

International Conference “Tackling the global housing challenges: Relevance and replicability of housing cooperatives’ role in the provision of affordable housing”
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State of Housing Cooperatives and current challenges in the Netherlands: the case of the “wooncoöperatie”

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Background

- Historically, housing cooperatives **marginal** in Dutch housing landscape
 - Housing Law from 1901:
 - Intended to regulate social housing providers and set up a framework for the provision of low-interest government loans to social housing providers.
- BUT, what 'legal form'?**
- 'Associations' (*wooncorporaties*) were accepted while 'co-operatives' were rejected.
 - Liberals liked private because it was not public,
 - Social Democrats satisfied because it was outside private market investment
 - Christian Democrats - emphasizing sovereignty in communities – liked the key role of these civil society organisations.

→associations aim for the 'public interest' while co-operative aims for the 'private interest' of its members (Helderman, 2004; Beekers, 2013).

Current developments

- 2015 Dutch Housing Act restricts aim and scope of housing associations and provides new opportunities for residents' self-provision and self-management
- “Wooncoöperatie” model:
 - new legal form aimed at bridging gap between social rental and owner-occupied sectors
 - 3 forms:
 - *Vastgoedcoöperatie* (collective cooperative ownership)
 - *Beheercoöperatie* (management cooperative)
 - *Besloten Vennootschap met beperkte aansprakelijkheid, BV* (Limited Liability Company, LLC) Shares jointly owned by tenants association and social landlord.

The *wooncoöperatie* in the 2015 Housing Law

"A 'wooncoöperatie' is an association with full legal capacity with the objective of enabling its members to independently provide for the management and maintenance of the residential areas in which they live and the environment immediately adjacent thereto."

"Owners or tenants of at least five residential properties located in close proximity to each other that form a unit in financial, administrative, constructional, urban or other terms, can set up a 'wooncoöperatie'."

BUT: wooncoöperatie model slow to take up – why?

- In Dutch cooperative law, wooncoöperaties have **no special position** (they fall within Housing law)
- Many housing associations **skeptical** towards wooncoöperaties and tenants' self-organization
- Preserving social housing stock in a wooncoöperatie **cannot currently be put in binding agreements** → risk of loss societal capital.
- Concern over housing associations selling buildings at a discount to tenants' groups: less capacity to build **new social rental homes** vis-à-vis selling at market price.

Action plan Municipality of Amsterdam

Source: Platform 31

Objectives:

- Within 2 years: 15 to 20 projects started
 - Focus on new construction and development areas
 - In the 'middle segment' and mixed initiatives
- In 2025: 7,000 homes in development or realized
 - 50% new construction and 50% existing construction
- In 20 years: 40,000 homes owned by housing cooperatives
 - 50% new construction and 50% existing construction
 - 50% social and 50% middle segment

Challenges and debates

- **Built trust in the cooperatives form** amongst Dutch society (banks, housing associations, citizens...);
- Establish guarantees for **long-term retention of 'societal capital'** of the housing stock for the public interest;
- **Clarify** target groups: low income tenants or middle income groups?
- **Facilitate** acquisition and management of finance by groups;
- Towards *professionalization* of cooperatives?

Get in touch!

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