting on the way we create and organise our domestic lives can be approached from multiple angles. The emphasis of this study will lie on what co-housing initiatives actually consist of in their organisational and material sides; in the kind of work that actually goes into co-housing. While co-housing projects can be realised with varying degrees of citizen involvement in housing development, the involvement of the users themselves in the planning and design phase and, after realisation, in the continuation of the project is an important aspect. Therefore, a second part of the research objective is to gain insight in the dynamics of co-housing. The interest here is how the various concerns of co-housing members and collaborating parties develop over time as initiatives concretise into actual housing projects which need to be managed and maintained.

Throughout the research, practices are viewed in the same manner as conceptualised by practice-theorists such as Shove et al (2012) and Nicolini (2009; 2012): as dynamic integrations of multiple material and intangible elements. In order to come to an adequate conceptualisation of co-housing as constituting a practice, we need to bring into view how ‘practitioners’ construct a new concept of housing and act on it. In addition to the description of local accomplishments of co-housing practices within co-housing initiatives, the scope will be broadened to consider as well how co-housing culminates in an integrative practice-net (c.f. Shove et al., 2012; Tummers, 2016); a bundle or a complex of organisational and processual practices that are involved in, and as such affect and are affected by the practice of co-housing.

The main research question that will lead this study is formulated as follows:

How do co-housing practices develop over time as initiatives materialise into concrete projects and what does this mean for (local) housing development practices?

Housing development is of course a very broad activity in which many different types of organisations are involved. In this study the main attention goes out to the housing development practices of governments, housing corporations and, to a lesser extent, commercial developers and urban planners. This choice has been made for feasibility reasons, as well as that this is in accordance with the most important actors in the modern history of housing development in The Netherlands, and the partial conduction of this study in the framework of a research internship commissioned by a partnership of housing corporations.

As explained above, co-housing could be thought of as constituting a nexus of various practices that are important for housing production. Most of these practices are conventionally the
domain of professionals in the housing domain. Because co-housing groups may take on these practices themselves in varying degrees, but are likely to need to collaborate with external parties, it is relevant to see what the opportunities or impediments are for mutual collaboration between co-housing initiatives and the people and organisations that are professionally active in the housing domain:

What are the opportunities and difficulties for collaboration between co-housing initiatives and professional housing development organisations?

Spatial planning is a specific professional domain that is important for co-housing. Co-housing initiatives can be expected to become involved with urban planning practices in various ways. In this research not all possible connections between spatial planning and co-housing will be considered, what is primarily at stake is how the practice of co-housing is enabled or constrained conventional spatial planning practices:

How are co-housing practices related to local spatial planning practices?

As an emergent, innovative housing alternative which seems to be on the rise, but at the same time is not an evident way of housing development, it is evidently relevant to review the reasons people hold for becoming involved with co-housing initiatives. To speak in the language of practice theory, this focus can help explain how the practice of co-housing attracts practitioners. To be clear, these practitioners are not only seen as the members of co-housing initiatives themselves. Practitioners of co-housing can be people who work for organisations that are needed for the realisation of co-housing plans.

What intentions do co-housing initiatives have, and with what reasons do external organisations become involved with co-housing?

Consistent with the previously mentioned ‘starting point’ of user-led and demand-driven housing, this research starts by focussing on the intentions of the groups that constitute the users, and how they bring these aspirations to practice. As the research progresses, it will broaden the view to include the organisational hybridity and processual aspects that are needed to realise co-housing initiatives into concrete housing projects.

As mentioned, the research is partially done on behalf of a partnership of social housing corporations in the city-region of Arnhem-Nijmegen. This coalition formed as part of a regional alliance of housing corporations, which is aimed at cooperation between the corporations on the basis of various themes. Co-housing became one of these themes as a few members of the alliance of corporations witnessed an increase in requests for cooperation by co-housing initiatives. Describing themselves as a ‘coalition of the willing’, the housing corporations that are part of this coalition expressed the desire to increase their knowledge of co-housing by commissioning a research-internship. The present study is the result of the combination of my academic interests in the phenomenon and the research questions of the internship organisation.
1.4 Structure of the thesis

In chapter 2 a history of housing development in the Netherlands from the 20th century onwards will be given. Furthermore, in this chapter the cooperative movement in Dutch housing will be discussed, as well as that descriptions will be given of an existing co-housing model (Centraal Wonen) and the relevance of the instrument of collective private commissioning for contemporary co-housing initiatives. In the ending section of this chapter co-housing will be contextualised in reference to spatial planning. In chapter 3 the practice-theoretical approach to studying co-housing in this research will be outlined. After a brief introduction to practice theory a slim-line version of practice theory as the dynamic integration of tangible and intangible elements, as developed by Shove et al. (2012) is presented as the leading theoretical instrument to conceptualise co-housing practices. Subsequently, aspects of practice theory relevant for this study will be elaborated on: first the relevance of the intangible elements of co-housing practice, the relevance of meaning-making through the collective intentionality of co-housing groups, the dynamism of co-housing practices and, lastly, a consideration of how small scale phenomena like practices relate to the emergence of larger-scale structure-like formations. In chapter 4 the methodological choices of this research will be accounted for. Nicolini’s (2012) suggestion of ‘zooming-in’ and ‘zooming-out’ of practice will serve as the leading strategy. The rationale for a diffuse research strategy that follows the co-housing practice and is not limited to a specific case or location will be explained, before describing the use of expert interviews as the research technique. The results of the research, organised by presenting first the impetus for co-housing groups to form through collective intentions, external and internal collaborations in project development and the maintainance of the meaning of co-housing in a materialised projects, will be described in chapter 5. Lastly, in chapter 6 answers to the research questions will be formulated in the conclusion of this research.
Chapter 2

Co-housing and housing development in The Netherlands

When considering the various temporally arranged practices of co-housing, from the design and development phases to the subsequent continuation in a co-housing project, it is relevant to first understand what forms of or instruments for co-housing already exist in The Netherlands and how co-housing relates to the traditional housing market. To properly understand how co-housing members recreate the meaning of housing - both the physical and social contents of housing and living environments and the social process that lead to them (Vestbro & Horelli, 2012) - we have to get a grasp of against what context these new meanings are created.

In the next paragraph a brief history of 20th century housing development in The Netherlands will be given. Despite the strong institutionalisation of the Dutch housing sector since the 20h century, some user-led approaches to housing that have a form of collectivism at their core have been developed, especially since the late 1970’s. In § 2.2 Centraal Wonen, a Dutch adaptation of the Scandinavian cohousing model will be described. In § 2.3 the topic is collective private commissioning (CPC), a newer housing development instrument that can be used for co-housing. The relevance of the cooperative movement and the potential anchor-point for citizen-initiatives in the public housing sector will be discussed in § 2.4. Lastly, in § 2.5 co-housing will be considered in relation to spatial planning.

2.1 A brief history of housing development in The Netherlands since the 20th century

Dutch housing corporations are the main non-profit housing organisations and nowadays the only party that constructs public housing in The Netherlands (Nijboer & Gruis, 2016). As institutionalised non-profit housing developers that often have explicit societal purposes, housing corporations are often an evident partner for aspiring co-housing groups. Therefore I provide a brief overview of their historical development in The Netherlands, and the way that the expansion of the public housing sector has contributed to the current polarised state between the rental and buying sectors.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in the midst of industrialisation, housing conditions for poor factory workers were slum-like. Mostly initiated by wealthy industrialists and dignitaries who were committed to a social cause, working class citizens became organised in housing associations in order to improve their housing conditions. Members for the associations were recruited on the basis of affiliation, such as work, religion or political preference. New housing construction, however, was still limited and did not adequately address the urgency for more dwellings. Until then the Dutch government was hesitant to intervene in the housing market, but increasingly political voices were uttered that government intervention was needed if the housing conditions of the poor, both in urban and rural areas, were to be improved. At the turn of the century this resulted in the Housing Act of 1901. The Housing Act made it possible for self-organised housing groups to receive state-subsidies for financing their housing projects, allocated via local governments, which eventually led to a significant improvement of the housing conditions of many, and the firmer embedding of the housing associations in Dutch society (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016; Boelens & Visser, 2011; SEV, 2010). In addition to the self-organised housing associations, who mainly constructed for their own followers, municipalities founded municipal housing companies, who constructed for the less self-reliant
population. The housing associations, usually referred to as housing corporations, had a broad public task, which also encompassed investment in liveability aspects. Until recently it was very common for housing corporations to invest in what was called *societal real-estate*: community centres, bathing houses, libraries, schools and so on (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016).

After WWII the housing shortage was so severe that the government took a more firm role in the rebuilding of the housing stock, and the housing associations were made more responsible for execution of government plans. Factually, the government became a client and financer for the housing associations, who increasingly became an extension of the state. Housing development became standardised and had to meet strict requirements, resulting in uniformity in housing provision throughout the country (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016; Qu & Hasselaar, 2011). In other European countries, such as neighbouring Germany and Belgium, the rebuilding of the housing stock was approached in a more decentralised manner, not in the least place out of fear for a renewal of a firm grip of the government after the defeat of National Socialism (Boelens & Visser, 2011; Duivesteijn, 2013; SEV, 2010). The firmer grip of the Dutch state on the housing associations after WWII led to a hollowing out of the original organisational structure and ideological underpinnings of the housing associations. One of the results was that the relationship between residents and housing associations shifted from a shareholder-user perspective to an increasing business-like landlord-tenant relationship (Boelens & Visser, 2011). In the UK, where social housing development also took a flight as the state intervened, similar changes in the relations between the government as a provider and tenant-citizens as clients of social housing have taken place (Hodkinson, 2010, p. 17). Questions of ‘living culture’ on the side of the candidate inhabitants were barely dealt with, which further undermined the original caring, devotional and connecting functions of the housing corporations in The Netherlands (SEV, 2010, p. 12). Nevertheless, as the successes of the strong government-led housing development were large – more than 100,000 new dwellings were constructed annually in the post-war years, and combined with some architectural highlights these accomplishments became internationally renowned – the idea that this was perhaps the best way to do things became prevalent (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016; Boelens & Visser, 2011).

During the 1970’s, the distance between housing corporations and renters became bigger. As general prosperity increased, residents generally became less involved with their living environment as the necessity in terms of a shortage of houses decreased, until the point that in the 1970’s the term ‘housing consumers’ became increasingly commonplace amongst housing corporations and policy makers, implying the final abandonment of residents as members of housing associations. In parallel, housing corporations increasingly took up the form of foundations in order to become independent of participation by their members (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016).

Changing social, economic and political circumstances since the 1980’s have instigated changes in the political perceptions of the role the housing corporations should play and have led to reforms in this part of the Dutch housing sector. After years of political discussion, state subsidies to corporations were finally halted in the 1990’s, and corporations were expected to become independent. The newly gained independence gave room to corporations to further expand their activities, which also included the building of (more speculative) rental housing for the liberalised sector. Furthermore, in order to finance their broad range of tasks, housing corporations relied on market activities, such as selling their housing stock to private parties (Nijboer & Gruis, 2016).
While the large-scale public housing development in the 20th century meant a great improvement in the housing conditions for many in the lower and middle-income groups, starting in the 1950’s, private ownership of housing was increasingly stimulated by several government regulations: a national mortgage guarantee for private households and the expansion of tax benefits for private house owners and developers. A belief took hold that house ownership could contribute to feeling responsible, a sensibility of (economic) savings, cleanliness and family stability (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016, p. 59). Although public rental housing continued to be stimulated via the government-housing corporation construction for 3 decades after the 1950’s, gradually the owner segment became more developed. The tipping point for the rental – owner ratio was reached in 1998, when for the first time in history the owner segment constituted more than half of the housing stock (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016, p. 61). A few years before, around 1990, the public rental sector reached its highest point, when it accounted for one-third of all housing, after which its share gradually decreased (Qu & Hasselaar, 2011).

Since the credit crunch in 2008 the development of new housing slowed and affordable housing, especially for middle-income groups in the big cities, is now again a scarcity in The Netherlands. Furthermore, after infamously failed speculative developments by some housing corporations lead to nationwide public outrage, housing corporations are now again constrained by the state in their activities, being forced to focus on their ‘core task’, which is providing for affordable housing for the lowest income groups (Nijboer & Gruis, 2016; Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016).

The above developments have contributed to the contemporary strong institutionalisation of the Dutch housing market, and its state of polarisation between the rental and the ownership sectors (Boelens & Visser, 2011; Duivesteijn, 2013; SEV, 2011). Consecutive liberal reforms of the housing market aimed to decrease government expenditures in both the owner sector (by retrenching on mortgage-based tax benefits) and the rental sector (first by substituting object subsidies for new developments for subject subsidies for the lowest income groups, then by introducing a new property tax for the corporations), however, fundamental reforms of the housing market haven’t been made as of yet (see especially the criticism of former senator Adri Duivesteijn, 2013). Boelens & Visser (2011, p. 103) describe the general attitude of Dutch citizens towards housing as follows: “nowadays in the Netherlands, it seems to be quite normal for consumers to take a passive role and to find a home according to what is available on the market or what corporations allocate.” Especially lower middle-income groups are now caught in the gap that is left by the different housing sectors, as they are above the income threshold-level to be eligible for public housing, but can’t acquire a mortgage on the buying sector. The private rental sector is not well developed enough to account for this midrange category, which is especially a problem for the increasingly popular larger cities (Schinkel, 2017; Qu & Hasselaar, 2011).

2.2 Co-housing in The Netherlands: Centraal Wonen
Although the housing market in The Netherlands is characterized by its strong institutionalisation and relatively low levels of self-initiative by citizens, in the co-housing world The Netherlands is sometimes mentioned as one of the ‘early adapters’ of especially the Scandinavian model of co-housing with grouped individual units with shared spaces (e.g. Ruiu, 2016). Modern co-housing models first saw the light in The Netherlands in the 1970’s in the form of Centraal Wonen. Reportedly, the first Centraal Wonen project was initiated following a
call to architects in a newspaper by an inhabitant of the city of Nijmegen in 1969, asking for the design of a central kitchen, dining room, laundry room, day-care, study room and a common guesthouse, enclosed by individual residential units (Wandelmeent, 2017). The centrality of shared spaces and facilities explains the term Centraal Wonen, which translates into ‘Central Living’. In 1977 the first actual project based on these ideas was realised in the city of Hilversum in collaboration with a local housing corporation (Wandelmeent, 2017).

Most Centraal Wonen projects that have been developed since started with citizen initiatives and materialised via partnerships with housing corporations. Initially the projects mainly consisted of socially rented housing, inaccessible for households above the income threshold for this section of the housing market (Ruiu, 2016; Tummers, 2016). However, different institutional policy contexts have influenced the tenure structure of these cohousing projects, reflecting the national developments described in the previous section. As national housing policy became more concerned with individual plot and home-ownership, in the 1990’s Centraal Wonen projects were increasingly implemented with mixed forms of ownership, making them more diverse in terms of financial accessibility (Tummers, 2016). Currently, there are an estimated 70 to 80 Centraal Wonen projects in The Netherlands. These projects show variation in aspects such as number of units, tenure structure, physical design and degree of resident participation, but there are a few central tenets of this Dutch co-housing form: residents have private units (as opposed to communes), residents self-manage the projects, there are shared spaces and/or facilities and activities, and, lastly, there must be a certain degree of engagement with the project on behalf of all residents (SNFGW, 2005). Hence, an important goal of Centraal Wonen is community building (Tummers, 2015), and the leading idea is that this can be accomplished by sharing certain spaces, facilities and jointly engaging in decision-making. According to a handbook from the national association for Centraal Wonen, important factors that influence the success of the projects include: having a powerful group of self-organising (future) residents, assuring that residents have a say in the planning and execution of the projects, influence from the residents in allocating residential units that become vacant, being able to count on collaboration of external parties and lastly, the supplementing of knowledge of the participants with expertise and guidance from professionals (SNFGW, 2017).

2.3 Co-housing in The Netherlands II: Collective Private Commissioning

Another variant of co-housing in The Netherlands can be found in projects that make use of collective private commissioning (CPC). CPC is defined as a “collective of likeminded individuals who acquire land(s) and determine in dialogue how and with what parties the dwellings, private, and in some cases even public spaces are designed and realised” (SEV, 2010, p. 7, translation by the author). Against the background of a strongly institutionalised national housing market, the promotion of CPC is intended to stimulate more citizen involvement and choice in the Dutch housing market. However, CPC was also promoted by governments at a time when conventional ‘institutional’ housing development was at a historical low-point as a consequence of the global financial crisis (Zandvoort et al., 2013; SEV, 2010; Qu & Hasselaar, 2011). In CPC the initiative may come from citizens themselves or from a landowner, often a municipality, but in both instances the idea is that it is the citizen collective that engages in the design and development of their new housing (Agentschap NL, 2012). As such, CPC always involves a certain degree of collaboration amongst residents. Seen in this light, expectations of CPC by planners and administrators involve social aspects that relate to stimulating an active community of residents and facilitating social cohesion in urban areas (Zandvoort et al., 2013).
There are more perceived benefits, such as expectations of diversity in architecture and lower housing costs for residents. Provincial governments in The Netherlands stimulate CPC with subsidies and loans (e.g. Provincie Gelderland, 2017). Although the emphasis on CPC in national housing development visions has shifted since its inclusion in 2000 (SEV, 2010), the relative broad support by lower governments for CPC could be seen as reflecting a societal desire for more user-led approaches to housing development (c.f. Zandvoort et al., 2013).

In contrast with expectations, however, evaluations of CPC projects have indicated that they tend to involve higher costs than ‘regular’ supply-led development. The reason for this is that the costs that are potentially saved on project developers are spent again on professional guidance and high-quality amenities in and around the houses (SEV, 2010; Boelens & Visser, 2011). Although shared spaces and facilities are not inherent to CPC projects, the desire by residents for collective management of outside spaces and/or to share certain spaces and facilities have been found in the evaluations of CPC projects (Boelens & Visser, 2011; SEV, 2010). Zandvoort et al. (2013) distinguish between an emphasis on “building together” and “living together” in CPC projects in The Netherlands and their German counterparts Baugruppen and Baugemeinschaften. This indicates that depending on the intentionality of collectives, CPC may enable the realisation of aspirations of living with shared spaces and facilities, as in the Centraal Wonen concept. Boelens’ & Visser (2011) substantiate this expectation in their evaluation, which found increased desires of sharing spaces and facilities amongst CPC projects when compared to regular private commissioning projects. In the same study, increased social cohesion was also often stated amongst CPC projects, but these perceptions were mainly related to the projects themselves and not the surrounding areas, with some indications of feelings of living enclosed, or in a ‘gated community’ (Boelens & Visser, 2011), a frequently heard concern about the perceived benefits of co-housing models (e.g. Chioldelli, 2015; Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012; Tummers, 2015; Droste, 2015; Sullivan, 2016).

Also important for this research is the conclusion of Boelens & Visser (2011) that initiatives from citizens themselves have largely been ignored or neglected, with municipality-driven projects receiving more attention. A number of authors seem to agree that in order to realise the full potential of CPC, government administrators and urban planners need to put more trust in the citizen-led collectives themselves and take a more facilitating role in the development process (e.g. Zandvoort et al., 2013; Boelens & Visser, 2011; SEV, 2010). Boonstra & Boelens (2011) argue that the failure by municipalities to recognise the importance of citizen-led initiatives in spatial planning via participatory planning is a wider issue in The Netherlands. This points to the relevance CPC has for practices of self-organised housing. If the initiatives are predominantly coordinated by municipalities and developers, who make land plots available for specific groups that fit their requirements, it would be more difficult to argue for CPC as a real ‘user-led’ housing alternative as citizens do not take the decisive role. In Tummers’ (2015, p. 69) words, when considering the relevance of CPC for user-led development one could ask what the possible consequences of appropriation by public authorities are.

2.4 The cooperative movement and housing in The Netherlands
The cooperative movement has its origins in prevailing social problems in the second half of the 19th century, in the industrialising United Kingdom. The cooperative thought can be seen as a societal or a political-economic movement that spread throughout Europe, mainly in the agricultural sector, but also spreading to other sectors in society where widespread problems of the working classes were attempted to be improved via cooperation (Van Der Sangen, 1999).
Since then, cooperatives seem to spring up especially in times of crisis, also in the housing sector.

Housing cooperatives are not new in The Netherlands, in fact, a lot of the contemporary housing corporations actually started as cooperatives that aimed to improve the housing conditions of their members. One of the first was the Rochdale cooperative for labourers of the tramway in Amsterdam, the name referring to the English town of Rochdale, which is where the cooperative movement started and spread from. In order to be eligible for the government subsidies allocated through the Housing Act of 1901, the various housing cooperatives had to change their organisational structure because the profit-sharing possibilities of the cooperative model were not in accordance with the public task they were to fulfil. Potential profits resulting from public investments were to be invested again in the societal cause: the development of more affordable housing (Van Der Lans & Pflug, 2016; Van Der Sangen, 1999).

In contrast to The Netherlands, in countries like Germany, Denmark and Sweden, the housing cooperative is still a widely known housing concept that constitutes a non-neglectable share of the respective national housing stocks (Brandsen & Helderman, 2009a; 2012). It is estimated that in the current EU about 10% of all housing is managed by cooperatives (Pit, 2017). It must be said that some of the bigger, traditional housing cooperatives, for instance those in Germany, broadly resemble Dutch housing corporations in their contemporary characteristic of having little binding power between the tenant-member and the directing boards, whose roles are that of landlords. Nevertheless, in The Netherlands the cooperative housing model is far less self-evident than it is abroad.

According to former senator Duivesteijn (2013), the debate about housing in The Netherlands was (and still is) framed too much around questions of finances, markets and instruments, and too little around the fundamental questions relating to who should or could be responsible for housing supply, neglecting what citizens could do themselves. His plead for creating the preconditions necessary to allow for more citizen involvement in public housing found its way to the Housing Act of 2015, in which housing cooperatives are formally included in public housing legislation (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2017; Platform31, 2016a). The definition of housing cooperatives in the Housing Act is formulated as follows: “A housing cooperative is an association with full legal competence, which aims to enable its members to be fully self-sufficient in the management and maintenance of the dwelling they inhabit and its directly surrounding area” (cited in Platform31, 2016a, p. 5, translation by the author). This inclusion of the housing cooperative in the Housing Act of 2015 should be seen as a gesture to enable more citizen involvement in the public housing domain. The government requires these cooperatives to become associations after their establishment as a cooperative, according to Dutch law, has at its objective to make profits for its members, which contradicts the social objectives of the housing cooperative in the Housing Act.

Broadly speaking, there are 3 types of housing cooperatives enabled by the new legislation, of which hybrid versions are also possible. The first is the ‘cooperative of buyers’, where individual house owners collectively organise tasks of management and maintenance. The second type is the ‘management cooperative’, where the housing corporation remains the owner of the real estate, but the residents collectively organise management and maintenance through a cooperative. For corporations the delegation of management to tenants may be interesting as it could mean a cost reduction on their part. The third type, cooperative ownership of real estate by residents, qualifies as the most innovative type; an intermediary form
of housing between the owner and (public) rental segments (Platform31, 2017a). However, this third type is also the most ambitious.

Urban expert organisation Platform31 (2017b) argues that housing cooperatives in The Netherlands are interesting for specific groups of people in specific urban contexts: in shrinking regions where corporations (and other services and facilities) are retreating, in city districts where public housing is privatised or replaced with more expensive new developments, for elderly who like to continue living independently but with presence of (care) services, for lower middle income groups who are not eligible for public housing but for whom private renting or buying is too expensive (especially in larger cities), and lastly, for existing co-housing groups (e.g. Centraal Wonen) who no longer fit in the policy of corporations as they represent a deviation from their core task. Hence, in a lot of cases the cooperative is an instrument to convert the ownership of corporation housing to resident-led collectives who take full responsibility and make their own collective choices regarding the social and material aspects of their housing.

Contemplation about the potential of housing cooperatives in The Netherlands is not limited to Duivesteijn’s endeavours. Exploratory researches have been conducted for quite some time - often in countries where cooperatives are common (e.g. Germany, Sweden) - on behalf of housing corporations and the organisation that preceded Platform31, the former “Steering Group Experiments Public Housing” (e.g. Helderman & Brandsen, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2012; SEV, 2011). However, since the inclusion of cooperatives in the Housing Act, questions and applications from citizen initiatives are on the rise. The difficulty with the phenomenon of the housing cooperative in The Netherlands mainly has to do with its novelty; as both citizens and parties that are usually involved with housing provision and urban development are unfamiliar with it, the process of applying the concept is characterized by trial and error experiences of citizen initiatives in practice (Platform31, 2017a; 2017b). Banks are still hesitant to provide financing for cooperatives, which on their part often lack adequate preparation business-wise (Platform31, 2016b). Current practices of cooperative housing in The Netherlands are mainly aimed at stabilising this form of housing as a niche within the Dutch housing market (e.g. Cooplink, 2017), but it is not sure what the future holds for this type of organisation.

CW and CPC practices and the current cooperative housing initiatives seem to have in common that they can be described in terms of a cooperative movement where groups of citizens collectively give voice to their housing needs and aspirations and seek opportunities to realise their ambition. However, these types of collective citizen initiatives do not operate in a vacuum and their success depends to a large degree on their ability to balance their aspirations with local spatial planning objectives, and the mutual capacity to collaborate of co-housing initiatives on the one side and various stakeholders in the housing domain on the other side.

2.5 Co-housing and spatial planning in The Netherlands

2.5.1 Relating co-housing to spatial planning

Tummers (2011; 2015) argues that the ‘moment’ that co-housing ‘meets’ spatial planning varies according to the conception of spatial planning. She distinguishes between the challenges for co-housing in planning systems that mainly relate to the process of planning and the challenges relating to the substance of planning. In co-housing initiatives, citizens assume an unusual role because instead of being merely ‘consumers’ of housing and associated technological
infrastructures (water and energy), co-housing groups become commissioners, co-producers and sometime even constructors of their own housing projects. Each project demands its own tailor-made solutions, where citizens self-decide or deliver the input for the financial models, forms of (shared) tenure and governance of their own groups to account for the input of their members (Tummers, 2011, p. 168).

On the substance side of spatial planning other problems are faced by co-housing initiatives. As the nuclear family model is so deeply entrenched in housing and architecture standards, the realisation of co-housing aspirations can be problematic as initiatives often challenge conventional boundaries between public and private, as well as that they involve mixed income accomodations, mixed uses and unconventional designs, which may not comply with zoning plan details, housing allocation criteria and standard housing requirements. All these aspects may impede the obtention of building permission (Tummers, 2011, p. 171).

According to Tummers (2016, p.2035), together with the amount of shared space, the degree of self-reliance constitutes the foremost characteristic of co-housing. In the wider co-housing movement, differing degrees of these two characteristics can be found. Based on these characteristics, a rough distinction between various co-housing projects can be made (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: differentiation of housing matrix (derived from Tummers, 2016, p. 2034).](image)

While both the process and content of planning are equally important for co-housing initiatives to materialise, in this study the emphasis lies on process related aspects of co-housing and the degree of self-reliance of initiatives in the development process. Therewith we can come to an interpretation of the ways that co-housing initiatives become involved in the professional practices of housing developers and the interweaving of co-housing with local planning practices. To help this interpretation, the concept of co-production and its relevance to co-housing will be discussed hereunder.

2.5.2 The role of co-housing initiatives in the planning process: co-production
In considering the embedding of co-housing in local governance systems in Germany, Droste (2015) discusses how the adaptation of land-use policies, planning frameworks and communication processes in order to facilitate co-housing initiatives by pioneering municipalities with high demands for such forms of housing have been experienced as patronising by co-housing initiators. The experiences of patronisation found by Droste (2015) underline the tension between allowing for truly ‘bottom-up’ or ‘grassroots’ development of
housing and providing a policy-framework for allowing this to happen. More generally, Albrechts (2015, p. 514) argues that there is a challenge for contemporary politics “in the dialectic between movements that seek democratization, collective decision making, and empowerment of citizens on the one hand and the established institutions and structures that seek to reabsorb such demands into a distributive framework on the other”. Put simply, depending on how co-housing initiatives are accommodated for by local governments, by becoming ‘too’ institutionalised the very important aspect of self-control of co-housing groups can become undermined.

According to Droste the ultimate challenge for municipalities is how to foster far-reaching citizen-participation in the form of co-production (Droste, 2015, pp. 83-84). Co-production is a concept that has been suggested to analyse citizen participation in the provision of public services, regardless of the provider (Pestoff et al, 2011, p. 2). Housing takes an important place in public service provision because of the relations that exist between the quality of housing and living environments on the one hand, and personal quality of life and individual lifestyle expressions on the other (Brandsen & Helderman, 2012, p. 169). In considering under what conditions co-production can succeed, Brandsen & Helderman (2012) argue that the advantages of vertical coordination of housing development by institutionalised powerful players and ‘bottom-up’ initiatives need to be integrated if the full potential of collective, self-reliant housing initiatives are to succeed. While institutional housing developers have the power and capacity to contribute to urban development, citizen initiatives can enable the grassroots growth of ‘community’ and stimulate self-management. Helderman & Brandsen argue that this can only be achieved by collaborations between relatively small initiatives and larger institutions that strike a balance between giving a helping hand and taking a ‘hands off’ approach by allowing for self-reliance on the part of the initiatives. Importantly, the latter would involve that initiatives bear at least some of the (financial) risk (Brandsen & Helderman, 2012, p. 190).

A similar point is made by Boelens & Visser (2011), who advocate the adoption of an “outside-in” approach to urban development, by which they mean that planning professionals should start and end with the (human and non-human) subjects and networks in the planning process. Despite the long tradition of participatory planning in The Netherlands, plans often fail to incorporate the voices of citizens themselves, reverting to an “inside-out” approach, which starts with the formulation of goals, making of designs and proposing these to external parties, who are then invited to ’cooperate’ (Boelens & Visser, 2011, p. 15). Taking the right approach to co-housing from a planning perspective would mean that municipalities and local housing professionals take the citizen initiatives as the starting and ending point of the planning process, striking the right balance between guidance and a ‘hands-off’ approach. It should be noted, however, that co-production is not something that can be perfectly achieved. Instead it should be seen as a normative and ethical process that involves a change of the status quo of spatial planning (Albrechts, 2015, p. 516). Hence, analysing the role of co-housing groups in local spatial planning practices possibly tells something about their successes and failures to challenge conventional modes of housing production and their capacity to realise their ambitions.
Chapter 3
Theoretical framework: towards a theory of co-housing practice

To gain insight in the various dynamics of co-housing, this research makes use of practice theory. The core of the theoretical framework is a relational view on the organisation of co-housing. The ‘practice of co-housing’ in The Netherlands will be viewed both from the dynamics ‘within’ individual co-housing groups, as well as from the possibility that co-housing dynamics transcend individual projects and become imbricated in ‘translocal’ practices in the domain of urban housing development. By studying local accomplishments of co-housing and broadening the view to consider how these local accomplishments are themselves enmeshed in a texture of multiple practices, this research adds a view on co-housing as constituting a ‘practice-net’ within which multiple practices are connected to each other. As initiatives move through the stages towards materialisation of their envisioned housing projects, they combine various practices to realise their housing aspiration.

3.1 An introduction to practice theory

Practice theory is being developed as an attempt to bridge dialectic approaches in social sciences, most notably the perceived opposition between thinking about society in terms of grand structures that steer ‘the whole’ and the opposed view that it would be more useful to think in terms of rational agents whose cumulative choices and actions shape the organisation of social life (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 2-3). The roots of practice theory can be traced back as far as certain interpretations of Marxism, and in the works of Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Bourdieu. These philosophers have inspired contemporary social theorists and philosophers, such as Giddens, Reckwitz and Schatzki to elaborate on the role of practices in the making of the social world. Although there is no “unified theory of practice”, Nicolini (2012) speaks of “family resemblances” between the writings of these thinkers. Importantly, when it comes to structure - agency dynamics, Shove et al. (2012) argue that practice theory chimes best with Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory. The expectation of theories of practice is that they have the potential to provide an instrument for explaining processes of change, without risking the pitfall of giving priority to human agency and choice and for conceptualising stability without treating it as an outcome of an overarching given structure (Shove et al., 2012, p. 4). Studying and theorising about practices is relevant because of the reciprocal relationship between practices and organisation: “the essential idea is that practices constitute the site of organisation and that organisational phenomena transpire through, and are effects of, a texture of interconnected practices” (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1392). In this thinking about the relationship between human agency and social structure, instead of seeing practices as “points of passage between human subjects and social structure” (Shove et al., 2012, p. 5), practices are put centre stage. Therefore, theories of practice try to do more than studying human behaviour. In practice theory, practices reflect the horizon within which humans coordinate their everyday life, and in turn these practices can shape and change this action-horizon (Nicolini, 2009; Shove et al., 2012). Our practices determine our behaviour, and consequently, “if the source of changed behaviour lies in the development of practices, understanding their emergence, persistence and disappearance is of essence” (Shove et al., 2012, p. 2).

Hence, the intention is to use practice theory as a lens to explain the possibility of co-housing as a change in Dutch housing development. Now that new housing models and tools for collective
citizen involvement are being implemented, it is relevant to reconsider the mutual influence between co-housing and the institutionalised ways of housing development.

3.2 A simplified conceptualisation of co-housing practice

Put simply, practices are understood by practice theorists as combinations of observable actions, like sayings and socio-material doings, thus including the use of objects, and the tacit, incorporated knowledge through which observable actions acquire meaning (Nicolini, 2009; Shove et al., 2012; Bueger, 2014). A graphic representation of this conceptualisation as proposed by Bueger (2014) is depicted in Figure 2, where the observable part of practices are constituted by ‘bodily movements’ and ‘artifacts’.

![Figure 2: visualisation of the concept of practices by Bueger, 2014.](image)

Shove et al. (2012) propose a ‘slim version’ conceptualisation of practices, similar to Bueger’s, but restricting the role of what Bueger and other practice theorists see as the strictly unobservable part of what constitutes practices. Shove et al. conceptualise practices as the integration of three core elements: materials, competences and meanings. These elements are highly interrelated and mutually constitutive, and as such cannot truly be seen as separate elements. However, Shove et al. are proposing a radically simplified theory of practice, and argue that for analytical purposes thinking of practices as the linking of these three elements is a useful way to analyse the dynamics of practices.

In their conceptualisation, materials encompass “objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and the body itself”. Competences refer to “multiple forms of understanding and practical knowledgeability”, and lastly, the element of meaning describes “the social and symbolic significance of participation at any one moment” (Shove et al., 2012, p. 23). Applied to co-housing, we can think of the relevance of urban settings, such as available building sites, from empty plots available for development to existing structures awaiting a new destination, but also the built environment, the design of housing projects, the ways that practitioners physically conduct themselves in these settings, documents that dictate planning and building regulations or legislation under the Housing Act, articles of association of initiatives, finances and so on. Competences could include the organisational skills that are needed to keep a co-housing group together and move it forward, as well as the judgment of appropriate behaviour, of ‘learning’ what can and what cannot be done in co-housing groups or in the domain of housing development. Practical competences in the sense of skills needed for co-housing are often spread actively by advocacy groups for (specific forms of) co-housing (Tummers, 2016; e.g.
SNFGW, 2005). Furthermore, knowledge of spatial spatial planning procedures, governance and institutions that are active in the housing domains can also be competences that are relevant for co-housing. Lastly, the element of meaning could include the ways that forms of co-housing are perceived, related to the collective intentions, or (aspired) life styles of members of co-housing groups, which may involve aspects of intentional living arrangements as well as meanings ascribed to collectively taking responsibility for a housing situation (c.f. Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Hasanov & Beaumont, 2016). Importantly, meanings can influence the popularity and general acceptance of a practice (Shove et al., 2012). Hence, what it means to ‘do’ co-housing can influence the degree of attraction of co-housing as a practice, both for residents and professionals. Meanings ascribed to co-housing by important ‘outsiders’ – such as housing corporations, project developers, municipalities and so on – can influence the degree of willingness of powerful stakeholders to support co-housing initiatives. The latter aspect is crucial; often co-housing initiatives have failed because administrators and institutional housing developers perceive it as a fringe phenomenon and potential financiers are reluctant to provide loans to a phenomenon they are not familiar with. The recent inclusion of housing cooperatives in the national Housing Act potentially allows for new legal opportunities when co-housing initiatives involve social housing, however, so far obtaining financing remains an important obstacle for such initiatives (Brandsen & Helderman, 2012; Tummers, 2016; Platform31, 2017a). Returning to Shove et al.’s (2012) slim-line theory of practice, the configurations of materials, competences and meanings of co-housing can change over time; links are made and broken and some elements may lose importance or be replaced by new elements, therewith influencing the performance and trajectory of the co-housing practice.

Seen from a practice-theoretical point of view, co-housing could be argued to remain a niche in the Dutch housing market as the links between the necessary competences, meanings and materials that are needed to get co-housing projects going have not proven to be very durable through history. For instance, the meaning of housing cooperatives at the start of the 20th century changed as housing shortages became so severe that the national government intervened. As a result, the backbone of the initial cooperatives, the tenant-members, were cut-off from the directing boards. While competences of tenant-members in the housing domain potentially could grow, this potential was soon undermined by national policy to combat housing shortage. The ensuing institutionalisation of the housing domain and its quantitative successes in combating housing shortages by large scale development of individual single-family dwellings left little room for groups of citizens who might want to do things differently. Some change occurred as housing shortages decreased and a specific form of co-housing, Centraal Wonen, gained momentum. However, the dominant perceptions of Centraal Wonen – both in the professional housing domain and society at large – is that of a very specific communal-type of housing that implies complicated and time-consuming coordination of management and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the confinement of the housing corporation sector’s activities has meant that CW groups may see their autonomy under pressure as they have to comply with stricter admittance regulations (Platform31, 2017b). Taken together, the texture within which co-housing practices in The Netherlands are situated, the practices of ‘other’ people, institutions and organisations, have left little room for a niche practice, which would need adaptation on the part of both the ‘producers’ and the ‘consumers’ of housing, as well as of housing rules and regulations. However, as explained above, there are signs that this is changing. Fuelled by societal developments and increasingly tight urban housing markets where little is being developed for certain categories of people, citizen collectives are taking matters in their own hands and find solutions in new instruments such as CPC and housing cooperatives.
According to Bueger (2014, p. 386), practice researchers are eventually after the ‘invisible’ elements of practices, in his own conceptualisation termed ‘implicit knowledge’, as practices are thought of as being the carriers and mediators of such knowledge. Bueger (2014, p. 386) thus argues that in order to understand social order practice researchers should study the practices that constitute such orders of knowledge. Rouse (2007) similarly argues that this ‘tacit’ knowledge, also referred to as ‘background knowledge’ or ‘collective norms’, are important for any theory of practice, as it is against these backgrounds that people carry out their practices; based on what is acceptable according to the norm (Rouse, 2007). However, there are varying ways in which people act upon a norm: they either completely and implicitly accept it and do not diverge from it, or they consciously interpret it and choose the way that they perform the practice (Rouse, 2007). Thinking of co-housing as an innovative or novel form of housing, practitioners of co-housing then pose an interesting case. As co-housing practitioners are forced to go beyond conventional practice in housing development if they are to realise their ambitions, they are more likely to find themselves in the latter category: they know the conventional ‘way’ of housing, but they interpret it and choose it doesn’t suit them, or to simply do it differently. Different models of co-housing rest on some shared goal of their members, which goes beyond what the housing market has to offer. In some way then, practitioners of co-housing ‘decode’ their background knowledge about what is desirable as a dwelling, living environment and/or mode of development and management of housing, and reconstruct it.

It needs to be acknowledged that such orders of knowledge can only be interpreted and not ‘known’ only by what can be observed (see Figure 2). There are varying conceptualisations of these invisible orders of knowledge, especially in reference to what the role of language is: can these orders of knowledge be made explicit through language, or not? In Rouse’s (2007, p. 515) words; “the conceptions of what a “practice” is thus range from understanding practices as pre-linguistic and perhaps ‘inarticulable’, to accounts of social life as thoroughly linguistically constituted. Bypassing the discussion of the possibility of ‘articulability’, although recognising the highly implicit, embodied nature of this background knowledge, according to Eikeland & Nicolini (2011) practice researchers should focus on helping practitioners to articulate these orders of knowledge, in simple terms ‘what they already do’. For Nicolini (2009, p. 1392) “practices [...] always need to be drawn to the fore, made visible and turned into an epistemic object in order to enter discourse”. In the language of science technology studies, it is about ‘un-black-boxing’ practices: describing in detail what is assumed as self-evident in the performance of practices. Co-housing could represent the ‘un-black-boxing’ of both the process of housing development and the content of a living environment. Instead of simply choosing based on what is available on the market, co-housing involves the deliberate reconstruction of a housing model.

The recognition that these ‘orders of knowledge’ cannot be known (in the strict sense) points to the highly interpretative nature of this study. Staying in line with Shove et al.’s conceptualisation of practices, orders of knowledge are replaced by the element of meaning. In the following paragraph the relevance of this element for co-housing will be elaborated on.
3.4 Coming to co-housing: collective meaning-making

As Nicolini (2009, p. 1393) explains, all practices emerge around an object of work (the materials) or a prospective outcome, which provides the direction, motivation and coordination for activities. While, simply put, the object of work in co-housing is the house and the living environment, the subjects, or meanings, that this object represents can be versatile. As the literature indicates, co-housing represents a new way of organising various aspects of modern life. As a movement in the housing domain, co-housing could be viewed as a qualitative mission that is about new ways of thinking about (and acting on) the way living environments are created and inhabited. Therefore the intentions of co-housing initiatives, relating to their aspirations for housing or ‘living arrangements’ (Jarvis, 2015) and how these intentions might become relevant for professionals in the field of urban planning and development are of interest for this study. As Brandsen & Helderman (2012, p. 170) argue “co-production in housing must begin with communities of individuals with a shared goal”. To become familiar with these interests of citizen collectives, we have to look how co-housing groups are formed and what drives these people to engage with a co-housing initiative. Using a recurrent term from the co-housing literature, this part of the research aims to get insight into the ‘why’ of ‘intentional communities’, whether these communities emphasise “building together”, “living together” or both (c.f. Zandvoort et al., 2013). In the process towards realisation of collective housing aspirations, intentions need to be formulated for guiding the initiatives. Through their collective intentions, co-housing as a practice acquires meaning for the members of initiatives and other involved actors (c.f. Shove et al., 2012). As such, collective intentionality can provide a means for ‘internal’ and ‘external’ collaboration of co-housing initiatives. Hence, shedding a light on collective intentionality can help to come to the possibility of an interpretation of the meanings that help shape co-housing as a practice, and potentially even the background knowledge against which these meanings are constructed.

In their account of the importance of collective intentionality for self-organised citizen initiatives, Hasanov & Beaumont (2016, p. 238) define intentions as “the action of directing our minds to achieve self-perceived goals or objectives”. These intentions reside within individuals, but they can also be shared, and importantly, any collective action is dependent on this reciprocal sharing of intent by individuals (Tollefsen & Gallagher, 2017; Hasanov & Beaumont, 2016). It can be expected that co-housing groups form from the sharing of certain intentions. Joint action in co-housing – realising or maintaining a co-housing project - can only occur if there is a consciousness of some shared intention on the part of every individual of the group (c.f. Tuomela & Miller, 1988).

The literature about co-housing suggests that the intentionality of co-housing projects can vary in different contexts and urban settings; people may find each other in a common housing aspiration driven by idealism - aspirations of life in close-knit communities and/or high ecological standards have been covered by the co-housing literature at large - and engage in a new housing development, but people may also self-organise based on more pragmatic motivations, such as the availability of an attractive land plot or building for housing development, the revitalisation of urban area’s, the lack of affordable and qualitative housing, or the forthcoming demolition or privatisation of (public) housing stock. Furthermore, the significance that people may attribute to having control over developing and maintaining their own housing project and the (public) space it produces could figure as an important meaning for co-housing initiators as well. Hodkinson (2010; 2012) has tried to review various housing alternatives, amongst which tenant-led housing cooperatives and co-housing schemes, based on a notion of coming to “a pre-figurative praxis of creating spaces of social commons [...]”
The self-determination of citizen collectives taking their housing situation in their own hands could be interpreted as an appropriation, the taking of ownership over both the process and content of housing development.

When aspiring co-housers form a group on the basis of such shared intention they can form an initiative. However, sharing certain housing intentions does not mean that all participants share intentions for the same reasons, which could influence their efficiency to collaborate. The degree to which the background motivations and reasons of intentions are also shared amongst individuals that participate in the collective action is conceptualised as the depth of shared intentionality (Tollefsen & Gallagher, 2017). Sullivan (2016) found that while the collective intention of living in a close-knit co-housing community in an initiative in the U.S. was the leading motive, the members had varying background reasons for this intention. Sullivan explains how the background reasons for collective intentions in this initiative were mostly imagined, as the reasons were not always shared nor was there always good reason to assume that these expectations would come about when compared with the plans of the collective (Sullivan, 2016). According to Tollefsen & Gallagher, if background reasons of collective intentions are the same across all participants in a collective action, there is complete depth, and conversely, if all individuals participate for different reasons, the collective intentionality is shallow. Although participants in co-housing initiatives may share the same intentions (e.g. community-building), they may do so for reasons that are not shared amongst all participants. Similarly, although there may be a shared intention for collectively developing a place for co-residence, an often heard issue for co-housing initiatives is disagreement amongst group members on the site where to situate their eventual housing project (e.g. Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012). Tollefsen & Gallagher (2017) argue that the depth of collective intentionality is especially important to consider the ability of groups to respond to complex cases of shared action where there is no clear agreement about how to proceed, such as in situations of conflict. If all participants join in the shared action for the same reasons, when a problem arises they expectedly will be better able to solve the problem than when there are differences in the background reasons for participation. In this way, it is thought that the depth of collective intentionality could influence its stability over time (Tollefsen & Gallagher, 2017).

There is reason to expect that the collective intentionality of co-housing initiatives, their objectives, are challenged most in the planning and development phase. During the planning and development process co-housing groups are likely to be required to make compromises to their aspirations as some parts of their aspirations might not be realisable for varying reasons (see also § 2.5; Tummers, 2011; 2015). Furthermore, some members might defect from the initiative in the process, therewith leaving an empty spot for new members who bring their own ideas and desires to the collective. Some members of initiatives might have fewer difficulties to make compromises to their intentions than others, but within the initiatives consensus is needed in order for the project to go forward. Individual interests and changes in individual preferences need to be balanced with the interests and preferences of the group (e.g. Jarvis, 2011). Hamiduddin & Gallant (2016) found that only when collective goals prevail over individual interest and preferences are group self-build projects to succeed. This recognition of the priority of collective over individual interests is resonated by theory on collective action in the production and management of public and common goods and services (Ostrom, 2000; Pestoff, 2011). However, even if it is likely that the intentions of co-housing groups undergo the most important transformations during the planning and development process, also after realisation of projects the continuation of group forming processes and negotiation and
evaluation of intentions are important aspects that can influence the trajectories of collective organisation in co-housing projects (e.g., Jarvis, 2015).

3.5 The dynamics of co-housing practice

Both Boonstra (2016) and Jarvis (2015) emphasise that co-housing practices of single co-housing initiatives, both in the sense of planning and in the sense of a certain way of living, are in a continuous process of becoming. This is consistent with the conceptualisation of practices as being dynamic, non-fixed processes (Shove et al., 2012).

In this study it is important to recognise that the practice of co-housing is non-linear, i.e. not a process that is building up until the ultimate goal of a certain type of self-created living environment is reached. As already suggested, conceptualising co-housing as a practice of group-based, user-led housing development means a sensitivity to the trajectories of co-housing groups. While co-housing initiatives emerge out of certain demands from consumers of housing, and thus, as explained above, reflect a more or less defined intentionality, the realisation of co-housing demands compromises and adaptation of these intentions as initiators need to collaborate with diverse actors in the preparatory phase and can be confronted with obstacles in materialising their intentions (e.g., Boonstra, 2016; Tummers, 2011; 2015). Additionally, adaptations to changing situations in the continuation of co-housing projects after the implementation phase, such as resident turnover or maintenance requirements, can put the original collective intentions under pressure (Jarvis, 2015). Hence, by considering the stability of collective intentions of co-housing initiatives over time, the degree to which the ‘past selves’ of co-housing initiatives govern their future actions (Tollefsen & Gallagher, 2017, p. 96), a view can be offered on the dynamics of co-housing practices.

However, the notion of dynamism in co-housing practices is somewhat at odds with attempts to conceptualise practices. This thought relates to what Bueger (2014, p. 391) calls the “problem of routine”. If practices are continuously becoming, how can a conceptualisation of a practice even be made? This is because practices are also routinised patterns. Overcoming this problem, according to Bueger, means reflexivity to both routine and emergence: “it can only be addressed by a continuous reflexivity towards the concomitance of the emergent, innovative side of practice and the repetitive, reproducing one” (Bueger, 2014, p. 391). In other words, the boundaries of practices shift as performing a practice is always an act of poiesis, but at the same time the practice remains more or less identifiable, and not everything ‘goes’ in any practice. Nicolini (2012) calls this the appreciation of the performance of practices as “bounded creativity”. According to Rouse (2007, p. 507) the concomitance of routinisation and dynamism of practices underline the siding of theories of practice with Gidden’s argument that structure and agency are mutually constitutive. Performances of practices are structured by their routinisation; some general agreed upon ‘manner’ of how the practice should be performed. Simultaneously, incremental or radical changes in the enactment of practices or the meanings ascribed to it can mean that the practice as a structuring factor is subject to change through agency. Consider the wide acceptance of supply-led institutional housing development in The Netherlands; depending on the intentions of co-housing groups, it is possible that housing professionals and co-housing initiatives hold different opinions on what constitutes the ‘right way’ of housing development. At the same time, within the co-housing movement, their may be different opinions or considerations of what ‘counts’ as co-housing.
The structure – agency dynamic described above is congruent with Shove et al.’s (2012) analytical distinction between “practices-as-entities” and “practices-as-performances”. Simply put, practices-as-entities can undergo certain trajectories as materials, meaning and competences are integrated through the ongoing performance of these practices. Both routine and emergence are important to consider when studying the dynamics of co-housing, both seen on the single project level and as a movement in housing development in general. In this study the emergence of co-housing as a practice, just as its ‘routinisation’ will be considered jointly by giving attention to the trajectories that initiatives undergo as they find their way from the inception of a group to the planning and development processes and their subsequent continuation into actual housing projects.

3.6 Questions of scale: how the small and the big interrelate

While social research often involves a way of ‘looking up’, i.e. assuming that social wholes are knowable and controllable, and consequently is concerned with revealing the ‘big system’ and abstract principles, practice theory is also a way of ‘looking down’: apprehending the local and the non-coherent (Bueger, 2014, p. 389). Practice theory is concerned with the study of practices on the ‘micro’ level, or on the ‘local accomplishments of practices’ (Nicolini, 2009; Bueger, 2014), but most authors argue that this ‘zooming in’ movement is only part of the job and practice theory is eventually interested in how practices connect, integrate and form ‘nets’, ‘bundles’ or ‘complexes’ of practices (Shove et al., 2012; Bueger, 2014; Nicolini, 2009; 2012). Consequently, practice theory involves a problem of scale: how can big formations or structures be known through the study of phenomena as ‘small’ as practices?

Bueger (2014, pp. 390-391) provides three answers to this problem of scale for practice theory. The first is that practice theory is open in scale: in order to study practice there is no prescription to any scale in time and space. It is equally appropriate to study seemingly ‘big scale’ phenomena (e.g. global financial markets) as well as what conventionally would be seen as a typically ‘small scale’ phenomenon (e.g. everyday actions in a bank office). When studying practices, it is argued that “no distinct level of aggregation” is considered the most appropriate (Bueger, 2014, p. 390). The second suggestion to overcome the problem of scale is that studying practices does not always mean that practices have to be untangled in all their complexity. Often an overview of a practice-net will already be a meaningful contribution. Lastly, practice theorists who subscribe to a radical relational ontology often reject any notion of natural scales: here scales are argued to be social constructs and practice theorists should be concerned with reconceptualising and transcending the divisions between such notions as micro, meso and macro.

Following the above, there is no pre-given scale that is assumed appropriate to study the relevance of co-housing for housing development in The Netherlands. What is relevant is to come to a view of co-housing as constituting a ‘field of practice’, or a practice-net: how the practices to which co-housing is connected are combined or integrated to form a ‘sticky’ complex of practices, or a more loosely coupled ‘bundle of practices’, or conversely, fail to do so (Shove et al., 2012). While the co-housing literature is replete with references to co-housing as constituting a practice in itself (e.g. Jarvis, 2015; Boonstra, 2016; Tummers, 2016), in this research co-housing is viewed as a kind of emergent ‘meta-practice’ (Rouse, 2007) that can bundle, or combine into a complex, practices that might otherwise be disconnected (Shove et al., 2012). Potentially, the practices that co-housing integrates or combines has consequences for the roles of the (groups of) people who perform these practices. This expectation builds on
Boonstra’s (2016) observation that as co-housing initiatives progress towards materialisation, the boundaries of the roles of members of initiatives and professionals in the domains of spatial planning and housing development tend to become blurred as in the emerging collaborations each actor becomes involved in the life world of the other actors. In other words, co-housing can involve the ‘infiltration’ of professional housing practices by citizens themselves, from which a redefinition of the roles of residents, planners, developers, builders and managers could ensue. According to Albrechts (2015), this process of becoming where boundaries between ‘consumers’ and ‘producers’ of spatial planning objects blur is a distinct feature of co-production. As the relationship between housing professionals, local authorities, spatial planners and members of co-housing initiatives is what characterises each instance of co-housing, each party can become involved in other’s life-world and practices (Pestoff, 2011; Boonstra, 2016).

The aim of this study is not to untangle all complexity of co-housing through a practice-theoretical lens, but rather to amount to an interpretation of co-housing as a practice-net of various practices arranged by the stages that co-housing initiatives go through as they work towards materialisation into a housing project. In this manner, an attempt is made at coming to an idea of how co-housing is shaped against an institutional housing development system that is centered on the individual family dwelling. Because practice theory is open in scale, there is no scale that is prioritised: co-housing will be studied on the project level, as well as on a more systemic level. This is done by adopting Nicolini’s suggestion of a “programmatic eclecticism” that allows to zoom in and out of co-housing practice.
Chapter 4
Methodology

4.1 A qualitative research approach
The goal of this research is not to produce standardized data collection or to allow for generalization of findings, but rather the ‘thick’ description (Clifford et al., 2016) of the issue at hand. The goal is less to look for coherence and regularity across a large range of localities and to produce simplified answers to complex questions, but rather to produce ‘thick descriptions’ that allow understanding how co-housing practices in The Netherlands come about and persist, or possibly disappear (Bueger, 2014, p. 383; Nicolini, 2012).

The types of analysis produced by researchers interested in practices have been called “praxiography”, a term coined by ethnographer Annemarie Mol (Mol, 2002; Bueger, 2014). Here, ‘graphy’ stands for the “common task of describing, recording and writing about a distinct phenomenon”, while ‘praxios’ (practice) replaces ‘ethno’ (culture) as the primary research subject (Bueger, 2014, p. 385). As explained in § 3.3, a practice theoretical approach implies that the meanings and knowledge through which practices are forged and reproduced are reconstructed, which requires an interpretive and qualitative research approach that privileges a close up, in depth research design (Bueger, 2014, p. 387; Trowler, 2014, p. 20).

Nicolini (2012) has done important work in ‘operationalising’ the practice-theoretical approach to study practices. It is largely inspired on his suggestion of adopting a “programmatic eclecticism” and of “switching conceptual lenses” that this research adopts a seemingly ‘diffuse’ research strategy by studying a selection of co-housing initiators and organisations or institutions that become involved with co-housing across a range of urban area’s in The Netherlands. Data has been collected by conducting semi-structured, in depth interviews with inhabitants, initiators and professionals that are involved with or interested in co-housing. The collection and analysis of data follows a move from the observation and interpretation of the ‘micro’ facets of co-housing practices, to an interpretation of co-housing as a ‘container’ that bundles, or forms a complex of various practices (Shove et al., 2012).

4.2 Research strategy: following co-housing through multiple sites and organisations
Nicolini (2012) proposes three basic ‘moves’ for understanding and representing practice, in which practices are first studied on the ‘micro’ scale by ‘zooming in’ on the local accomplishments of practices, while the important second move, ‘zooming out’, should tell us more about how local accomplishments of practices relate to other practices that are enacted elsewhere at different times. The third move constitutes the use of the zooming in and out of practices to produce thick textual representations of mundane practices (Nicolini, 2012, p. 219).

Before elaborating on the specific strategic choices and methodological choices that were made in this research, it is important to briefly return to the suggestion that the study of ‘small-scale, local accomplishments’ of co-housing should be accompanied by considering the ‘bigger’ network of interrelated practices of which co-housing is part, or which co-housing brings about. As Trowler (2014, p. 24) suggests, to research “immediate practices”, the researcher also needs to move beyond them. Herein, Nicolini’s suggestion of ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ of practices is the leading strategic recommendation. While this provides an orientation to strategic choices, it also provides the main directive for the analysis of the results from fieldwork. In
essence, Nicolini’s recommendation implies a research approach in which several tactics can be employed to describe practice-nets, depending on the time and resources the researcher has at his or her disposal. For example, practice-based studies can be undertaken by investigating sites where practices are performed, by following the actors or objects and concepts (actants) involved in practices or by focussing on ruptures in routine practices (e.g. Bueger, 2014; Nicolini, 2009). While each strategy implies its own specific methodological approach, these strategies are not mutually exclusive. What the researcher should do, is tailor the strategies and accompanying methods to the practice under scrutiny. In this research a choice has been made to ‘shadow’ or ‘follow’ co-housing in multiple sites and organisations, and thus it is deliberately not tied to a specific locale. By ‘shadowing’ practices, following them in different settings and paying attention both to their ‘in vivo’ accomplishments, their historical trajectories, their interconnections to other places where the practice is enacted and their relation to practices of other people and organisations, we can come to an “appreciation of how local practices participate in larger configurations and how they enter as elements, ingredients or resources in other activities” (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1409). Hence, an apparent ‘diffuse’ research strategy is made accountable by the fact that what is ‘followed’ in the research is co-housing as a practice and its culmination in a practice-net, instead of the practitioners themselves, the result of which should be seen as a praxiography, and not an ethnography.

4.2.1 Zooming in: local accomplishment of co-housing
Contrary to traditional accounts in social research where practices are assumed as a given, a practice-based approach is concerned with the actual skilled accomplishment of the practice. This ‘local accomplishment’ is the primary concern when pursuing Nicolini’s ‘zooming in’ suggestion. It is important to note that the ‘zooming in’ metaphor does not imply a magnifying of the practice in order to arrive at a complete picture in which all dimensions of it come to the fore. Rather, Nicolini argues that zooming in entails the sequential close-up analysis of (fragments of) the practice being studied by switching theoretical lenses. This switching of theoretical lenses means that some aspects of the practice are brought to the foreground while others are (temporarily) suspended (Nicolini, 2009; 2012). Nicolini (2012, p. 221) describes this focus as being on the “public and publicly accountable methods that practitioners use to assemble collaboratively and accomplish scenes of action.” For the zooming in move, Nicolini suggests an elaborate ‘palette of sensitising concepts’, which can be read as aspects of practice that are relevant to consider in the attempt to understand the local accomplishment of practices. Because of the sheer elaborateness of Nicolini’s research programme and the time and resource constraints of this research, a selection of Nicolini’s ‘zooming in’ programme is adopted in this research to make sense of co-housing seen as a practice. Attuned to the aspects of co-housing and practice theory discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the most prominent themes for this ‘zooming in’ movement are the following:

a) The oriented and concerned nature of co-housing:
This implies a focus on the “lived directionality” of co-housing, considering what objectives co-housing serves, and how this orientation is perceived by the ‘practitioners’ of co-housing. In § 3.4 this has largely been explained as the relevance of collective intentionality and the ‘making’ of meanings by co-housing participants.

b) The active role of materials
How materials are used to perform, and in turn also shape co-housing. As suggested in § 3.2, examples of such materials are especially the availability of land and buildings, the design of the built environment, but also finances and legislation.

c) Dynamism and routine
This move can help to unravel the dynamism of co-housing elaborated in § 3.5, from the planning phase to the continuation in daily life in a co-housing group. As co-housing is seen as a form of housing production that doesn’t end after a housing project has materialised, a sensitivity to what this production actually consists of is important. Co-housing is continually reproduced, but there are limits to what is perceived as the ‘right’ or ‘acceptable’ ways to perform (co-)housing, seen from the perspective of co-housing groups internally as well as from the perspective of external parties that are needed to realise co-housing projects. Furthermore, a consideration of how co-housing is ‘kept in place’ is needed. This implies a sensitivity to the patterns of relationships between people, and how these relationships are made durable in a variety of ways. Co-housing as a practice-as-entity or as an alternative housing concept could also contain traces of institutionalisation as a niche in the Dutch housing market, no matter how weak (Nicolini, 2009, pp. 1405-1406).

In summary, these aspects can be read as a refinement of the notion of the dynamic integration of the elements of meanings (a), materials (b), and competences (c and d) and the constitution of practice proposed by Shove et al. (2012). The concern for the active role of materials, the tension between dynamism and routinisation of practices (see also Bueger, 2014), and the mutual relationship between practitioners and practices, are specified by these aspects of the ‘micro’ accomplishments of co-housing.

4.2.2 Zooming out: trailing associations & studying effects
Throughout this report it has been asserted repeatedly that co-housing should be thought of as constituting a ‘container’ of more or less connected practices, instead of a practice in itself. Therefore the description of the associations between the practices involved in co-housing is eventually what is envisioned. While the zooming in move should enable the detailed description of the local accomplishment of co-housing practices, the associated zooming out move should enable a view on the texture of practices within which co-housing is ‘enacted’, and what kind of effects are produced by co-housing, or vice-versa: what kind of effects associated practices may have on co-housing. In the remainder of this chapter I will explain the two aspects of this ‘zooming out’ movement; associations between practices and the effects that practices and their mutual associations bring about.

Associations
Nicolini (2009; 2012) argues that in scrutinising the associations between practices the researcher should follow the associations through time and space and investigate how practices are kept in place.

The first of these two moves can be done by the ‘shadowing’ of co-housing and a study of its emergence and evolution. ‘Real time shadowing’ of co-housing initiatives through their multiple trajectories unfortunately is beyond the scope of this study as initiatives typically take several years to materialise, however, in part this can be overcome by considering the trajectories of co-housing projects and their contextual embeddedness in time and space. This can allow for a view on the associations between co-housing and other practices.
The second move that Nicolini suggests, the ‘knotting’ of associations and keeping them in place “through the co-ordination of humans and non-human mediators” (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1409). In the terminology of Shove et al. (2012), this is the ‘linking’ of practices and the formation of loose bundles or sticky complexes of interlinked practices.

**Effects**
The zooming out movement must also tell us something about what effects the (temporary stabilisation of) co-housing practices bring about in the domain of housing development. Hence, we need to consider how co-housing is being noticed and by whom and what the consequences are. We can think about developers of housing in the broad sense: all parties that become involved with housing and are affected by it. In The Netherlands, such parties can be corporations, governments, project developers, building companies, and so on, but of course also private persons who (collectively) may act as developers in their own right. A sensitivity to the effects of co-housing means that the potential new ways of practising housing development should be brought forward, including who and what is affected by it and in what ways. Ultimately, this can answer the question leading this research; what co-housing means for housing alterity in The Netherlands, affecting policy makers, housing developers and the landscape of housing development in general. However, the converse may be true as well: co-housing may be enabled, but it is also likely to be constrained by events and practices taking place elsewhere (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1410).

4.3 The research technique: expert interviews
Participant observation, it is argued, is the corresponding method for researching practices, because it allows to capture the practising in the ‘middle of the action’ itself (Bueger, 2014; Nicolini, 2012). However, this technique demands a lot of the time and resources. Because co-housing is seen as a practice-net, the sites and moments where co-housing is ‘coordinated’ are very diverse and finding and obtaining access to them, and to subsequently study them at length, would cost too much time for this thesis. Furthermore, because participatory observation allows to study the ‘in vivo’ performance of practices, it’s usability for studying co-housing as a practice-net is limited because co-housing initiatives take a long time to materialise, meaning that significant moments of organising co-housing have already ‘went by’ when initiatives have materialised into projects, and thus such moments can no longer be observed (c.f. Bueger, 2014). Hence, instead of participant observation, the primary method for this research is the interviewing of ‘experts’ of co-housing.

Expert interviews is a method that has proven its merit for research with a practice theoretical grounding, especially when thorough participant observation is not feasible (Bueger, 2014). Bueger (2014) suggests that expert interviews can help the interpretation of practices as it allows for co-producing interpretations with the interviewee, and as such also for tracing background knowledge of practices. In accordance with Bueger, in this research a distinction will be made between directly involved experts, which are the co-housing residents or initiators themselves (‘internal’ experts from now on), and experts who are involved differently with the practice under scrutiny, for instance because they work in relevant departments in municipalities and housing corporations, are active as advocates and so on (‘external’ experts from now on).
4.4 The researched co-housing initiatives and projects

The generalisation of findings is not a goal of this research, however, to get a good idea of the most prominent co-housing practices in The Netherlands, the leading motive for selection of was to cover the types of co-housing (instruments) explained in chapter 2: CW, CPC and one cooperative in the social housing domain (Table 2). The projects and initiatives were found by personal acquaintance, via the internship organisation, by suggestion and by browsing the Internet. The Roggeveenstraat initiative and the WvdT project were found via the website of Cooplink, which is a network organisation that, prompted by the new housing cooperative legislation (see § 2.4), aims to promote knowledge about housing cooperatives for resident groups.

The sizes of selected initiatives and projects ranged from smaller projects building a development for 14 households to a large project with 94 households. The tenure structures vary from owner-occupied only to mixed (with one project containing predominantly rented and another predominantly owned units) and rental only. All contain common spaces and facilities or, in the case of initiatives, the intention to have them created, a shared garden only being the minimum (housing cooperative Roggeveenstraat). In demographic composition all selected initiatives and projects are varied and could be considered intergenerational, although most groups have predominantly middle-aged to elderly participants as the projects matured. At the time of writing, the housing cooperative initiative in The Hague is on the verge of becoming the first successful housing cooperative in a major city in The Netherlands. The initiative in Arnhem currently has put their plan on hold as it hasn’t come to an agreement between the intentions of the group and external stakeholders, which will be described in the next chapter. The materialised projects, or the projects under development or construction were developed in various times; the oldest project was finalised in 1993, whereas the most recent projects will be finalised in 2018.
Table 2: list of co-housing initiatives and projects from which interviewees were selected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative/project (I/P)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Size and ownership struct.</th>
<th>Place and year of realisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roggeveenstraat (I)</td>
<td>Social housing cooperative in existing housing with common garden</td>
<td>65 rented dwellings, to be collectively owned by the resident association</td>
<td>The Hague, forthcoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Kersentuin (P)</td>
<td>Ecologically built CPC with common inside and outside spaces and facilities</td>
<td>94 dwellings; 66 owned and 28 socially rented from corporation</td>
<td>Utrecht, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Roze Hallen (P)</td>
<td>CPC project for elderly (55+) LBTQ people, common inside spaces and facilities</td>
<td>14 privately owned apartments</td>
<td>Amsterdam, 2018 (under construction at time of writing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malbergen (I)</td>
<td>CPC/cohousing (Scandic model) initiative, common inside and outside spaces</td>
<td>10 initiators (homeowners), intentions to build mix of 25 owner-occupied and socially rented dwellings</td>
<td>Arnhem, N.A. (initiative stalled)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woonvorm van de Toekomst (WvdT, P)</td>
<td>CW project, shared inside and outside spaces and facilities</td>
<td>61 dwellings, one-third privately owned, two-thirds socially rented from corporation</td>
<td>Amersfoort, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Getijden (P)</td>
<td>CPC project for elderly with common inside and outside spaces, part redevelopment, part newly built</td>
<td>17 dwellings, (9 apartments, 8 land-based dwellings)</td>
<td>Nijmegen, forthcoming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 The respondents and interviews

In this research, a total of 15 interviews were conducted. The participants who are interviewed as insider experts are all part of one of the projects or initiatives presented in Table 2. The age composition of insider experts varies from middle-aged (40+) to elderly (65+).

Table 3: Insider and outsider expert respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Internal experts</strong></th>
<th><strong>External experts</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The initiator of the Roggeveenstraat cooperative in the city of The Hague</td>
<td>The chairman of the national cohousing (CW) association*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A member-initiator of the Roze Hallen CPC project in the city of Amsterdam</td>
<td>The coordinator of the CPC programme for the Province of Gelderland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A long-time member of De Kersentuin CPC / CW project in the city of Utrecht</td>
<td>A junior housing advisor at the municipality of Arnhem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The initiator of the Malbergen CPC / cohousing initiative in the city of Arnhem*</td>
<td>The director of a housing corporation specialised in collective tenant self-management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A long-time member of Woonvorm van de Toekomst CW project in the city of Amersfoort</td>
<td>A process manager specialised in group-based citizen initiatives in housing (CPC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A member-initiator of De Getijden CPC initiative in the city of Nijmegen</td>
<td>A market analyst for a project developer (specialised in demand-driven developments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A housing and CPC advisor for the municipality of Utrecht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A senior housing advisor at the municipality of Nijmegen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An urban architect with experience with CPC initiatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents who can simultaneously be considered internal and external experts.

Two experts in this research belong to both the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ categories simultaneously: the chairman of the national cohousing (CW) association lives in a CW project, while the initiator of the Malbergen CPC/cohousing initiative has a long-term interest in various forms of co-housing and has also written a book about it. Notwithstanding this subtlety in the roles that experts may have, insider experts were mostly interviewed to obtain insights into the knowledge, motivations and emotional states with which they ‘perform’ co-housing in their initiatives or materialised projects. Interviews with external experts were similarly conducted to obtain insight in the reasons that external parties become involved with co-housing, as well as to get assistance in the interpretation of the practices of the insiders of co-housing (Bueger, 2014, p. 400). Hence, the interview questions were designed for each interviewee specifically, taking into consideration his or her expertise in co-housing. This is not to say that all interviews were entirely different, a degree of similarity in the focus of the questions was maintained. Interviews took 30 to 90 minutes and were semi-structured, allowing to ask additional questions when unexpected and relevant matters not covered by the interview guide came up during the interview. When a certain degree of saturation on specific topics was reached, the emphasis in subsequent interviews came to lie on other aspects. The most important common themes in the interviews, both for insider and outsider experts, were the motivations for participating in co-housing, the way that others are attracted to co-housing, the relations with these other people and organisations and the main challenges that are faced in the initiative phase and the post-implementation phase. The topic lists for the interviews are included in the appendix.

The conduction of the interviews generally went well. Although the interviews with internal experts were very similar, sometimes respondents answered interpreted questions
differently or formulated answers in different ways. In order to ensure rigour in the interpretation, during the interviews I briefly responded to the answers by giving summaries of them. In this way the interpretations of co-housing practices were made in co-production with the interviewees (c.f. Bueger, 2014).

The diffuse research strategy had important implications for the research. Most importantly, the experiences of both internal and external experts always need to be seen in relation to their local contexts. This makes any generalisation of research findings problematic. However, the strength of this research approach lies in the selection of various types of co-housing projects in various local contexts, which has given insight in the various ways that co-housing projects can unfold. Furthermore, by interviewing a range of external experts, co-housing practices could be interpreted from various viewpoints.

4.6 Analysis
The first twelve interviews were transcribed in full and coded with the software package Nvivo. The last three interviews (senior housing advisor of the municipality of Nijmegen, member of initiative De Getijden and the urban architect) were not transcribed and coded, but mostly used to gain additional insights in aspects that came forward in the interviews that went before. Initially a rudimentary structure for the code-tree was drafted on the basis of the slim-line conceptualisation of practices described in chapter 3: the three elements of practice - materials, competences and meanings (collective intentions) - as suggested by Shove et al. (2012). Furthermore, nodes were created to code answers about the dynamism of co-housing practices and the involved parties in co-housing. For each of these main codes a set of sub-codes were created on the basis of the responses of interviewees and my own interpretations of the responses. For instance, as interviewees mentioned that building ecologically was a key intention formulated by their collectives, ‘ecological sustainability’ was added under the broader theme of meanings. When architects were named as important parties, the sub-node ‘architects’ was created under the family node of ‘involved parties’. In the process of coding, specific types of practices that can be associated with co-housing came to the foreground, which were then categorised under a family node ‘practices of co-housing’. As will appear, these practices are still quite broad categories which allow a further ‘zooming in’ movement, which will break them up in even more ‘micro’ type practices. However, as the orientation of this research is also on the practice-net of co-housing, the zooming-in move was stopped at a certain point to also allow for the zooming-out part of the research. The eventual code-tree is included in the appendix.
Chapter 5

Results

The research findings are primarily presented by organising them according to various aspects of co-housing that are important in the stages that initiatives go through. First, the collective intentions that drive initiatives are discussed. Subsequently, the relevance of these collective intentions for external parties are brought to the foreground. Hereafter, the discussion centers on the external and internal collaborations that co-housing initiatives have to engage in, and lastly, the continuation of co-housing initiatives after their materialisation into an actual housing project is described. These aspects are described in general terms, as possible ways that co-housing is ‘practiced’ by multiple involved parties that were approached in this research. In the descriptions, the experiences of case-initiators, the prospective co-housing residents, and the experiences of ‘external’ parties, such as governments, corporations, project developers and process managers, are accounted for. It is important to stress that the descriptions need to be seen in reference to the participants interviewed in this research. Hence, the ‘praxiography’ presented in this chapter is certainly not exhaustive of all co-housing endeavours in The Netherlands, but rather the result of the interpretation of the experiences of the selected research participants, based on an understanding of co-housing as a distinctly user-led and group-based approach to housing development. Although the structure of this chapter may be suggestive of a linear path towards co-housing, it should be clear that a universal pathway does not exist. Some of the discussed phases are highly interrelated, and in some cases they can in fact be interchanged. For analytical purpose, however, it the choice has been made to present the research findings in this way. All citations from the respondents have been translated from Dutch by the author.

5.1 Shared housing aspirations

Collective intentions of co-housing initiatives

Resonating prior descriptions from the co-housing literature, the projects and initiatives approached in this research started out with one or more core groups of people with the intention to maintain or develop a certain type of housing project. The ‘proto-practices’ (Shove et al., 2012) of co-housing initiatives in this research were given birth by individuals who shared an idea of a wished-for dwelling and living environment.

The collective intentions that were encountered in this research can roughly be categorised into social or societal intentions of creating or maintaining a certain type of living environment with less anonymity than regular housing, more technical intentions of building and living in ecologically sustainable ways and, lastly, intentions that have to do with self-reliance; of controlling the design and development process of a housing project. Although these meanings of co-housing can be highly interrelated, for practical reasons they will be discussed separately

5.1.1 Intentions of commonality: fending off anonymity in the living environment

A more common point of departure for co-housers in this research is the idea that most ‘regular’ urban neighbourhoods in the Netherlands are too anonymous. While respondents seem to acknowledge that anonymity is not an inevitability in regular urban neighbourhoods, recognising that also in supply-led developments active residential communities can exist, the common perception seems to be that this is not warranted in such neighbourhoods. It is
interesting to note that the Roggeveenstraat initiative, where an existing residential group living in socially rented row-houses aims to acquire independence from their housing corporation, emerged as residents came to know each other through the use of a common garden and subsequently came in opposition to plans for demolition of their dwellings. Frequently heard terms that are used to denote the wished-for ‘antidote’ to this rejected anonymity are ‘neighbourliness’ (nabuurschap), ‘village in the city’ or the equivalent of a ‘hamlet’ (buurtschap). The following two quotes, the first from a middle-aged man who lives in a CW project and also works as an advisor and advocate for CW, the second from an elderly lady living in a CW project, illustrate how people choose for co-housing based on a perception of regular housing as too anonymous:

“In my case, since very long I don’t want to live with a family in an isolated house, really to be dependent on each other, or... together with children, I’ve never had that, I’ve never lived like that. So I just want to have more people around me, more exchange [...]” (- CW advocate and resident)

“I have read the advertisement and I was, or just went into retirement, something like that. And then I thought, well, I already had two sisters who were occupied with Centraal Wonen and so I already knew a thing or two about it and it appealed to me. I lived in an apartment in The Hague and I worked in education and lost all those contacts. Of course I had some friends, but when you live alone you always have to organise everything yourself, and I really intended to connect to an initiative for once.” (- WvdT resident)

The reasons for not wanting to live anonymously are plural and not restricted to one category of people, however, throughout the research multiple internal and external respondents stressed the relevance that non-anonymous living environments may have for elderly people, as illustrated by the latter quote above. The Roze Hallen and De Getijden projects were both initiated by aging individuals with the specific intention to create a living environment in which participants could ‘age in place’ with less likelihood of becoming socially isolated. Of course specific identities or lifestyles can be an important background reason why people may seek co-habitation. People may seek each other out on the basis of specific lifestyles or occupations which may require or can be facilitated by co-habitation. Consider for instance, the long history of co-habitation by spiritual groups, or the importance that musicians may attribute to living in a setting where spaces for musical practice can be shared by likeminded people. In this research, one group emerged from a distinct identity and lifestyle considerations: the Roze Hallen LHBT co-housing group. In this case the initiative came from an advocacy group for LHBT people, seeking to find new housing alternatives specifically for elderly LHBT people as they tend to become more isolated than non-LHBT elderly. Notwithstanding the potential wide variety of motivations for co-habitation, for other initiatives and projects in this research the wish for co-habitation did not emerge from such specific lifestyles. Most projects and initiatives in this research are not initiated by groups who describe themselves as ‘kindred by choice’ (c.f. Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012). Contrary to seeking homogeneity, except the Roze Hallen project all initiatives and projects in this research actually emphasise a certain diversity within their co-housing project or plans (and even the Roze Hallen project seeks a degree of diversity, but within the overarching LHBT community).

As said, in the initiative phase co-housing is just a proto-practice, driven by a certain meaning that is ascribed to domestic life. Material aspects are imagined, or prospective: a ‘certain’ dwelling in a ‘certain’ living environment that prevents the perceived anonymity of regular
neighbourhoods. All initiatives and projects in this research have concretised their intention of preventing anonymity in their plans with material aspects such as shared spaces and facilities (Figures 3 and 4). These materials provide the preconditions for planned and unplanned social interactions, such as casual meetings and common activities.

![Figure 3: 3D visualisation (volume-study) of the Malbergen initiative with common gardens, common inside spaces (red and yellow) and work-space (dark blue) (source: Flip Krabbendam in collaboration with Cohousing Veerpolderstraat (Malbergen) Arnhem).](image)

Numerous respondents expected that solidarity and reciprocity would be stimulated as a consequence from the relations that emerge from these interactions.

![Figure 4: the common house of WvdT project, situated in the middle of the common garden, encircled by the individual dwellings (source: WvdT, 2017).](image)
However, as one external expert with extensive experience with collective living indicated, when co-housing initiatives are in their earliest stage it is not self-evident for all initiatives similar to the ones in this research that sharing spaces and facilities can provide the preconditional materials for allowing a living environment where neighbours are more familiar with each other. This indicates the importance of having the competences to envision the right design for intentions of commonality. In this regard it is relevant to note, as the latter quote above indicates, the importance that the concept of CW can have for new initiatives. The CW concept can ‘travel’, as it were, making the phenomenon of intentional communities that share spaces and facilities in their living environment known to a wide audience (c.f. Shove et al., 2012). This is not to say that CW denotes a specific design and excludes others. For instance, while all CW projects have shared spaces, not all project-members of the national association for CW comply with the cohousing design recommendation of a set of clustered dwellings around shared spaces and facilities (see LVCW, 2017; Tummers, 2016). Using the terminology of Shove et al. (2012), in cases where CW provides the inspiration, the concept functions as an abstraction of material know-how about co-housing, which can be reversed in specific settings, attuned to the particularities of local initiatives. Or, put differently, CW can act as a non-human mediator in the practice of co-housing (c.f. Nicolini, 2012).

Thus far the discussion of social intentions concerns mostly the inward orientation amongst the initiative participants themselves. However, some initiatives clearly formulate wider societal goals and also intend to open themselves up to the surrounding neighbourhoods, or incorporate the neighbourhood in their societal aspirations of increased social interaction. This intention was encountered in the experiences of respondents of the Kersentuin, WvdT and Malbergen. The following quote is from the Malbergen initiator:

“[…] so what we intended in our project, was space for self-employed people, where people from the environs could also rent an office, and then a common meeting-place where you can also eat together with people from the neighbourhood and from where people could organise activities, from speech lessons to whatever, and we would exploit the common outside spaces with the neighbourhood, at least, that was the idea.”

Although they manifest themselves in varying intensities, the commonality intentions of co-housing that are so ubiquitous in the literature have also been encountered in the projects and initiatives in this research. When speaking about intensity, what is meant is that while for some initiatives commonality aspects are the main intention, in other initiatives this intention can be subordinated to other intentions.

5.1.2 Ecological sustainability

It seems that the intention of ecological sustainability is becoming normalised: wherever (financially) possible, all co-housing groups approached in this research, and also external parties that have experience with similar initiatives, at least mention ecological sustainability as an intention, or part of the intentions that drive initiatives. The intensity of ecological intentions however, shows varying degrees. There is a difference between groups that put ecology centre stage, and groups that only mention ecology an intention where feasible, and thus plays a subordinate role. De Kersentuin in this case presents an interesting example, as it is a hybrid of two initiatives with more social objectives and one initiative with an ecological intention, as explained by the project’s respondent:
“[…] the core group […] was a merger between two initiatives; there was an initiative of people who wanted to create a technically sustainable residential area somewhere in the vicinity of Utrecht, really focussed on technology, and there was another group that wanted to create a collective, a Centraal Wonen project. And at a certain point the municipality said: “would you like to do that together?” And they just did that, they tried to maintain both values, and they simply compliment each other well.”

What this quote also hints at, is that social intentions and ecological intentions are often expected to be complementary: when certain spaces and facilities become shared to provide social interaction, they can also decrease private ownership and more efficient energy-use, for instance.

![Figure 5: Bird-eye view of De Kersentuin. Between the buildings, self-managed greenery on public space plays an important role for the realisation of both commonality and ecology intentions. Other visible ecological measures are the solar panels and low amount of parking spaces (source picture: ICEB, 2017).](image)

Compared to cases where ecological sustainability is named, but not explicitised in certain measures or concrete goals, the project description by the above respondent and the listings of ecological measures that the group formulated in the initiative phase are very elaborate. Arguably, when this intention is concretised by groups with material measures for the project construction and organisational measures in the continuation of the project, this intention is more intense than when the intention is only supported with general claims to ecological sustainability that fit in normalised societal debates. Consider for instance, the following quote from the initiator of the Roggeveenstraat initiative:

“Is there really anybody against it? Are there people that just want to use as much oil and gas to warm up the planet?” Well, there weren’t any, and so there was consensus, wherever it is affordable we are for it.”

This quote illustrates how ecological sustainability plays a major role in housing questions general: wherever possible or affordable, people have no objections to this objective. On the other hand, when ecological sustainability objectives are truly innovative, as was the case when De Kersentuin was developed, they can raise the bar for other initiatives or possibly even
institutional housing developers. According to the process manager for CPC initiatives, some co-housing initiatives are pioneers in experimentation with ecological building standards and can be argued to normalise higher ecological measures for professional housing developers. According to this respondent this was specifically the case for De Kersentuin:

“[…] now it almost makes you laugh, but at that time the ambition to accomplish an EPC¹ of 0.4, now that is just regular, the threshold is much higher now, but at the time it was a big operation to be able to do that […] very often it’s ambitions of sustainability that have […] a central role in the project. Definitely in the big cities, where municipalities also have high demands […]”

This is certainly a bold claim, but it’s not unimaginable that when co-housing initiatives don’t shy away from ambitious ecological objectives and experimentation, they offer examples of good and feasible practice for institutional housing developers, who may shy away from experimentation as it also involves greater economic risks.

5.1.3 Self-reliance: control, customisation and pride
The ‘doing it yourself’ aspect of co-housing is strongly related to the aforementioned categories of collective intentions. This is quite evident: if there is no housing available that fulfills the aspiration to live in a non-anonymous setting and/or is built according to certain ecological standards, then there is a clear incentive for collectives to self-reliantly develop a housing project. In the researched projects prospective residents indicated they mostly initiated or participated in self-development as a collective task because they sought a certain living environment, transcending the individual dwelling and encompassing social and/or ecological aspects, which couldn’t be found easily on the regular market. Take, for instance, the following quote from the respondent of De Kersentuin:

“I am a building expert, so by profession it already interested me, like it could be fun to step into such a process. I was looking for a house to buy […] it was the ideal way to find just the house that suits you […] also the searching on the market, I think, for a house that suits you and an environment that suits you and the people who live there, it’s more difficult than to create it yourself I think.”

However, the experiences of the respondents in this research indicate that there seems to be more at hand: even if respondents were aware that certain residential communities existed in the country that conceptually would meet the meanings they attribute to co-housing, feelings were reported that seem to relate to a certain determination to be involved in the design of a new living environment. Hence, self-reliance can be argued to have a double function: while on the one hand self-development could be the best means to achieve certain aspirations, and thus function as an instrument (as in CPC practices), on the other hand it can also be a key intention that drives co-housing initiatives. Not disregarding the importance of pragmatism in self-reliance, psychological states of self-actualisation should not be ignored. From the interviews it became clear that for some co-housing initiators and residents self-developing a house and living environment is also a goal in itself, as for the Malbergen initiator:

¹ Energy Performance Coefficient (Energieprestatiecoëfficiënt): is a measure for energy performance for buildings used in The Netherlands.
“[...] directing the process yourself, directing your own life, when you get older, but I also like to do something with groups, to create something like that with a group in a neighbourhood and to also to mean something for that neighbourhood.”

It could be suggested that in cases where citizens intend to take control over the design and development process, they aspire to ‘appropriate’ the process of housing production and (therewith) the eventual spaces that are produced by these endeavours. In a few cases the co-housing participants in this research also have affinity with the domain of urban development and housing either by profession, prior experience or personal interest, as also indicated by the quote above of the Kersentuin respondent. The respondents of co-housing initiatives and projects indicated that having competences like housing development and construction expertise or institutional know-how, for instance through professional experience with governments can be very useful for co-housing initiatives. Having such competences then can facilitate the self-reliance on the part of co-housing groups.

To add to the discussion of collective intentions, it should be noted that respondents in this research reported that the members of their groups joined the initiatives for varying reasons, indicating that the depth of collective intentions does not need to be deep (Tollefsen & Gallagher, 2017) for co-housing initiatives to come into existence and materialise. As from each project/initiative only one participant was interviewed, it is difficult to make a rigorous assessment of the degree to which the reasons behind collective intentions of participants are the same, but based on the experiences of the respondents there is reason to believe that the reasons are quite diverse and hence, that there isn’t always much depth in collective intentions.

5.2 Generating enthusiasm

External perceptions of co-housing

In order to realise their ambitions, co-housing initiatives make their intentions known and go ‘out’ to generate external support for their project. Based on respondent experiences, the motivations for these external parties to become involved with co-housing initiatives in this research can roughly be divided between a reasoning that if there is a certain housing demand, it needs to be catered for, and on the other hand the acknowledgment that these demands relate to collective intentions that can have wider societal relevance. On the other hand, respondents explained that there are also reasons why external parties do not see co-housing as something they should be involved in.

5.2.1 The relevance of co-houser’s intentions for external parties

Most external experts that were interviewed in this research reported that they perceive a rising demand for co-housing. The perceived rising demand for self-led collective housing forms is an important reason why especially governmental (provincial and municipal) advisors indicated that they are seeking for opportunities to facilitate co-housing initiatives. There seems to be a concensus amongst governmental respondents that if citizen collectives want to increase their influence on the way they dwell and live, this should be facilitated by public authorities, thus supporting co-housing intentions of self-reliance and control. The norm of supply-led development, which was especially prevalent before the 2008 global financial crisis, is dismissed by most external experts as inadequate in current times, as the junior housing advisor for the municipality of Arnhem explains:
“At the municipality we want housing for everyone. Before the crisis the choice in houses was just very limited. There was such a great demand that houses were only built and developed by contractors and project developers. There was little choice and variation, so if you wanted something different, in the market you would get nowhere. So then it was the municipality that felt called upon to facilitate those people who wanted to live differently”.

Other reasons and arguments to support co-housing stem from a more substantive understanding of the content of co-housing forms and the relevance of the social and ecological intentions of co-housing groups. Governmental respondents have similar social expectations of co-housing as the initiatives themselves. Especially the engagement of co-housers towards each other and their living environment is seen as a positive aspect which can count on enthusiasm on the part of the civil servants in this research. The following quote of the municipal respondent of the municipality of Utrecht resonates the perception of ‘mainstream’ society and urban neighbourhoods as individualistic and anonymous:

“… what also plays a role, what I say, is that in an individualistic society you also have a counterpart. People who prefer to share more with others, you see that in housing […] to signify more for the neighbourhood, especially together, you also see that in a lot of groups.”

Further arguments why co-housing initiatives are relevant to support that are brought forward by governmental officials have to do with the challenges to ensure liveability in popular cities that need to densify in order to handle the population pressure. While co-housing projects could be argued to need more space when they include common spaces and facilities, on the other hand there seems to be an expectation that co-housing could also signify more efficient use of available space, therewith reducing the pressure on public facilities. Again the housing advisor for the city of Utrecht explains:

“[…] because a principle for municipal policy is to increase density, we have to go higher, but then you also have to take care that people share facilities with each other, or that there are shared facilities in such a building or side-street, you have to have attention for that.”

Furthermore, as the CPC process manager already indicated, some municipalities that facilitate co-housing, for instance by ear-marking land for citizen initiatives, also set criteria for ecological sustainability measures in housing development. In this way co-housing initiatives can win plot-tenders by setting certain ecological ambitions. Other reasons that were mentioned as having relevance for governments were solutions for aging in place (f.i. the Roze Hallen initiative won a plot tender that was designated for a senior housing citizen initiative) and the benefits that having implemented co-housing initiatives can have for place-promotional endeavours.

5.2.2 Negative perceptions: uncertain demand, legitimacy and constraining practices

However, perceptions of co-housing in governments are not always positive. There were also reported oppositions to a facilitative stance towards co-housing on the part of municipalities. Municipalities were also reported to perceive co-housing as a form of elitist housing that is mostly aspired by people who are already self-sufficient and thus do not need a helping hand. Importantly, uncertainty about the demand for co-housing is an important obstacle for municipalities to take a facilitative stance. Sometimes the demand for co-housing is perceived to be very low by municipalities, which makes facilitation unimportant. However, during interviews with municipal officials and the housing corporation director, the thought that a proactive facilitation of co-housing can have an enforcing effect on the demand came forward. Put simply, those governments that promote self-led housing alternatives and provide
information about it, for instance via easily accessible platforms such as websites, brochures and the like, have experienced that they are easily reached by aspiring co-housing groups, or even stimulate the development of latent co-housing-like aspirations. In contrast, if citizen collectives do not know ‘where to start’, they are less likely to engage in the planning of a co-housing initiative and to ask for assistance from municipal housing departments. Because citizen collectives can lack the initially needed competences of institutional know-how and knowledge of the instruments they can use to bring their initiative forward, there is a greater likelihood that they fail before they have had a real opportunity. As the municipal advisor in Arnhem explained about the situation there:

“I think that people don’t know very well what the possibilities are, with regards to self-building and CPC, building together, because in Arnhem it has never been promoted or communicated well what is really possible, and so I think we should take a more proactive attitude in this.”

A further problem for collaboration between external parties and co-housing projects relates to the perceived legitimacy for citizens to act as spatial planners and housing developers (c.f. Nicolini, 2012). A number of the external expert respondents reported that local government officials sometimes meet co-housing initiatives with uncooperative attitudes. As co-housing projects may ask for a degree of custom work that mostly involves the balancing of facilitation with interference, authorities may have to go out of their standard procedures to facilitate co-housing. In this way, co-housing initiatives sometimes are perceived as a challenge to the traditional roles of municipal officials. The process manager explained that in some cases municipal project managers are not cooperative and sometimes even abuse the lack of competences of co-housing members to thwart them. The housing corporation director interprets the negative attitude towards co-housing initiatives by municipal officials as the perceived inappropriateness of a deviation from the standard mode of work:

“[…] if it wouldn’t go through, then we’d get more of the same, so what we already know, we can anticipate well on […] there must be all kinds of disadvantages involved as well, which are of course not named by an initiative. You know, what is feasible for civil servants? Maybe rules have to be bent to make it possible and they think: difficult, troublesome, complicated, should we really want that?”

The problems of legitimacy of planners and housing developers can be seen as the routinisation of institutional spatial planning and housing development, which sometimes leaves little room for the emergence of new ways of housing development.

By their historical strong role in non-profit housing development, housing corporations are also an important category of external parties that potentially become involved with co-housing. The relative institutionalisation of CW has also meant that corporations that have been involved in its implementation have acquired some experience with co-producing housing based on the aspirations of citizen collectives. The housing corporation director that was interviewed, reported that the restrictions of the activities of housing corporations since the new Housing Act of 2015 has had important effects for the way that co-housing is now perceived by housing corporations. Most important is that generally co-housing is perceived as a deviation of the core task of corporations, something that would formally be needed to become separated from their core-task: the provision of housing for low-income groups that are not self-reliant. However, next to the fact that new co-housing initiatives are also started by low-income groups that form the core target group for corporations, the corporation director also expressed a possible re-
interpretation of the role that corporations could play, as co-housing can be seen as a form of housing development that can enable the emergence of collective self-reliance for groups that otherwise (individually) may not be self-reliant. In this view, corporations could not only provide housing for those who cannot provide for themselves, but also help groups who aspire to become self-reliant to provide housing for themselves. However, according to the corporation director most housing corporations seem to have routinised their work as demarcated by the national government since 2015, and are reluctant to experiment with new concepts and modes of housing development as they perceive it illegitimate for their role as public housing provisioners.

Concludingly, external stakeholders assign different meanings to co-housing practices, which range from seeing it as an important type of housing development and product that is pursued by different types of people to perceptions of it as a fringe phenomena and a practice that challenges the position of local housing authorities. These different external meanings to co-housing make these organisations engage with it in various ways, ranging from proactive and facilitative to reluctance to engage with it at all.

5.3 External collaboration

Availability of locations and competing housing development practices

Two co-housing projects in this research came into being in times when their respective municipalities had disposal over large expansion areas for housing development (Vinex-policy locations). In these cases, the availability of land for housing development enabled these municipalities to make way for experimental housing development. In Utrecht, De Kersentuin could profit from a so-called ‘initiative-policy’, while in Amersfoort the CW initiative Woonvorm van de Toekomst coincided with the development of Kattenbroek, a new housing district where the local development policy prescribed large-scale experimentation with ‘unusual’ housing forms.

The earmarking of available locations for citizen initiatives is becoming a quite common practice for municipalities in The Netherlands. In this practice, the municipalities wherefrom respondents participated in this research, none went as far as Nijmegen. In this city, a section of the most important expansion area called Vossenpels, destined for approximately 200 households, was earmarked for private initiatives from citizens, both individuals and collectives. To accommodate for customisation on the part of individuals, a flexible urban plan with minimum infrastructure that allows for flexible land plotting was drafted (Figures 6 and 7). Such flexible urban plans with minimum regulation provide an adequate precondition for the implementation of co-housing initiatives as it allows for customisation of envisioned projects. Furthermore, the earmarking of land could also prompt latent co-housing aspirations. It is therefore not surprising that multiple of the ‘external experts’ referred to Nijmegen as an exemplary ‘co-housing city’.

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2 Vierde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening Extra is a national large-scale housing development directive.
According to the corporation director the self-build policy by the Nijmegen authorities was mostly initiated for economic motivations, as professional developers were withdrawing in the aftermath of the global financial crisis (see also § 2.3; Zandvoort et al., 2013; SEV, 2010; Qu & Hasselaar, 2011), providing a window of opportunity for citizen initiatives:

“[…] it’s a kind of anti-cyclical phenomenon, because when it’s difficult for the rest of the world, such an initiative gets a chance […] otherwise it wouldn’t have gotten off the ground in Lent either, that’s really been prompted by the crisis. At that moment the municipality couldn’t get rid of it’s land, and then those initiatives came forward, like “we do want it!”, and the municipality was really happy with it, as in “hey, we can dispose of the land, it’s being built again, it’s recovering”

As explained by the municipal housing advisor of Nijmegen, while at first there was no assurance that the self-build policy would take off, an effective communication campaign resulted in enough applications from individual and private collectives for self-build projects, and now the area is already fully built up with citizen-led housing projects, amongst which three are co-housing. By now, however, the corporation director indicated that it’s already harder for new initiatives to find space in Nijmegen as economic resurgence has led to more pressure from commercial developers. According to the CPC process manager there is now a more “healthy
mix” of citizen-led and institutional housing development across the country. Hence, when routine housing practices are disrupted by macro-economic events, there is more room for alternative housing development practices than in times when professional housing development is dominant and leaves little room for ‘bottom-up’ housing development practices.

The successes of such temporal windows of opportunity suggest that before co-housing can be seen as a viable alternative to institutional housing development, local authorities need to be convinced that citizens can effectively act as competent housing developers. Especially when the initiative comes from citizens, and not the other way around (as in Nijmegen), the perceptions of local planning authorities of citizen collectives as housing developers is crucial. The main line of thought here is that if co-housing is counter-posed to professional project development, the latter would more easily and quickly yield results. The senior housing and spatial development advisor for the municipality of Nijmegen – although he himself has a different opinion – formulated this attitude as follows:

“CPC may sound very nice, but we want to accelerate and so we’ll give it to a project developer, because we know that party already and they have a good plan, so we tell them to go ahead.”

Thus, it should be clear that when municipalities have land available and ‘put it up’ for development without earmarking it for a particular kind of developing party, co-housing initiatives compete for the development of municipal land with professional housing developers. This makes the competence of communicating co-housing plans to external stakeholders in a persuasive manner important, especially in situations where authorities have no prior experience with citizen-led housing development. While some external experts argued that co-housing initiatives often need more time to get their plans in order and present them to the municipality (for instance in cases where municipal land is allocated via public tenders), other experts argued that some initiatives – for example groups that are able to make realistic choices and are not hampered by far-reaching idealistic ambitions – are very effective and the argument that co-housing initiatives in general are slower planners and developers than commercial project developers cannot be substantiated, the more so because plans and developments that are led by professional parties can be equally long and complicated processes.

Importantly, municipalities reported that their land ownership is decreasing. Two municipal respondents explained that as project developers often still have land, they were looking for possibilities to either cooperate with these commercial parties in realising co-housing initiatives, or to find possibilities to negotiate with them. Although after the crisis some project developers have started to work in a more demand-centered manner, there is of course an almost inherent tension between co-housing understood as citizen-led housing development and commercial project-based development, as explained by the market analyst for a commercial project developer:

“[…] the problem is, of course, the idea of project development is to spread the whole thing in a project-based manner, to just develop a whole neighbourhood like that […] And with CPC it’s more like “ok people, what do you want? Can we assist in that?” That’s a wholly different manner of doing business and developing. So we don’t have a lot experience with that, really with communal groups. So we have a sort of intermediary variant where we have an idea and then we look if there are people who are interested in it and then we continue shaping it with those people.”
However, the aspired degree of self-reliance amongst co-housing groups is not necessarily the highest possible. For instance, the respondent from the Roze Hallen initiative experienced a lack of assistance in the development process. As the market analyst for this commercial developer noted, collective and demand-led housing could be placed on a continuum where future residents do not always desire full control over the process. The urban architect had similar experiences. Importantly, however, co-housing initiatives must know what the implications of being a fully competent housing developer are. Some material aspects of project development may be beyond the scope of co-housing initiatives. While most initiatives and projects in this research did go through all phases of project development, sometimes in collaboration with a housing corporation, it can be imagined that co-housing initiatives may not aspire to self-reliantly develop the preconditional frameworks for housing development (like roads, sidewalks, parking spaces and energy-and water infrastructures). The urban architect explained that in CPC schemes there can be confusion as to what is the responsibility for citizen collectives and what isn’t. This stresses the importance of the competence to communicate between external stakeholders and co-housing initiatives about the requirements for and aspired degree of self-reliant project development. In searching the options to work with professional project developers (to which housing corporations belong as well), somewhere along the continuum of self-reliance (see also the matrix in Figure 1 in § 2.5) these professionals can play a role and collaborate with initiatives. Conversely, when citizen initiatives desire an amount of control and involvement in the development process that surpasses a certain threshold, there is no interest for a commercial developer to collaborate. In essence then, in determining the role that commercial developers and urban architects can play, it is necessary to come to the right balance between the degree of facilitation by professional expertise that co-housing initiatives may need, without letting it interfere with the aspired level of autonomy of initiatives in the design and development process.

In this section, the material requirements for co-housing development and the degree of self-reliance of co-housing initiatives have shed some light on the enabling and constraining practices of external parties. In the following section the focus shifts on the internal collaborative dynamics of co-housing groups as they gradually move from being an initiative towards a concrete project.

5.4 Internal collaboration

Decision-making, guidance and commitment

In this section first the gradual move from initiative to project will be described by looking at the importance of internal decision making and the assistance that co-housing groups are likely to need in these internal dynamics. Subsequently, the concretisation of collective intentions will be considered. The section ends with a consideration of the importance of commitment to the project by the members of co-housing groups.

5.4.1 From initiative to project: internal decision making and external assistance

Most co-housing initiatives and projects in this research started out with a core group of people with a specific housing aspiration who seek for a way to turn their initiative into a project. In this proto-practice of co-housing, groups look for an opportunity to realise their plans. Most initiatives in this research only turn into a housing development project after the group gets an opportunity to develop a piece of land or an existing building.
Depending on their numbers and the wished-for or possible size for the actual envisioned housing project, co-housing groups set out to attract additional members through announcements and information gatherings. From the experiences of the research participants it appeared that new members mostly join because they are attracted to the social and/or ecological intentions of the core group, because the envisioned location or building appeals to them, or because they like to be part of a self-led housing initiative (see also § 5.1).

When the groups in this research had attracted enough members, most held frequent meetings where the intentions of the initiatives were discussed. Internal discussion and decision making make up a very important share of the efforts. Especially when initiatives are driven by idealism and have high ambitions, it can become difficult to concretise aspirations into realistic plans. In order to smoothen this internal process, as well as to help get collective intentions materialised into concrete, realistic plans, it is common for initiatives to hire an external process manager that can provide guidance in the process of negotiating and concretising collective housing intentions. As individual participants are involved in decisions that affect the interests of the collective, a key competence that co-housing groups must develop is to balance individual interests with those of the group as a whole. The respondent from the province of Gelderland explained that there are special subsidies for new initiatives, designated for the hiring of professional help to facilitate this process:

“[…] it is very important for such a group to leave that to someone else who will just get on with it […] You have to make ambitions realistic. Before you know it people have many dreams: “then we can do this and we can do that” and then especially it’s important that someone, a process manager, says “OK, these and these steps have to be taken, this and this is needed now, what do you want there?” The streamlining of especially the internal process.”

Considering the necessary competences for co-housing initiatives, the CPC process manager explained that one of the most important aspects for initiatives is to act effectively as one group. This effectivity can also influence the decision of initiators on the legal form they want to establish. For instance, while most groups in this research that had established a legal organisation did so as an association with equal participation by all members, De Getijden initiators intentionally organised as a foundation to keep final decision-making in the hands of the board members, which consists of the original initiators.

Although each project is different, the process manager explained that there is some similarity in the way that, first, groups have to understand how self-led development works, to know about which things decisions need to be taken. Secondly, information needs to be prepared outside of the group as a whole, for instance via working groups and in collaboration with external advisors, such as architects, so decisions can be taken based on certain scenario’s that are presented in the group. In this way messy, open discussions are avoided:

“You make it possible to take decisions in a bigger group, and actually you have hundreds of those decisions that overlap, which need to be taken in the process, and contain the same pattern of planning, informing, deciding and executing.”

In a similar way as the CW concept does for envisioning collective intentions of commonality, specialised process managers can help in abstracting competences of collective citizen-led housing development from local situations and reverse it in other local situations (c.f. Shove et al., 2012). In this way, process managers act as human mediators that help to streamline co-
housing projects. Hence, external guidance can help alleviate time-consuming and precarious, conflict-sensitive matters. However, in order not to undermine the self-reliant aspect of initiatives, as well as the potential that this collective self-reliance provides the foundation for the durability of group-organisation after the projects have materialised, external guidance always needs to be balanced with interference: each group is likely to need its specific balance of guidance. Furthermore, experiences from external experts also point to the important for process managers to not only be busy with the internal dynamics of co-housing groups, but to also be competent at project development and know the interests, procedures and requirements of external parties in order to finetune the internal dynamics of co-housing projects with the project context.

5.4.2 Concretising collective intentions

Depending on their social and ecological intentions and the degree of self-reliance, in the project phase co-housing initiatives have to explicitise the materiality of their envisioned project design-wise and, especially in relation to ecological intentions, with regards to the used construction materials.

Knowing how social intentions of ‘living together’, or more concretely, the prevention of anonymity by facilitating interaction, can be realised in a housing project is important. As already explained in § 5.1.1, meanings of commonality have to be linked to specific materials in the (prospective) living environment. All projects and initiatives in this research have shared spaces and/or facilities, and as said, the CW model and other forms of collective living can provide important sources of information for aspiring co-housing groups. However, at the same time some respondents reported that CW is frequently perceived as an old or traditional style of co-housing. Specifically the model of multiple clusters of dwellings centering on a common space and facilities was not encountered amongst the initiatives and projects in this research. Even the WvdT project, which calls itself a CW project, chose consciously to divert from this model of clustered housing:

“[…] when we started, I was involved in the beginning of the establishment of the project, it was directly said: “we don’t want clusters”. That was something… there were people in the initiative group who had experience with that. And they said “we really don’t want that, each of us just wants to live independently and then something will emerge.”

Many respondents, especially the external experts, felt that in contemporary co-housing projects there is more emphasis on individualism than in the commune-like projects that emerged in the 1960’s. Contemporary projects are argued to seek a new balance between privacy and commonality. What seems to be sought after, is just the right amount of commonality. The Malbergen project initiator and the CPC process manager explain this new tendency as follows:

“[…] in the past, say in the 1960’s, you had two things: you were for the collective or you weren’t for it. So when you would speak with people about collective housing, they would all have the same connotations […] Now you have only individual interest, and because of that people ask more questions than back then [...] Now people ask questions like: “Do I want to live there? With whom do I want to live there? What would I have to do then? How much time do I have to invest in it?” All of that wasn’t relevant in the past. You would just step in a collective and subordinate yourself to it, and now you enter a collective and from all individual interests you’ll have to build a collective. And that is very complicated, very difficult.” (- Malbergen initiator)
“Now you see that it’s concentrating more around a commonly wished-for location, or a common wished-for demand for sustainability, and then the social aspect, of course that’s important in each project, but maybe in the past it was more preconceived, and now it’s just important as part of the process. So it’s not always the intention to create a social housing form, but the question does come up: what do you want to realise in common in a project?” (- CPC process manager)

Although each project and initiative in this research had some kind of common social aspiration, the above quotes illustrate the possibility that forms of co-housing are not preconceived and grow incrementally during the process. The CPC process manager also confirmed that he has seen multiple instances where sharing spaces and facilities were not part of the original intention, but were eventually planned as the groups in question collaborated and liked the idea to continue the collective after materialisation of the project. Hence, here we could speak of ‘unintentional communities’, or maybe ‘coincidental communities’ (c.f. Jarvis, 2015).

Lastly, the design of buildings can also mediate the identity of the co-housing groups. For instance, the Roze Hallen project uses self-designed art that will be integrated with the individual balconies of each household and the appearance of De Kersentuin project stands out in relation to its surroundings (Figure 5). But sometimes personalisation is limited and there is only scope for it within certain frameworks that are imposed by external parties. While in Nijmegen a flexible urban plan allowed for far-reaching personalisation of housing projects, for instance at De Kersentuin the orientation of the buildings and the spaces between them were already pre-determined by the urban plan before the collective started the design-process. To be granted building permission, some co-housing groups in this research had to negotiate with municipal committees that establish esthetic criteria (the so-called welstandscommissies). Furthermore, the urban architect mentioned a co-housing project in a large new housing district under development that didn’t show much sensitivity to legal requirements such as parking spaces or the general physical coherence of the area. External advisors, like architects and process managers were reported to be very important to first help groups determine realistic designs for their projects based on their collective intentions, but also to give advise during negotiations in cases of friction between plans or designs by residents and certain frameworks for development that were set by external parties.

5.4.3 Commitment and defection

The above aspects of concretising collective intentions and taking decisions to move the project forward require the commitment of participants in initiatives. Most groups in this research were able to establish an effective organisation of this work by requiring commitment of their members to self-led working groups that take upon a specific part of the tasks. The members often have to fulfill the multiple tasks that are involved with developing or self-designing their projects in addition to their day-jobs, which consumes a lot of time and energy. While some of the researched groups ensured commitment by making it mandatory, for instance by asking each household to deliver one person to a work-group or by setting a quorum for a certain amount of time per week to be devoted to the initiative, other groups made internal collaboration a non-compulsory matter. In these cases a core-group or an individual took care of a great share of the work. While in the Roggeveenstraat initiative, the leader of the initiative expects that other residents take over other tasks when they need to be done (for instance the...
renovation work after purchase of the houses), in the Malbergen initiative a lack of time to hold meetings and discuss collective intentions contributed to the stranding of the initiative.

Importantly, the expectations that initiative members have of each other are often related to the competences, known or estimated, that group members bring with them. According to the housing corporation director, the chances for realisation of collective intentions is very dependent on the capacity of groups to collaborate and to tap into the competences of individual members:

“Ideas often are not realised, very often. That mainly has to do with the capacity of residents to get things done. If you wish for more than you can handle, that’s a problem, because you have to handle things in multiple ways, so multiple competences will be asked from you [...] in a completely new initiative that concerns a whole list of competences and you need to have a lot of it in-house to get it done.”

Most groups in this research were quite effective at making use of the in-house competences of project members. As in the Roggeveenstraat initiative knowledge of housing corporations was important, the initiative used the competences of a neighbour who had a long career in the housing corporation world. Similarly, the Roze Hallen project contained a lot of members who were familiar with the functioning of government institutions.

Internal commitment, next to the pragmatism of bringing the initiative forward, often also serves the ubiquitous social intentions of co-housing groups. As already asserted in the previous section, through the process joint decision making and action enabled group formation in the projects in this research. If the group is successful at this internal collaboration an important preconditional aspect for social objectives (less anonymity and associated benefits) is met because mutual trust is built up during the process. Most, but not all respondents clearly reported their consciousness about the benefits of collaboration, which then also often translates in the coercion of collaboration:

“The commonality is also, we have also expressed that a bit as a demand in the beginning, you have to put your energy in it. And then we said, everybody has to put in one day a week on average.”

Members sometimes also defect from initiatives during the process. This can happen because they don’t agree with the decisions of the group, or because of time or financial constraints. For instance, in De Getijden project a group was formed two years after the initiators had their first idea. However, when it became clear that each member would have to bear financial risk by making an investment for the development, almost all members defected. The initiators continued with the initiative and after they had more concrete plans, they succeeded in attracting new members who liked their ideas and were prepared to make an investment in it. This suggests that in some cases, especially those where initiatives have the most far-reaching responsibility for their own project, members have to be able to deal with uncertainty to act as entrepreneurs in their own housing project.

5.5 Maintaining the co-housing project: stability and dynamics of co-housing practice
As explained in § 3.5, conceptualising co-housing as practice means that it is never ‘finished’ when an initiative has turned into a concrete housing project. After construction, the project has
to be maintained; co-housing is in a continuous state of becoming (Boonstra, 2016; Jarvis, 2015). Staying faithful to conceptualising practices as the making and breaking of links between meanings, competences and materials (Shove et al., 2012), the continuity of co-housing can be viewed as the durability of the links between the elements that formed co-housing projects. The durability of these links will be discussed on the basis of three aspects of co-housing that become important in the continuation of projects: warranting commonality through social interactions and internal collaboration, ensuring collective intentions in resident turnover and, lastly, the continuation of external collaboration.

5.5.1 Routinising commonality: utility of sharing spaces, commitment and self-management

An important part of co-housing is the actual realised form of commonality in the housing project. In the researched projects and initiatives, material elements such as common spaces and facilities have been designed to allow for the continuity, or in the language of practice theory, the routinisation of social interactions after the development process is over. Several types of social interactions can be distinguished as important for providing commonality.

The first type of social interactions are casual encounters between residents, which are important for facilitating neighbourliness. Overall, respondents of co-housing projects reported the normalisation and enjoyment of having unplanned meetings with co-residents in the common (often semi-public) spaces between the private dwellings (c.f. Fromm, 2012) of the housing projects. A middle-aged, long time CW project resident explains the importance of having the possibility of social exchanges close to home:

“It pleased me, and I remember that from living in a student apartment [...] that when I wanted to see someone, I’d have to think who, and that was still in the 70’s, so that person would not necessarily be at home and young people often didn’t have a telephone. And so you’d get your bike and check if someone was at home, and if he wasn’t, you’d go to the next, you know. And so you also needed to decide which friend you would like to see. And now it’s more spontaneous. I can walk into the street, and certainly in summer I often run into someone and have a chat, as long as that person is up for it. I really enjoy those unexpected meetings.”

Importantly, the inhabitants of materialised projects explained that in order to practice commonality through having casual meetings implies sociability. While respondents made sure to explain that co-housing residents are certainly not expected to be sociable at all times and privacy needs to be assured, some also stressed that co-housing projects are not a form of assisted living. Especially the CW residents indicated that also in a co-housing project residents are expected to self-initiate sociability if they feel they need it.

A second type of encounter between residents takes place during planned, regular activities, which are often organised by co-residents who are active in specific working-groups. Under the denominator ‘common activities’, co-housing residents report a whole array of regular, organised encounters between residents that revolve around specific activities, from daily coffee and tea mornings and weekly bar evenings to yearly thematic parties.
Meanings ascribed to regular activities can revolve around the pragmatic collective benefits that can be expected in exchange for relative small individual contributions, thus realising expectations of reciprocity. This is explained by the elderly long time CW resident:

“For example, there is coffee every morning, you don’t have to organise that yourself. There is a schedule for people, and I also serve coffee once a month, that’s true. But the rest of the month you can profit from the coffee-serving. There are also movies once a month, a cinema-group. So yes, there are all kinds of activities that you don’t have to organise yourself right? And that appeals to me greatly, I must say.”

In addition to the functions that ‘in between spaces’ and common spaces and facilities can have for planned and unplanned social interactions, another function of shared spaces and facilities that routinises commonality is provided by the joint management and maintenance responsibilities that ensue from them. Such common responsibilities can involve physical upkeep (gardening, cleaning, repairing et cetera), as well as joint management (scheduling use, tracking facility-use et cetera). This stresses internal collaboration and the importance of
continued organisational competences and commitment in the co-housing project. The following quote, taken from the corporation director illustrates the relevance of this additional collaborative function:

“It needs to have that [i.e. shared spaces, ed.], otherwise it’s only an administrative and legal framework, but physically they have nothing to do with each other. You need the physical as well. If you don’t have that, you don’t meet each other and you have nothing to shape common activities [...] It also needs substance. If you only share a garden, well, that’s just on the edge, that’s not very much. Actually, something is needed that concerns the living as well [...] a guest room for instance. You can share that, but that also means you have to make agreements about it [...] because that physical facility is there, you also establish the management, you make agreements, and social cohesion can form.”

Interestingly, the generation of commitment for the common management tasks means a seemingly paradoxical situation for a good share of co-housing projects: while both the CW and CPC projects with intentions of commonality emphasise individual freedom, they also emphasise common responsibilities in order to warrant social intentions. So a potential problem for co-housing groups is to ensure commitment to common responsibilities without compromising the individual freedom of residents. Such tensions between voluntary, but needed commitment was overcome in De Kersentuin and WvdT projects by the scale of the projects, i.e. in practice there is always a sufficient amount of residents who volunteer for common management tasks. The respondents from these projects also emphasised that support for common responsibilities is also ensured by a diverse age-composition; if the population of co-housing projects age and residents see their own capabilities decrease, there is reason to assume that the resident groups become less self-reliant and intentions of commonality may be more difficult to realise without external help.

In summary, next to having frequent social interactions through planned and unplanned encounters that take place in common spaces and facilities, these material aspects of co-housing also act as warrantors for collaboration between residents. As explained in § 5.1.1, the facet of warranty for these social interactions is also a key motivating factor for co-housing practitioners. As explained by the Kersentuin respondent:

“They were high ambitions at the time, we have realised them and this is the result. So that is a difference with other neighbourhoods, that we have done it from the beginning and warranted them in such a way that we can keep doing it. Because often it’s the warranting that is essential. There are a lot of CPC projects [...] that stop when the project is finalised, but the management phase, which is a lot longer, is not enclosed in it. If you don’t take care of common responsibilities in your neighbourhood, it can dilute. It isn’t something you can easily add to a neighbourhood [...]”

The common responsibilities in co-housing projects also mean that common decision-making is an ongoing practice in co-housing. Throughout the trajectories that co-housing groups go, the systems for decision-making, the modes of governance that co-housing groups use affect the functioning of the group. As explained in § 5.4.1, internal decision-making can be advised on in the initiative phase by external experts, but in the eventual continuation, a key factor of co-housing is their responsibility and collective competence to self-govern (aspects of) their housing projects. Given the variety in ways that group decisions can be taken (democratic, consensus etcetera), and the ways that they affect the internal functioning of co-housing projects, there may
also be reasons for conflict if individual group-members feel disadvantaged by them. As explained by a long term CW inhabitant:

*With us decisions in the smaller groups, we call them clusters, are mostly taken with consensus. En in the greater community they are taken by majority. But now we’re getting caught up in it a bit. It has been bothering me for years that with majority it can mean that you don’t account for minority interests. It’s being attempted, but the over the years decisions have been taken about which I think we should’ve discussed more.*

From the initiative to materialised projects, collective decision-making is a competence that can be a decisive reason for success, but conversely also for failure and discomfort with co-housing.

### 5.5.2 Ensuring collective intentions: resident turnover

The co-housing projects and initiatives in this research self-select or plan to self-select potential new residents. This self-selection of new residents can be done in a variety of ways. Most projects have a website and a resident association of which aspiring residents can become a member, often against a small annual contribution. To ensure that aspiring residents know what they are getting involved with, and to ensure their commitment, new residents are often expected to take part in one or more common activities a year. Furthermore, aspiring residents can also be asked for the time they have available to invest in the community. The Kersentuin respondent explained what might be expected from potential new neighbours:

> “We expect that those who put themselves on the list intrinsically back these ideals. It also has to do with the social rental houses, those don’t become available very often, so people remain on the list quite long, and well, you have to make an effort to stay on that list every year. You also pay something, ten euro’s or so, and it is expected that you participate in something once a year, even if it’s just a gardening day.”

In the case of home-ownership, the projects in this research have different strategies to ensure that new residents comply with their collective intentions. In mixed projects the groups also consist of individual home-owners who can sell their house on the free market. In the case of De Roze Hallen, an anti-speculation clause was signed by all residents, which applies to the first two years after the completion of the project and is meant to prevent an early breakdown of collective intentions. Interestingly, at De Kersentuin some real estate brokers have downplayed commonality aspects, focussing instead on the individual dwelling in their marketing efforts. Nevertheless, the Kersentuin respondent reported that in practice potential buyers already know that a dwelling becomes available through word of mouth or via extant networks. The demand for the co-housing projects in this research is quite high, as reflected by relative long waiting lists of aspiring residents. Most projects in this research have arranged that aspiring residents who endorse their collective intentions are made aware when individual dwellings are put up for sale, making sure that there are enough ‘intrinsically motivated people’ who can make bids on dwellings that become available. In this way, the collective intentions of co-housing groups in this research maintain a certain stability.

However, there is more at hand, because although new residents, or novices, may have consciously signed up for an existing co-housing project, they have not been part of the initiative phase and enter a more or less new environment where the various practices of planned and unplanned social interaction have to be learned until they become internalised in their daily practicing of co-housing. Long time co-housing residents in this research reported a
consciousness about a certain normalisation of commonality, which although they are based on voluntariness, are implicitly expected to be picked up by new members.

5.5.3 Self-management and external relations
As the co-housing projects in this research have been implemented in various collaborative schemes and thus take various organisational shapes, some maintain ties with external organisations in the continuation of projects.

The mixed projects with both social rental dwellings and owner-occupied dwellings in this research maintain ties with housing corporations for the rental part of their project. Importantly, since the Housing Act of 2015 this means that new residents for the social rental dwellings have to be eligible according to centrally determined eligibility criteria for social housing. As explained in § 2.4, some CW groups experience this negatively as they lose some of their autonomy in self-selecting new residents. Both CW inhabitants that were interviewed reported that their projects were currently looking into the possibilities of becoming independent from their landlords. Next to the impediment of income-criteria for new residents in socially rented dwellings, two of the interviewed respondents also indicated that in their projects their groups try to prioritise the inflow of more young people. They do so because their respective groups are aging, and having a diverse age-composition fits both intentions of maintaining a diverse population as well as the aforementioned observation that having young people in the group also ensures support for common management tasks. However, having any additional criteria for new social housing residents further problematises the management of residential admittance.

Next to housing allocation, the members of CW groups also indicated that they’d like to become independent in order to simplify physical adjustments to the buildings. The collective intentions of the co-housing groups in this research seem to be durable; the original values of the visited groups were reported to still be maintained. However, at the same time intentions also ‘keep up with time’. For instance, ecological housing standards evolve as new technologies become available and combating climate change becomes an ever more prominent point of societal attention. Although most projects in this research have been developed eco-consciously, as time progresses new standards and technologies may be desired by the resident groups, such as solar panels, but landlords may not be very keen on making new investments in technological possibilities. Hence, the CW residents in this research both indicated that becoming independent of the housing corporation that once helped their project materialise, for instance by self-directing their own social housing organisation in a housing cooperative, can help their group to implement new physical adjustments that comply with evolving ecological standards.

In co-housing projects with mixed ownership (De Kersentuin, WvdT), making physical adjustments to the projects may be further complicated by the fact that while the home owners may be able to implement new adjustments collectively and independently, which is mostly arranged via their collective organisation in an owners-association, the social rented dwellings are managed by an external organisation that would need to be persuaded to also make new investments. This doesn’t only relate to making adjustments that keep up with new standards regarding collective intentions, eventually the projects may need large-scale renovations. However, most respondents in this research live in relatively new projects, which haven’t been in need of such large-scale renovations yet. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to see how renovation requirements affect the group dynamics of mixed co-housing projects.
Next to the relationships that the co-housing projects in this research maintain with housing corporations, some projects incorporate public space in their projects and make agreements about this with local municipalities. At De Kersentuin, the ability to self-manage public space means they can adjust it to comply with their ecological intentions (Figure 9). Superfluous parking spaces have been transformed into gardens that are actively kept by the residential community (Figure 10). For these kind of measures the resident association makes formal agreements with the municipality, which also supports this with financial contributions that would otherwise be spent on ‘regular’ maintenance of public space. De Kersentuin is not the only project where residents collectively take care of the management of public space, other initiatives and projects in this research had either plans to incorporate public space into their project or already had incorporated it. The value that self-designing and managing such parts of public space may have could be described in terms of the value that adjacent public space has as a resource for residential communities. Being able to collectively control public space in this way could be seen as a practice of commoning where resident collectives take ownership over public space (c.f. De Cauter, 2015).

On a concluding note about what has been said in this chapter, denoting the difference of the co-housing projects in this research and ‘regular’ neighbourhoods that consist of individually organised households, a view could be offered on co-housing projects as essentially functioning as full-fledged organisations. While the site of organisation is the home and the living environment, co-housers in this research also approach it as a kind of work-place that needs to be maintained in a way that is congruent with the philosophy, or collective intentions of the group. From the start-up phase in the initiative up to the management of the organisation that has been set-up, co-housing practitioners can be seen as continuously reproducing their aspired living environment by relinking elements of meaning, materials and competence. In Table 4 an attempt has been made to present the elements of co-housing practice as discussed per paragraph in this chapter, and hence in a way that emphasises the dynamism of co-housing. As each of the phases of co-housing projects require a specific set of practices, co-housing could be seen as an amalgam of multiple linked practices.
Table 4: Discerning the elements of co-housing practice

| § 5.1 | Shared housing aspirations
| Collective intentions of co-housing initiatives |

- Commonality (non-anonymity)
- Ecological sustainability
- Self-reliance and control

| § 5.2/5.3 | Generating enthusiasm –
| External perceptions of co-housing / External collaboration –
| Availability of locations and competing housing development practices |

- Citizen/consumer choice (self-control, choice)
- Societal relevance co-housing intentions
- Economic motivations (recession, place promotion)
- Legitimacy and experimentation (low demand, perception of co-housers, own position relative to co-housers as producers)

| § 5.4 | Internal collaboration –
| Decision-making, guidance and task-division |

- Collective intentions
- Commitment to collective intentions and moving the project forward

| § 5.5 | Maintaining the co-housing project: stability and dynamics of co-housing practice |

- Commonality: (un)planned social interactions, (pragmatic) benefits of commonality and reciprocity, commitment
- Self-reliance and autonomy

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<tr>
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<th>Materials</th>
<th>Competences</th>
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<td>Commonality (non-anonymity)</td>
<td>Prospective house and living environment</td>
<td>Institutional know-how: instruments and networks that facilitate co-housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecological sustainability</td>
<td>Shared spaces and facilities</td>
<td>Envisioning realisation of collective intentions: knowledge of co-housing models (e.g. CW), building materials and project development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-reliance and control</td>
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<td>Communication: with co-initiators and potential external collaborators, making plans known and generate support</td>
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<td>Available locations</td>
<td>Urban plans</td>
<td>Facilitation and interference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-conditional frameworks and requirements</td>
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<td>Communication of requirements and aspired degree of self-reliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design: shared spaces and facilities (degree of commonality)</td>
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<td>Acting as one group (a project developer/commissioner)</td>
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<td>Construction materials</td>
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<td>Balancing individual and collective interests</td>
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<td>Material mediation identity of group</td>
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<td>Balancing internal dynamics with external requirements</td>
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<td>Balancing facilitation and interference</td>
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Chapter 6

Conclusions

The objective of this research was to gain insight in the kind of work that goes into co-housing in The Netherlands by focussing on the dynamics of co-housing practices as initiatives move towards the materialisation of their envisioned co-housing projects. In this way co-housing can be appreciated as constituting a practice-net in which various practices of collective planning, housing development and self-management become enmeshed. In the analysis, attention was given to the ongoing linking of materials, meanings and competences (Shove et al., 2012) that are involved in co-housing. In the following each of the research questions posed in chapter 1 will be addressed with a sensitivity to the practice-theoretical injunction of Shove et al. to analyse the linking between these elements and the linking between practices.

6.1 Motivations for involvement with co-housing

What intentions do co-housing initiatives have, and with what reasons do external organisations become involved with co-housing?

In chapter 3 collective intentionality was put forward as the meaning-making by co-housing initiatives; the meanings ascribed to a wished-for, envisioned housing project and living environment are suggested to be the force that drives initiatives. In this sense, the concept of collective intentionality provided a first lens through which this research ‘zoomed in’ on ‘the oriented and concerned nature’ of co-housing practices (Nicolini, 2012). Firstly, this research argues that a demand for co-housing amongst research participants emerges from meanings of neighbourliness and the intention to prevent anonymity in the living environment. Additionally, an argument was put forward that the possible background reasons for co-habitation can be very diverse: from a range of lifestyles – where possibilities are as many as there are types of lifestyles for which cohabitation can be supportive – to reasons that relate to changing life-cycle stages (e.g. seniors with an ‘aging in place’ aspiration). Further meanings ascribed to co-housing that were discerned amongst citizens were intentions of building and living in ecologically sustainable ways and to have control over the design and development process. While intentions of ecological sustainability were argued to be normalised in society as a whole, some co-housing initiatives put this intention centre stage and do not shy away from experimentation with building materials, which conventional developers are less likely to do. The intentions of self-reliance were found to have a double function: self-reliance is sometimes the only means to obtain access to housing that meets specific social and/or material demands, but for some respondents taking responsibility for the planning, design and development process figured as an intention in itself. In these cases, co-housing practices were suggested as a kind of collective appropriation of the process and content of housing development; as a praxis of commoning.

Next to the internal intentions of co-housing groups, the motivations for external parties to become involved with co-housing were also discussed. These external motivations for co-housing ranged from deeming it important to cater for specific housing demands to more substantial understandings of co-housing as having broader societal relevance, which mainly relates to the expected benefits that co-housing groups may bring to urban neighbourhoods (notions of commonality and involvement with the social and physical maintenance of neighbourhoods) and contributions to urban liveability in densifying cities through practices of sharing.
6.2 Opportunities and difficulties for external collaboration

What are the opportunities and difficulties for collaboration between co-housing initiatives and professional housing development organisations and institutions?

Throughout the research it has been asserted that the accomplishment of co-housing cannot ‘happen’ in isolation; multiple parties are needed to allow for co-housing initiatives to materialise. While initiatives can emerge from the shared, envisioned social and material content of a housing project, such aspirations are unlikely to materialise if other criteria, such as supportive meanings ascribed to co-housing by external parties and the competences needed to get an initiative off the ground, are not met. In other words, meanings, competences and materials relevant for co-housing need to be linked in order for co-housing projects to take off.

From experiences of governmental respondents it appeared that there is a relative strong will to support co-housing in general, but this varies between municipalities. In relation to what has been said above, the way that co-housing initiatives are facilitated by local governments may be influenced by whether municipalities have a substantive understanding of the intentions of co-housing initiatives, and do not only support it out of political (e.g. more choice for entrepreneurial citizens, active citizenship) or economic motivations (crisis, withdrawal by institutional developers). Impediments to facilitate co-housing are the perceived legitimacy for municipalities to facilitate initiatives, perceptions of co-housing as a fringe phenomena with a minimal demand or an elitist pursuit, and a doubt about the capacity of citizen collectives to act competently as their own housing developers. Furthermore, co-housing can also be perceived as a diversion from ‘regular’ modes of housing development, which can be perceived to involve more tailor-work on the part of municipal authorities. Hence, municipalities may be reluctant to divert from their routine practices in housing development.

The practices of housing corporations were reported to have routinised on the basis of the curtailment of their activities by the national government. A difficulty for housing corporations in collaborating with co-housing initiatives within the social housing sector, just as in CW schemes, is the aspiration of co-housing groups to self-manage their housing projects. Tailor-made experimentation instead of standard modes of social housing development and management can be perceived as illegitimate practices for corporations. Hence, routinisation of social housing development could be argued to impede the potential emergence of new relevant housing development practices with more room for resident collectives as producers or co-designers.

Lastly, although municipalities might be supportive of co-housing, respondents indicated that the availability of municipal land is decreasing, signalling the lack of material requirements for co-housing. For this reason voices were raised to seek collaboration with commercial project developers, who do have land at their disposal. However, between commercial project-led housing development and co-housing as a user-led approach to housing development there can be tensions that are difficult to resolve. A clear understanding of the aspired degree of self-reliance amongst co-housing groups and the extent to which the collective intentions imply self-reliance, could help determine the degree to which project developers could play a role. Of course, this implies a certain balance between self-reliance and interference that some co-housing initiatives might not feel comfortable with. In addition, if learning all facets of housing development is seen as one of the most important aspects of co-housing and its associated instrument of CPC, then such collaborative schemes with project developers could be labelled as ‘illegitimate’ user-led approaches to housing.
6.3 Relation to spatial planning

How are co-housing practices related to local spatial planning practices?

In considering the relation of co-housing initiatives to urban planning practices, it is important to determine at what point of the planning and development process co-housing initiatives are introduced. The kind of development frameworks that are in place, if any, play an important role in co-housing. Similar to the tensions between co-housing and commercial project-led development, the opportunities for co-housing initiatives can be constrained by spatial planning practices as a result of the tension between the aspect of self-reliance in co-housing and the tendency of urban planners to shape pre-conditional frameworks for development. Extant urban plans determine the degree of self-design that co-housing groups can exercise, and the more detailed such plans are, the more adaptations co-housing groups have to make. On the other hand, when urban plans are not yet in place, co-housing groups can become responsible for aspects that they might have less intention to make their own, including the construction of infrastructures such as roads, parking spaces, water and energy et cetera. Such material aspects are important as they form pre-conditional frameworks for housing development that have to comply with formal regulations. Hence, determining at what point of the planning process co-housing initiatives become involved is crucial for understanding the practices that co-housing groups engage in.

In turn, the opportunities that co-housing initiatives have at being considered as competent planners and developers and thus be included in the spatial planning process, are dependent on the perceptions of co-housing by planning authorities. Depending on the aspired degree of self-reliance, and the competences that groups have to self-reliantly develop their project, there needs to be a balance between facilitation and interference by planning and housing authorities. Therefore it is important that co-housing groups are aware of the context of their location and the formal requirements to which their plans have to comply, and base their aspired level of self-reliance in the planning and development phase on this information.

In this research the experiences were manifold and varied locally. Not all projects aspire or have aspired full self-reliance. As one external expert jokingly said, some initiatives “just want to draw houses!”, which is only part of project development. Furthermore, active facilitation of co-housing instruments, for instance via the spread of information is fragmented and mostly based on a project-level (e.g. a certain housing district is earmarked for citizen initiatives, after which information about instruments is spread). Notwithstanding the locally varying connections and disconnections between co-housing and spatial planning, it is possible to imagine that as experiences of planning authorities with co-housing initiatives increase, so does familiarity with citizen initiatives, which can decrease problems of perception on the part of planning authorities and, if experiences are shared, increase know-how for new co-housing initiatives.

6.4 Dynamism, associations and effects of co-housing practices

How do co-housing practices develop over time as initiatives materialise into concrete projects and what does this mean for (local) housing development practices?
At this point there is sufficient basis to come to a the formulation of an answer to the question that provided the basis of this research. First the dynamism of co-housing practices will be considered, before turning to the effects that this may have on local housing development practices.

Dynamism and routine in this research have been viewed from two main angles. The routine that professional housing developers and municipal departments may have developed and how this may negatively affect co-housing has already been discussed. What remains to do is to say something about the dynamism and routine of co-housing practices within the initiatives.

In the initiative phase, the emphasis of co-housing projects lies on creating links between the meanings of co-housing that both initiators and external stakeholders may have, the needed materials in the form of a location for development, and the competences to devise realistic plans for self-development. When these pre-conditional elements are linked, it is important for co-housing groups to act effectively as one organisation to move the project forward. After materialisation, the co-housing practice is continued by bringing collective intentions in practice: the envisioned project has materialised, but now it is the continuation of collective intentions that becomes the main subject of work (c.f. Nicolini, 2012).

As we have seen in § 5.4, initiatives and projects in this research devise various strategies aimed at ensuring the continuation of collective housing intentions in the eventual living environment. One of these strategies is to ensure the continued commitment of old and new residents in the co-housing project. The materiality of co-housing projects often acts as a warrantor of collective intentions. Shared spaces and facilities not only provide the spaces for casual encounters and as such allow for neighbourliness, commonality is also ensured by the common management responsibilities that ensue from the shared indoor and outdoor spaces. In this research the notion that housing production is an ongoing matter has repeatedly been suggested. Hence, co-housing production also means the management of a materialised project. From a practice theoretical point of view, the links between the defining elements of each co-housing project have to be continually reproduced, otherwise only a carcass of co-housing would remain in the material form of the project. An important impediment to the continuation of collective intentions was found in mixed tenure projects that are dependent on the regulated practices by external parties, specifically housing corporations. Because of stringent social housing admittance criteria, mixed-tenure projects are formally constrained in their collective autonomy, which can impede their self-managed resident inflow and ability to make collective physical adjustments. In this regard, the new housing cooperative legislation has the potential to provide solutions for such groups, although that would require the cooperation of multiple institutions, such as municipalities and housing corporations (see Platform31, 2016a; 2016b).

Altogether, in each phase of co-housing trajectories multiple practices are linked, just as in regular housing development. The difference is that the developer, i.e. the co-housing group, is often inexperienced and learns ‘as it goes’. Practices like group-formation, collective decision-making, housing design, budgetting etc. are temporarily linked. Some linkages between these practices disappear after the projects have materialised (e.g. architectural designing and project development are quite specific for the development phase), but other linkages persist (such as self-management and external collaboration).

Then what about the influences of these collective forms of citizen production in housing development on local housing development in general? Firstly, co-housing in the sense of a housing product seems to be accepted as a growing market by a large share of the external experts in this research. Collective housing solutions as a product in which the material form
promotes social interaction are already being taken up by some commercial developers, for instance for senior housing consumers. But co-housing in the sense of citizen involvement in the process towards housing is often perceived as too devious and time-consuming, not legitimate to facilitate or as a threat to the position of conventional housing developers. However, at the same time there are signals that external stakeholders in housing development are noticing a trend which they can react to by experimenting in their routine practicing. Some governments include co-housing as an option in new housing development tasks and actively promote knowledge and information about co-housing instruments. Commercial project developers, as the one in this research, may explore the possibility of providing ‘in between solutions’ where pre-conditional urban plans have been sketched out and citizen initiatives can collectively develop plots within certain frameworks of development. Depending on the aspired or needed level of self-reliance on the part of co-housing groups, experimentation with conventional modes of housing development by professional organisations can facilitate co-housing without compromising their professionalism.

6.5 Research limitations, discussion and recommendations for praxis
Throughout the present praxiography care has been taken to formulate interpretations and arguments in a way that all statements need to be seen in relation to the approached respondents. Respondents were drawn from a selection of co-housing initiatives and projects from a few cities in The Netherlands, and consequently the findings about the collective intentionality and trajectories of co-housing practices are strongly influenced by what these co-housing initiators and residents had to say. Furthermore, external experts were also drawn from a selection of certain types of organisations. Interpretations of the practices of semi-public and commercial developers, like corporations and project developers, could reach more ‘depth’ if more respondents would have been drawn from these types of organisations. However, unfortunately time is only limited for a master thesis and practical considerations have led to the made choices. Having said that, there are still some recommendations for praxis that I would like to make based on this research.

Firstly, there are indications of mismatches between what could be a co-housing demand and the demand as it is perceived by authorities and housing developers. Negative connotations to co-housing by important institutions for housing development (as communal, hippie-like fringe phenomena, or modern elitist utopias) are accompanied by a lack of knowledge about the possibilities for collective housing production on the part of initiatives. At the same time, long waiting lists and residential stability in existing projects suggest that the actual demand is quite high. Hence, an important recommendation of this research is to make co-housing solutions part of large-scale housing surveys.

Relatedly, knowledge-sharing and the promotion of co-housing instruments is still relatively fragmented. The in-house competences of citizen initiatives to find ways to implement co-housing aspirations are still crucial, while more structured information provision on co-housing options could lead to more accessibility of citizen involvement in housing development. The multiple information platforms about self-building, co-housing, housing cooperatives and municipalities and housing developers that support co-housing could be linked so citizen initiatives can find their way more easily and get more rapid insight in the (im)possibilities of realising co-housing aspirations.

In considering the actual (financial) benefits of co-housing projects, societal cost-benefit analyses could give more substance to co-housing groups and advocate’s claims of societal
relevance. Such analyses could focus on multiple aspects of co-housing, such as the reciprocity and sharing practices of co-housing initiatives and the self-management of (public) space.
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**Appendix**

**Topic list interviews**
Internal experts:

a) Description initiative/project
   - Involvement (when and how)
   - Intentions: internal negotiations, development over time, depth of intentions
   - Design of project

b) Collaboration external parties
   - Involvement external parties different phases of project
   - Contact with external parties
   - Potential adjustments collective intentions resulting from contact
   - Negotiations with external parties

c) Internal dynamics
   - Practicing of collective intentions
   - Attraction/defection group members
   - Influence novices
   - Main differences with ‘regular’ housing

External experts:

a) Description of professional occupation

b) Involvement with co-housing
   - Relevance to expertise
   - Reasons for involvement

c) Experiences with internal experts
   - Reasons for initiating co-housing
   - Relevance co-housing intentions for own profession

d) Experiences with other external experts

e) Outlook development co-housing

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