Empowering the commons?

Analysing the effects of Public Collective Collaboration on urban commons governance in Amsterdam

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the influence of Public Collective Collaboration (PCC) on the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam. Urban commons, comprising collectively managed resources, management systems and communities, are increasingly recognised as alternatives to traditional market- and state-driven resource management systems. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research identifies the landscape of urban commons in Amsterdam, examining their structures, practices, and interactions with the municipality. Key findings highlight how both internal factors (such as trust-building and shared understanding) and external factors (like institutional design and facilitative leadership) shape collaborative efforts. The study further explores how these factors of collaboration influence the functioning (political pressure versus service provision) and positioning (independence versus autonomy) dimensions of the governance of the commons. The results show how the success or failure of factors of collaboration can influence the mutually exclusive nature of the dimensions of governance of the commons. These results give a more nuanced and empirical understanding of the dynamic of enhancement and co-optation due to PCC. These insights aim to support policy development under the amsterDOEN research agenda and contribute to academic debates on the evolving relationship between commons and local governments.

Keywords

Urban Commons, Collaborative governance, Public Collective Collaboration, Municipality of Amsterdam, Mixed methods research, Governance of the Commons

Preface

This thesis represents the culmination of a significant journey in my academic and personal life. My interest in urban commons has been developing for a long time. Over the course of my studies, this interest has grown into a passion for understanding and addressing the ins and outs of how commons function and should develop in the future. I am deeply grateful to both of my supervisors, Roberto Rocco and Darinka Czischke, for their guidance, insightful feedback, and encouragement throughout this process. Their expertise has been invaluable in shaping this work.

On a personal note, I wish to thank my wife, family and friends for their understanding and encouragement during the more challenging moments of this journey. Their belief in me has been a source of strength and motivation.

There have been many insightful talks, papers and other forms of inspiration that have guided me through the process. However, there are two that I would like to share especially. Firstly, in an interview from earlier this year with philosopher Slavoj Zizek in newspaper Trouw, Zizek encourages the reader to 'be pessimistic in theory, but optimistic in practice'. When it comes to the commons, I have found this to be a very apt motto. This brings me to the second source of inspiration: the poem at the bottom of the page. Its interpretation, I leave to you, the reader of this thesis. Perhaps you will find your own meaning in it.

Thomas van der Deijl
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The Goose and the Common

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
But leaves the greater villain loose
Who steals the common from off the goose.

The law demands that we atone
When we take things we do not own
But leaves the lords and ladies fine
Who take things that are yours and mine.
    - Anonymous, 1821

The poor and wretched don't escape
If they conspire the law to break;
This must be so but they endure
Those who conspire to make the law.

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
And geese will still a common lack
Till they go and steal it back.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This thesis explores the influence of collaboration efforts between the urban commons in Amsterdam and the Municipality of Amsterdam on the governance of those commons. Urban commons, which is a term used to describe a wide range of 'joint resource management' initiatives, are groups of people that are 'trying to reach their economic and social goals via collective action' (De Moor, 2012, p. 269). The historical use of the term 'the commons' was to refer to a resource, such as a field. However, De Moor's definition shows that the commons also refers to management practices and a community of people. While the historical interpretation of the commons dates back to the Middle Ages, in recent decades there has been a resurgence of academic and societal interest in this broader concept of the commons.

The Netherlands has a longstanding history of collective action and an active civil society. This dates back to the 12th century when it was common to have common grounds called 'Meenten' or 'Marken' in the village (Ibid.). While there have been many developments regarding collective action since then, the developments that have been taking place in the last decade regarding the urban commons seem to be a new turn in this history. Research by the municipality identified a wave of intrinsically motivated citizens that are generating momentum for the growth of these initiatives in Amsterdam (van der Stap et al., 2022). This momentum has not gone unnoticed. In 2024, this has led towards an attempt to formalise the varying collaboration efforts between the municipality of Amsterdam and the urban commons. Literature on the commons theorises that these collaboration efforts can impact the governance of the commons (Bianchi et al., 2022). However, there is little empirical research that can help to understand what this impact might look like in Amsterdam. Therefore, this research sets out to answer this question. The first and most important step, is to gain a deeper understanding of the commons.

To do so leads in a straight line towards Economic Nobel prize winner Elinor Ostrom. Elinor Ostrom (1990) defined the commons as shared resources, such as forests, fisheries, or irrigation systems, that are collectively managed by a group of users under agreed-upon rules and norms. Unlike the traditional "tragedy of the commons" narrative, Ostrom demonstrated that communities can effectively self-organize to manage these resources sustainably without requiring privatization or state control. Her research emphasized the importance of local knowledge, trust, and participatory governance. Successful management of the commons relies on clearly defined boundaries, fair decision-making processes, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and systems of monitoring and sanctioning to prevent overuse and ensure long-term resource sustainability (Ibid.).

By studying empirical examples of collectively managed resources, Ostrom managed to show that these systems can work effectively in practice. This finding is what Fennell (2011) later calls 'the law of Ostrom': 'a resource arrangement that works in practice can work in theory'. The tension demonstrated between theory and practice, remains an essential factor in studying the commons today. Ostrom's work effectively countered the dominant theory at that time, but it still operated very much within the logical economic paradigm of numbers, game theory and resource exchange. Over time Ostrom's ideas were integrated into other more politically-oriented theories such as political ecology and Resilience theory (Armitage, 2008). This evolution has also led some authors to adapt their definition of the object of study.

Through the expansion of literature on the commons after Ostrom's 'Governing the Commons' (1990), the commons came to be understood not only as a shared resource, but a shared resource with a collective relational social practice (Bianchi, 2018). For this thesis, the urban commons, commons in and around the city, are the subject of investigation. De Nictolis & Iaione (2021, p. 4) present urban commons as 'tangible or intangible socially constructed resources, assets, services, and infrastructure in cities'. The definition by De Nictolis and Iaione shows that some scholars choose to stick to the more classical narrow definition of the commons as a resource. However, this thesis follows the developing conceptualisation of the commons as described by Tomor et al. (2024, p.2): "*Urban Commons can include any number of resource types, from housing to Wi-Fi, but the main thing that makes urban commons different from public goods and consumer goods is that they are managed by the users through a prosocial, participatory process called commoning*". The theoretical framework will expand on the concept of commoning and the associated term for the users: commoners.

As many authors point out, the urban commons aim to be an alternative to the current market/state dominance in the management of resources (Bollier, 2020; Garnett, 2012; Ostrom, 1990). This however sparks a debate as to how commons should function and collaborate with(in) this incumbent system (Bianchi, 2022). To add to this debate, this thesis explores how the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam is affected by the collaboration between commons and the Municipality. Although an array of terms is used in literature to describe this collaboration, the municipality of Amsterdam labels it Public Collective Collaboration (PCC). This leads to the formulation of the following research question for this thesis: How does Public Collective Collaboration influence the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam?

As mentioned before, Ostroms' 'Governing the Commons' was instrumental in the rise of interest in the commons. It provided empirical evidence of the possibility of functioning collective institutions for the government of common pool resources. Over the years, this demonstration of commons as a workable alternative to the market or

state governance found its bedding in various critical academic fields. Its recent popularity is strongly associated with systemic critique brought about by increasing awareness around the limits of the neoliberal market economy. This awareness is highlighted by growing concerns about climate change, the unregulated housing market and increased pressure on nature by intensive agriculture. A testament to its popularity: Raworth incorporates commons into the well-known doughnut economy paradigm, as a means of changing the extractive nature of the economy towards a regenerative form of economy (Raworth, 2017).

Within cities, such developments are leading to a new wave of bottom-up urban commons, such as agriculture, housing, energy and care cooperatives. City governments in Ghent, Barcelona, Bologna and Amsterdam have recognized this movement and are looking for ways to be accommodating to these collectives (Bauwens & Niaros, 2017; Van Loon, 2023). This, in turn, raises the opportunity to empirically study the urban commons and their effects, something that was generally lacking in literature (Bianchi, 2018).

The empirical research enables a host of new questions to be asked, with answers that are relevant both for the commons and for municipal governments. Examples of such research include basic questions that aim to elaborate on what the commons are such as 'What are practices and challenges of commons?'(Calzati et al., 2022; Parker & Schmidt, 2017) or 'What benefits from urban commons can be identified?' (Colding et al., 2013). Many of these empirical studies highlight the nuanced and influential effort of local environmental factors such as regulations, financial possibilities and knowledge and experience of working with commons.

These factors provide the basis for this research. If local factors influence how the governance of the commons is shaped by Public Collective Collaboration, it is important to examine these factors as collaboration is shaped and intensified. The municipality of Amsterdam is currently increasing their collaboration with the commons. A notable example is the implementation of the 'Kaartenbak', an official system that enables and selects housing cooperations to build in specific plots around the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, n.d.). In the same spirit, the municipality has opened up a research and action agenda 'amsterDOEN', to explore how other commons can be stimulated similarly. At the time of writing, this program has already produced a legal handbook for the commons, an exploration of a financial ecosystem for the commons, and the start of an incubator for the community economy.

This thesis aims to provide input to this research agenda by studying the current and possible future influence of Public Collective Collaboration (PCC) on the governance of the commons in Amsterdam, and does this by pursuing two goals. The first goal is to identify the commons in Amsterdam, with a structural analysis based on an academically grounded definition of the commons. The second goal is to unpack the vast array of locally contingent PCC experiences into patterns on how

the governance of the commons can be affected. Pursuing these goals can help to empower both the commons and the Municipality in Amsterdam to shape their collaborative efforts going forward. Furthermore, this research adds to the developing academic debate on Public Collective Collaboration with the addition of Amsterdam as a case study. In the next section these goals will be explained more in depth and the research questions will be introduced.

1.2 Research Objective

This thesis aims to contribute to the amsterDOEN research agenda by studying the urban commons in Amsterdam through two primary goals. The amsterDOEN action program is set up by the democratisation department of the municipality of Amsterdam. The program has three main targets: organising financial and judicial tools for the commons, strengthening the commons ecosystem, and strengthening the commons narrative. The two main goals of this thesis indirectly support these goals by collecting empirical data on the commons in Amsterdam and providing an academic reflection on the possible effects of increased collaboration.

The first goal is to identify the Commons in Amsterdam, with a structural analysis based on an academically grounded definition of the commons. This involves a detailed examination of the various types of commons, their organisational structures, the resources they manage, and the communities they serve. Understanding these specifics is crucial for mapping the landscape of urban commons in Amsterdam and recognising the unique characteristics and needs of each common. This goal requires a distinct and focused understanding of what is considered an urban common and what is not. The theoretical framework will unpack this question in more detail.

The second goal is to unpack the wide array of Public Collective Collaboration experiences into patterns on how the governance of commons is affected. In doing so, it is crucial to consider the specific community, resource, and context of each common. This goal focuses on understanding how different urban commons perceive working with the local government, including their concerns, expectations, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks of such collaborations in certain domains. This also requires analysing the relevant policies and methods the Municipality has been developing. Reaching this goal requires mapping the experiences of commons through academically recognised factors contributing to the collaborative process. This includes factors that are both external and internal to the specific process. These factors will be explored in the theoretical framework.

1.3 Research Questions

By pursuing these goals, the thesis aims to advance the core objective of determining how commons-state collaboration can and should evolve in the future. The central research question guiding this thesis is: How does Public Collective Collaboration influence the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam? To comprehensively address this question, several sub-questions need to be explored:

- RQ1: What constitutes urban commons in Amsterdam?
- RQ2a: How do external factors shape the collaborative governance between the commons and the Municipality?
- RQ2b: How do internal factors shape the collaborative governance between the commons and the municipality?
- RQ3: How is the governance of the urban commons affected by the collaborative governance between the commons and the municipality?

These three questions aim to provide insight into how various collaborative efforts have influenced and could continue to influence the commons—crucial information given the rapid pace of development today. In the next section, an outline of the rest of this thesis is provided.

1.4 Research outline

So far, the introduction has outlined the main concepts, scope, objectives and research questions of this thesis. The next chapter describes and contrasts the core theoretical concepts and relevant theories. This analysis develops a conceptual framework that illustrates the interactions among the main dimensions of the core concepts: urban commons, governance of the commons, and collaborative governance. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the methodology and case selection. At the end of the chapter, an overview of how the main concepts from the conceptual framework have been operationalised is found.

Chapter 4 provides a narrative of the most important results from the data for each concept included in the conceptual framework. For clarity, the concepts are organised based on the sub-question they are related to. Chapter 5, the discussion, reflects on the wide range of results and describes their implications. The chapter contains both academic reflections as well as a summary of the most important takeaways for knowledge users. Finally, the conclusion summarises the most important findings and the overall implications. It also gives a list of actionable suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptualisation of Urban Commons

The word common in English comes from the old French 'commune' and the Latin 'communis', meaning (of/for the) community. During the middle ages In Europe, land that did not belong to the clergy or nobility, but belonged and was managed by the community to produce hay, wood, peat or provide pasture was known as the commons (De Moor, 2012). As time passed, a pattern of enclosure: 'the process of privatisation, closing of and fencing in' (Linebaugh, 2014, p. 7), diminished the role and size of the commons, further accelerated by the change from agricultural to industrial society.

In more recent history the concept of commons became well known due to its role in Hardin's 'Tragedy of the commons' (1968). Hardin theoretically explores how common pool resources, resources which are accessible and exploitable to all, without regulation or overseeing, are overexploited by a population, leading to the collapse of the resource. Hardin was a biologist, and wrote his essay on the commons in reference to the debate on population growth (Frischmann et al., 2019). The essay sketches a narrative where open access and unlimited population growth (over time) would exploit the resources available. As an answer to this problem Hardin advocates for solutions based on 'mutually agreement upon coercion' to escape 'the horror of the commons' (Hardin, 1968, p. 1247). In his biological paradigm, this mainly referred to a form of forced population control. However, Hardin's essay spread to other academic disciplines, including economy. Over time, Hardin' essay was used by economist to argue that the 'coercion' implied that either the state or the market should be in charge of managing common pool resources (Frischmann et al., 2019). This argument was used to propel systems of enclosure into the economy, feeding the neo-liberal system of privatisation of state and commonly owned resources. While Hardin embraced the interdisciplinary nature of his essay, he did later address that the implications of his work only applied in those instances where the resources were left totally unmanaged (Hardin, 1998).

Following up on this research and its claims, the revolutionary work of Ostrom (1990) set out to show that common pool resources can and have been managed successfully in many situations under certain sets of conditions. She pointed out that the system that Hardin described, is not a common but an open access system. The crucial difference is that according to Ostrom, empirical evidence show that when a community sets up a management system, the resource is not depleted, due to the regulation of access by the community. Ostrom calls this collective action for the management of common pool resources. Her work has inspired a lot more research into the governance of the commons, which also inspired societal and governmental

organizations to explore the topic. This, in turn, led to an expansion of the concept of what a common pool resource, or commons can be.

Where Ostrom only focuses on traditional Common Pool Resources such as fisheries or grasslands, modern definitions extend further. De Moor (2012) argues that there is no clear definition being used, and that depending on the local context and disciplinary background among scholars different meanings might be used. A commons might now be a much less tangible or even virtual type of good being shared by a community, such as Wikipedia, Linux or creative content under Creative Commons licenses. These 'new commons', as they are called by Hess (2008), are shared resources that did not exist before, or were not recognised as commons. In the case of the examples of virtual commons it was new technology that enabled the capture of a previously uncapturable public goods. There are however also new commons that that are based on the reconceptualization of publicly shared resources as commons, such as urban gardens or parks (Ibid.). The process of reconceptualization of shared public resources as a common can be seen as a continuing process. As this process is ongoing, this will affect the governance of these shared public resources, consequently reshaping the relationship between the public, private and civic sectors. Understanding this process is therefore urgent and relevant, both in academic and societal sense.

The first step to achieving the objectives of this research is a deeper understanding of all the elements that make up a commons, as well as what sets urban commons apart. To give some clarity, scholars tend to use adjectives to give a more specific interpretation of what type of commons they are referring to, such as digital commons, global commons or urban commons (Hess, 2008). The latter is of most relevance to this research, as the question relates to the urban environment and governance. The municipality of Amsterdam states that the commons are "a way of organizing: a collective that jointly owns and cares for a 'public good' or 'common good' based on stable democratic ideals and values" (Van Loon, 2023). In the following section, academic frameworks are examined to provide a deeper understanding of the interconnected elements that define a commons.

2.2 Frameworks to model the commons

While there are many models that aim to capture the different elements of the commons, the following section will explore 3 different models that will give a clear indication of what urban commons in Amsterdam could comprise. The comparison between these models can be found in table 1 below. The first model, the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IAD) by Ostrom (1992), has had a major influence on modern thinking around the commons. However, it is completely based on analysis of 'traditional' natural resource commons such as fisheries and fields.

This leads to a framework that is centred around the appropriation and provision of resource units.

Author	'Use'	'Management'	'Users'
(Ostrom, 1992)	Physical material conditions	Rules in use	Attributes of community
	Clearly defined boundaries, Technology, Time, Labor, Materials, Money	Economic and political relationships, Appropriation rules, Provision rules, Rule modification, Monitoring, nested enterprises	Cultural world views, conflict resolution mechanisms, enforcement, heterogeneity
(De Moor, 2012)	Common pool resources	Common pool institutions	Common property regime
	Excludability, substractability	User control, management rules, punishment, courts & assemblies	Boundaries, Bundle of rights, Cooperation, Users
(Tomor et al., 2024)	Resource design	Design context	Community design
	Form & function, Technological infrastructure, Operational model, Members and boundaries, Governance	Neighbours, Laws & regulation, Coalition building, Financing	Community Building, value articulation

Table 1 Comparison of main elements 'urban commons' as found in Ostrom, De Moor, and Tomor et al.

De Moor (2012) provides a more holistic approach, by aiming to bring historic ideas, including negative sentiments, and contemporary ideas of what commons are into a single framework. It is worth noting that De Moor shows how the three elements can be explained very differently based on whether the researcher has a positive or negative view on the management of commons. For example, a common property regime might either be seen as promoting equal distribution and rights of speech, or as something that attracts poverty and creates poverty (Ibid.). In comparison to the other two models the position of the common property regime is notable. For this comparison it is placed in the column of 'users', but a property regime is related to users in a much less direct sense than 'community' which is utilized by Ostrom and Tomor et al.

The model proposed by Tomor et al. (2024) holds particular relevance to this research compared to the other two models. It was chosen due to its recent publication and its foundation on empirical evidence gathered in Amsterdam over the past two years. It is also different in the sense that in aims to portray a model of be-commoning rather than commons. According to the authors be-commoning is 'the process through which a new (urban) commons is established' (Ibid., p. 2). Compared to the other two models this model therefore incorporates different aspects that are less apparent in the retrospective analysis of fully active commons, such as value articulation.

Despite the differences between these models, there is also a lot of overlap in the identification of what makes up a commons. The comparison shows that the three universal elements of commons are the use/resource, the management/institutions and the users/community. These can also be described as commons, commoning and commoners.

2.3 Theoretical Foundations

Taking Ostrom as a starting point again, her categorisation of principles for the management of commons (Ostrom, 1999) are important underpinnings in the development of literature and real life developments of commons. However, she also highlighted the uncertainty that is still abound in the literature on the commons (Ostrom, 2010a). She sums up examples of research that demonstrate that collective action is feasible to solve social dilemmas, but that there are nonetheless other examples of groups who have tried and failed, and that alternatives like privatisation or decentralisation might also fail. Towards this end she argues that:

'Due to the complexity of broader field settings, one needs to develop more configural approaches to the study of factors that enhance or detract from the emergence and robustness of self-organized efforts within multilevel, polycentric systems. Further, the application of empirical studies to the policy world leads one to stress the importance of fitting institutional rules to a specific social-ecological setting. "One-size-fits-all" policies are not effective.' (Ibid., p. 2)

This excerpt mentions two factors that inform the central research question of this thesis. Firstly, she recognizes that certain factors might either enhance or detract from the emergence and robustness of the governance of the commons. She was highly aware of the risks of the cooperation between commons and state, as expressed by her concern for 'blueprint thinking' (Ostrom, 1992). Blueprint thinking is another wording for the 'one-size-fits-all' mentality that she warns for, which is more likely to occur in a top-down governance organization. On the other hand, this tension of enhancement or detraction is mentioned in the context of a multilevel, polycentric system. Throughout her career, Ostrom advocated for thinking of governance as polycentric systems, such as her plead regarding climate change that 'many activities can be undertaken by multiple units at diverse scales that cumulatively make a difference' (Ostrom, 2010b, p. 550). In that sense, commons-local state cooperation should not be excluded, but can be one of the puzzle pieces that stimulate a nested network of commons.

Considering all of this, Ostrom presents a well-balanced approach to studying the governance of the commons. The most plausible reason for this is her reliance on empirical research, which forms the foundation of her work. This approach compels her to engage with theories critically, without ever prioritizing them over the insights drawn from empirical evidence. Yet despite these foundational positions of Ostrom,

over the last decade two conflicting theories have emerged about PCC and the governance of the Commons. The next section will explore these both more in depth.

2.4 After Ostrom

Using the work and frameworks of Ostrom around common pool resources, Hess (2008) broadened the conceptual understanding of the commons. In her publication 'Mapping the new commons' she identified eight main categories of possible commons, such as infrastructure commons, neighbourhood commons, cultural commons, knowledge commons and global commons. This categorisation reflects how the concept of the commons was expanding during that period. At the same time, Armitage (2008) synthesised key insights on the governance of commons by comparing the rapidly evolving fields of common property theory, political ecology and resilience theory. He concludes: "Governance of the commons as complex systems necessitates flexible and distributed institutional forms" (Ibid., p.25). However, this conclusion provides limited guidance on what such governance structures might look like in practice. The conclusion also highlights an existing tension between historical-ethnographic and theory building perspectives on commons scholarships. These academic efforts underscore the challenges faced by scholars in this period as they worked toward a more coherent theory of commons and their governance. In hindsight, this phase of intellectual exploration laid the groundwork for significant advancements, exemplified by the *Bologna Regulation* of 2014, which operationalised many of these ideas.

2.5 The Bologna regulation

As outlined in Iaione's (2016) paper *The Co-City*, the Co-Bologna program was implemented in the Italian city of Bologna from 2011 to 2017. This program led to the establishment of the "Regulation on collaboration between citizens and the city for the care and regeneration of urban commons" (2014). This regulation gave a legal foothold to commons to reach out to the local government for collaboration. It was received with much enthusiasm, and many other Italian municipalities have implemented similar regulations since. In 2015 these developments were presented during the conference 'The City as a Commons', to which prominent commons scholars, such as David Bollier, Tine de Moor and Silke Helfrich also contributed.

Through these events and the subsequent expansion of literature on the CO-City concept (Foster & Iaione, 2022), the neo-institutionalist paradigm on the commons became more established. The symbol for this paradigm: the Co-City, is short for collaborative city, which is based on 'the principle of public collaboration, whereby public institutions foster collaboration among citizens and with public administrations' (Iaione, 2016). Neo-institutional authors like Iaione, argue that Public Collective Collaboration can provide legitimacy and enhancement of the commons.

The impact is evident in the application of these concepts by other authors, such as Meerkerk (2024, p. 398), who conducted a case study in Amsterdam. This study 'draws on action research to further understand governing urban commons as collaborative governance, as proposed by Foster and Iaione (2016)'. This shift towards collaborative governance of commons is part of a broader trend of collaborative governance. The following section delves into the historical roots and evolution of this trend.

2.6 Collaborative governance

The trend of collaborative governance can be traced back to the seminal works of Arnstein (1969) and Healey (1996). Arnstein introduced the concept of the ladder of participation, indicating that citizen participation can range from manipulation to full citizen control, with many degrees of power or tokenism in between. The 8 steps of the ladder catch the dimension of 'the extent of citizens' power in determining the end product'. Arnstein's work was instrumental in demonstrating significant gradations in what people call citizen participation.

Patsy Healey's work (1996) marked another major turn for collaborative

Figure 1 Ladder of citizen participation from Arnstein (1969))

governance. Her work sets out to explore how a collaborative paradigm shift in planning theory can come about using the 'new institutionalist approach' (Ibid., p. 220). The marked shift away from a top-down planning approach has been gaining traction for a long time. Healey formulated 5 key methodological tasks for the development of this new approach. These 5 tasks are highlighted and compared in table 2 on the next page, with similar approaches to conceptualise the different elements of collaborative governance by Ansell & Gash (2008) and Meerkerk (2024). Partially building on Healey's work, Ansell & Gash (2008) establish a model of the factors around and within the collaborative process of collaborative governance. Their definition of collaborative governance is as follows:

"A governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets. (Ibid., p. 2)"

Collaborative process

(Healey, 1996)	(Ansell & Gash, 2008)	(Meerkerk, 2024)
Arenas for discussion	Face-to-face dialogue	Collaborative governance is public
The scope and style of discussion	Commitment to Process	Consensus-oriented processes are instrumental to collective creation, decision-making and implementation
Sorting through the arguments	Shared understanding	Actions must be deliberative and consensus-oriented.
Creating a new discourse	Intermediate outcomes	Collaboration across boundaries.
Agreement and critique	Trust building	Plausibility of collaborative processes requires engaging stakeholders constructively

Table 2 Comparison of elements of Collaborative process as understood by Healey, Ansell & Gash, and Meerkerk

In the model Ansell & Gash describe how starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership and the 5 features belonging to the collaborative process itself influence the outcomes of such arrangements (see figure 2). The five features of the collaborative process, which this thesis identifies as internal factors, clearly reflect the five principles outlined by Healey. The starting conditions, facilitative leadership and institutional design, which this thesis describes as external factors, are an important contribution that confirm the importance of contextual factors. Figure 2 provides a detailed understanding of these external factors, which will be incorporated into the conceptual framework. This integration is crucial for addressing research question 2a.
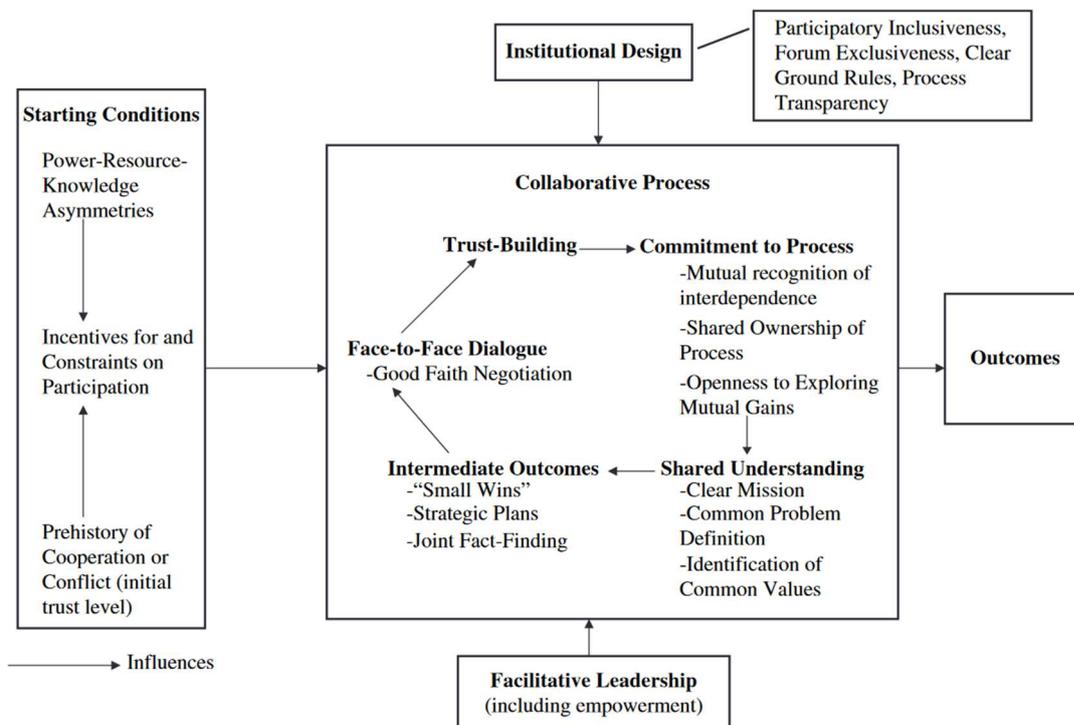

Figure 2 Model of collaborative governance by Ansell & Gash (2008)

In his work 'Understanding the governing of the commons' Meerkerk (2024) describes a case study in Amsterdam. For this work, he formulates 5 features of collaborative governance specifically for the commons. For this, he draws on the work of both (Ansell & Gash, 2008) and Foster & Iaione (2015) as well as other authors. While the chosen wording tends to be different table 2 demonstrates that the 5 features by Healey, Ansell & Gash and Meerkerk are largely in line with each other. This demonstrates that the concepts from Healey, as well as Ansell and Gash, can be applied in a manner similar to Meerkerk's approach to understand the collaborative governance of the commons, including the external factors identified by Ansell and Gash.

Establishing such a connection is a crucial step in developing a conceptual framework that underpins this thesis. This is particularly important given the normative dimension of the Public Collective Collaboration concept in the literature. Helfrich & Bollier (2019) describe what they call commons-public partnerships *as "an agreement of long-term cooperation between commoners and state institutions around specific functions"* (Ibid, p. 338). Crucially, they state that this is about giving people authority and support. Going back to Arnstein's ladder of participation, PCC would therefore only fall under the top categories of citizen control of delegated power. However this might not (yet) be a reality for many commons, and would thus exclude many cases from this research. Using the collaborative governance framework thus enables the broad range of collaborative experiences to be captured and understood. For this reason, the collaborative process is implemented into the conceptual framework, as it defines the concepts that are crucial for answering RQ2b.

2.7 Neo-Marxist perspectives on the commons

Another important point to consider is the rise of more critical voices regarding the collaboration between commons and the local state. Harvie & Angelis (2013) theorise about how commons can be employed to 'fix' the shortcomings of the neoliberal system, and argue that, commons may inadvertently be enabling this system rather than providing an alternative. They conclude that *"the 'ambiguity' between commons -within-and-for-capital and commoning-beyond-capital is in fact a razor edge"* (Ibid., p. 11). A commonly used term to describe this is Co-optation, which literately points towards the 'capture' of the commons by the local state. In a similar fashion Bianchi et al. describes this as the displacement of social costs onto the commons or domesticating commons' radical claims (2022). Bianchi indicates that these critical voices originate from an neo-Marxist perspective. This perspective is not as prominent in the scholarly debate as the neo-institutional perspective previously discussed. The contrast between these ideological positions is thoroughly examined by Bianchi (2022, p. 1797), who writes:

"According to the literature, the state can take on different repertoires of governance strategies towards the commons: antagonistic, co-optative and/or supportive. The theorisation of these repertoires tends to correspond to the ideological positions of those who uphold them, with neo-Marxists seeing the state as an antagonistic and/or co-optative institution, and neo-institutionalists seeing the state as supportive.(…) these perspectives tend not to enter into dialogue with each other"

She proposes to go beyond these ideological positions and "to feed an empirically grounded theory of common-inspired local state transformation under new municipalism" (Bianchi, 2023). Aiming to do so in a different paper, Bianchi et al. argue that, according to local context factors both co-optation and enhancement can be possible long term outcomes of commons-local state cooperation. They find that *'urban commons/local state co-production'* enhances the *'everyday politics'* of the commons in the short term (2022, p. 17), but they are unable to draw conclusion about the potential risk of long term co-optation. Similarly, Vesco & Busso (2024, p. 247) take the co-optation impasse as the starting point. Regarding the governance of commons, they are mainly focused on '*the political role of the commons'*, and delve into *'what actors consider political and how they conceive and implement this role'*. Vesco & Busso argue that this too is largely dependent on contextual factors and path-dependent dynamics.

Both Bianchi (2022) and Vesco & Busso (2024) demonstrate two key points. Firstly, there is an evident focus on the path dependent and contextual factors that influence the governance of the commons. This further underlines the need for an empirical approach, the need of which was also already discussed in section 2.3.

Secondly, both papers centre on the political dimension of commons governance, which provides a clear focus and a strong narrative. However, this focus raises important questions about how other aspects of commons governance might be influenced by different repertoires of governance strategies. By concentrating primarily on the political role, both works leave room to consider how other dimensions of governance, such as autonomy, integration and service provision, could be shaped by varying governance repertoires. These additional dimensions will be explored in the next paragraph.

2.8 Governance of the commons

How this research analyses the tensions in the governance of commons is heavily influenced by the third chapter of 'What is "Political" in Commons-Public Partnership?" by Vesco & Busso (2024). Their work aims to show how commons navigate the complexities of governance, and the tensions that influence it. However, to fully understand the arguments presented, it is helpful to first examine a previous work by one of the authors, which provides a conceptual framework for defining the role of civil society (see figure 3, Busso & De Luigi, 2019). This is relevant because civil society studies has investigated 'the contradictions inherent in practices of self-organization' for a long time already (Vesco & Busso, 2024, p. 248). Busso & De Luigi (2019) show that civil society's role has two essential dimensions: the positioning and functioning of actors. The functioning dimension can be broken down into a tension between service provision and political pressure and the positioning dimension into integration and independence. The authors recognise that these tensions "both functions and positioning are of course not mutually exclusive, and each dimension should be seen as a continuum" (Ibid., p.280).
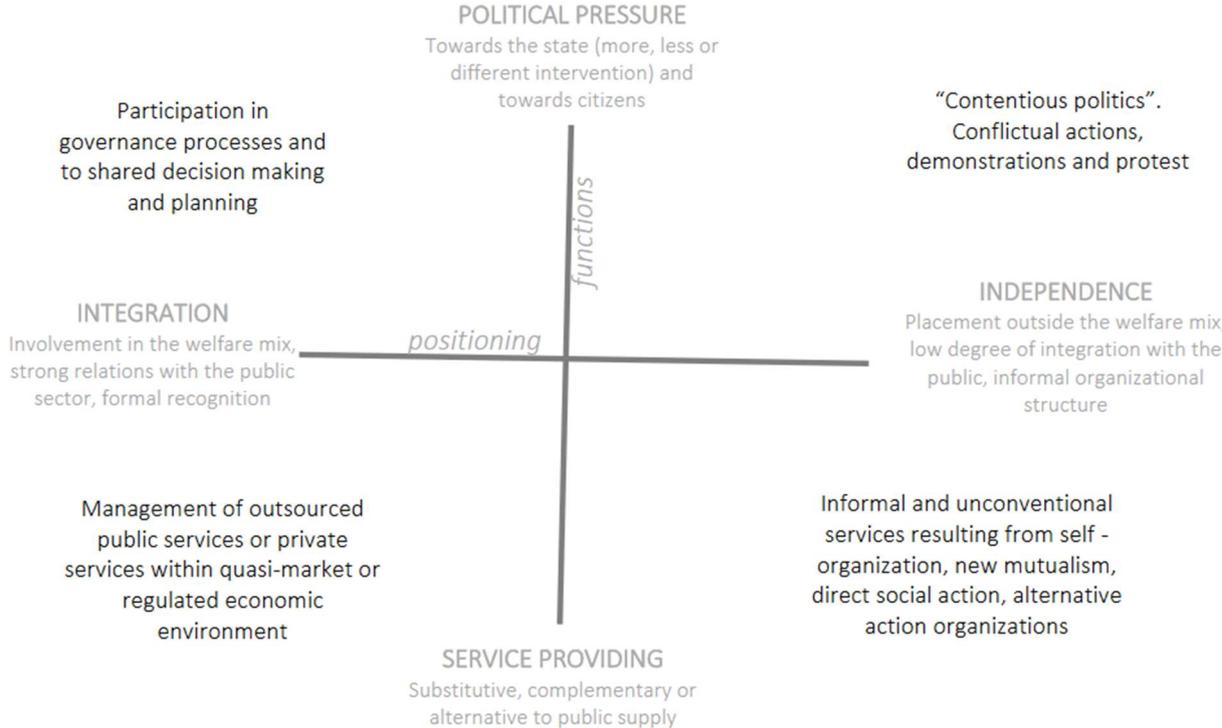
Figure 3 Dimension of Positioning and Functioning from Busso & De Luigi

Looking through this lens at the commons Vesco and Busso (2024) first recognise a similar trade-off for commons: balancing the need for autonomy and spontaneity with the necessity of legal recognition, which is often required to access resources and support. Legal or financial frameworks can empower commons, allowing them to leverage resources and influence institutions. However, these frameworks can also introduce restrictions, potentially conflicting with the

foundational principles of commoning, such as independence and self-organization. The second trade-off emerges within urban governance, where commons have to balance between political agency: influencing the system, and the risk of co-optation or marginalisation though becoming solely a service provider. Commons are an alternative to the market/state paradigm, and public sector and market actors might defend their position if it is threatened by commons.

Compared to the neo-Institutional versus neo-Marxist positions outlined previously this framework gives an accurate outline of the existing tensions and possibilities that take place from the commons perspective as an outcome of collaboration. It provides an effective framework for empirical analysis of the governance of the commons. A key point to keep in mind is that while the previous paragraph speaks of trade-offs, the dimensions are not mutually exclusive and can be a continuum. Blending or overlap of the positions might in that case be a sign of collaborations that (at least temporarily) overcome a trade-off, to achieve positive sum collaborations.

As a next step, Vesco and Busso explore two major theoretical concepts of how such positive collaboration might be achieved. Specifically, they consider how Ostrom's polycentric governance and Bollier and Helfrich's Commons/Public Partnerships might provide institutional arrangement to manage these tensions in the interest of the commons. Polycentric governance suggests that commons can be safeguarded through a layered multi-polar approach, where public institutions, private entities, and self-organised initiatives coexist and interact across local, national, and even international levels. However, Vesco and Busso note that this model may overlook direct interactions between commons and institutions, sometimes failing to guard against depoliticization risks.

The framework of Common/Public Partnerships (Helfrich & Bollier, 2019) is centred on the idea of autonomy of commons in all the steps of commoning, from a broader and unconditional delegation of authority. In 'Challenges in expanding the Commonsverse' Bollier (2024) explains that many forms of commoning are not pushing for such change. He advocates for what he calls an OntoShift: "people struggle to move from a world defined by individualism, calculative rationality, and material self-interest in markets, to one that is richly relational in all directions" (Ibid., p. 293). He argues that, from an urban governance perspective, the local state should not merely tolerate or authorise commoning initiatives but show true commitment to their transformative potential (Bollier and Helfrich 2019).

These theories of institutional arrangements for the commons are still new and developing territory. Understanding them is crucial to have a complete picture of the specific institutional arrangements for the commons that various municipalities are implementing. To understand how this is affecting this research, the context of commons in Amsterdam must first be explored.

2.9 Context of Amsterdam

As mentioned before, traces of collective ownership and management of resources can be found throughout history. In the Netherlands, the most notable examples are the Guilds, Marken, and Begijnhoven. Guilds, or in Dutch *Gilden*, were medieval associations that regulated different professions by collectively governing aspects like pay, tariffs, education, and certification. They also provided mutual support for members during times of illness or financial hardship, fostering social solidarity within their trades (De Moor, 2012). *Marken*, also known as *gemene gronden* or common grounds, were fields where the rights to manage, use, and upkeep the land were granted to farmers by landowners. These commons, active from the 12th to the 19th century, allowed farmers to share resources like grazing land or wood while establishing rules to prevent overuse (Forsman et al., 2021). They exemplify how communities could manage natural resources collectively and sustainably. *Begijnhoven*, or beguinages, were small courtyards of housing that provided for and were managed by independent religious women. These semi-monastic communities not only enabled women to live independently but also functioned as self-managed systems with collective rules for upkeep and governance (De Moor, 2008).

These examples illustrate that there have been longstanding traditions of collective ownership and management in different domains in the Netherlands. However, by the 19th century, most of these systems had disappeared. On the contrary, around the 19th century a wave of cooperatives based on mutual support were founded, such as consumer-, producer-, employee- and credit- cooperatives (Peeters, 2018). These cooperatives represented a shift towards new forms of collective ownership.

A notable example is the cooperative farmers' bank *Rabobank*. First opened in 1898, it was a federation of numerous local cooperative banks, with 547 independent local branches operating in 1996 (Groeneveld, 2016). However, significant restructuring since the turn of the century has dramatically reduced this number to just 78 banks, with most cooperative authority now consolidated into 14 regional "circles". The membership structure, once rooted in local relationships and farmer participation, has also evolved, with decision-making and cooperative influence becoming increasingly centralised. This example of transformation highlights how cooperative models often face challenges in retaining their community-driven character due to their institutionalisation and scale (Ibid.).

This sets the stage for understanding more recent developments. The trend of new urban commons in the last two decades are partially bedded in new types of cooperatives (Peeters, 2018). A likely cause for this is that due to cooperatives historic presence there was a precedent of how to operate within the modern financial and judicial system. This provides some insight into what the new commons

look like and how they operate, but the question remains: what has caused this new development?. There is however not one clear answer to this question. In her comparative framework for literature on the commons, De Moor (2012) states that researches can hold a causal explanation for the origin of commons management. A causal explanation implies that there are various elements which together lead to 'choosing' a common property regime. Factors that could influence this are the value of a good, the importance of the resource locally, or the possible destabilising effects of private rights and inequality amongst others. Different combinations of these factors might signify different motivations of commoners to create a commons. For example, for energy cooperatives the presumed sensitivity to local concerns are seen as a major benefit (Kaandorp et al., 2024). On the other hand, the rise in collaborative living in the Netherlands can be partially attributed to the high cost of living and resulting inequality (Czischke et al., 2023).

However, for these new forms of cooperatives such as housing or energy cooperatives, getting off the ground remained a big challenge. In recent years these challenges have been recognised by the Municipality of Amsterdam. For example, the municipality has implemented the 'Kaartenbak' system, which is a registry for collaborative housing co-ops, from which every year groups are selected for the development of specific lots in the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, n.d.). This is part of an ambition of the city to have 10% of the housing in the city be cooperatively owned by 2040.

Continuing on this path, as part of their participation agenda the municipality is funding the AmsterDOEN research program which is the cities answer to 'a current, international and social movement of neighbourhood initiatives, citizen initiatives and collective action (- *samenwerken aan sociale en duurzame stad*, 2022).' Stimulating the commons is one part of many parts of the larger democratization agenda of the Municipality of Amsterdam (*Ibid.*). AmsterDOEN aims to support Public Collective Collaboration and to explore how an incubator for the collaborative economy works. It identifies specific domains to look into: food, energy, free space, health and mobility. In 2024, as part of the AmsterDOEN agenda, a text was published that pitched the idea of a 'chamber of commons' for the city (van Loon, 2024). This would be a registry that commons initiatives that follow a certain set of demands could apply for. Once registered in the Chamber of Commons, initiatives can be invited to participate in tenders or collaboration agreements. This could lead to improved judicial and financial bedding, as well as promote the image and recognition of commons. The pitch ends with the following summary: 'The success of Amsterdam's 'commons' largely depends on a local government that offers legitimacy to the initiatives of residents' collectives. Without specific policy, resident groups have no chance within the various markets in which the outsourcing of our community facilities is organised.' (van Loon, 2024).

The analysis presented suggests a growing trend in the organisation of urban commons in Amsterdam, along with the continued development of this field likely leading to an expansion of Public Collective Collaboration. As these collective partnerships evolve, they will present both challenges and opportunities for the governance of commons as identified in chapter 2.8. The next paragraph and image provide a comprehensive overview of how the concepts discussed so far are interpreted and interconnected, offering a framework to address the main and sub-research questions of this thesis.

Conceptual framework

This conceptual framework illustrates the dynamics of collaborative governance within the context of urban commons. The urban commons (top left) consist of three interconnected elements: the "common" (the shared resource), "commoning" (the practices of managing and maintaining the resource), and the "commoners" (the individuals or groups involved), which are central to Research Question 1 (RQ1). These elements generate starting conditions influenced by power, resources, and knowledge asymmetries, as well as the prehistory of collaboration or conflict. Other 'external' factors to the collaborative process are institutional design and facilitative leadership. The collaborative process highlights 5 critical 'internal' components such as trust-building, face-to-face dialogue, and intermediate outcomes like "small wins," which foster a shared understanding, commitment, and mutual recognition of interdependence. The outcomes of this framework focus on the governance of the commons, where the effectiveness of collaborative governance is evaluated based on the positioning and functioning of these efforts (RQ3). The framework is specifically contextualised within the Municipality of Amsterdam, reflecting its role in shaping and supporting these governance processes.
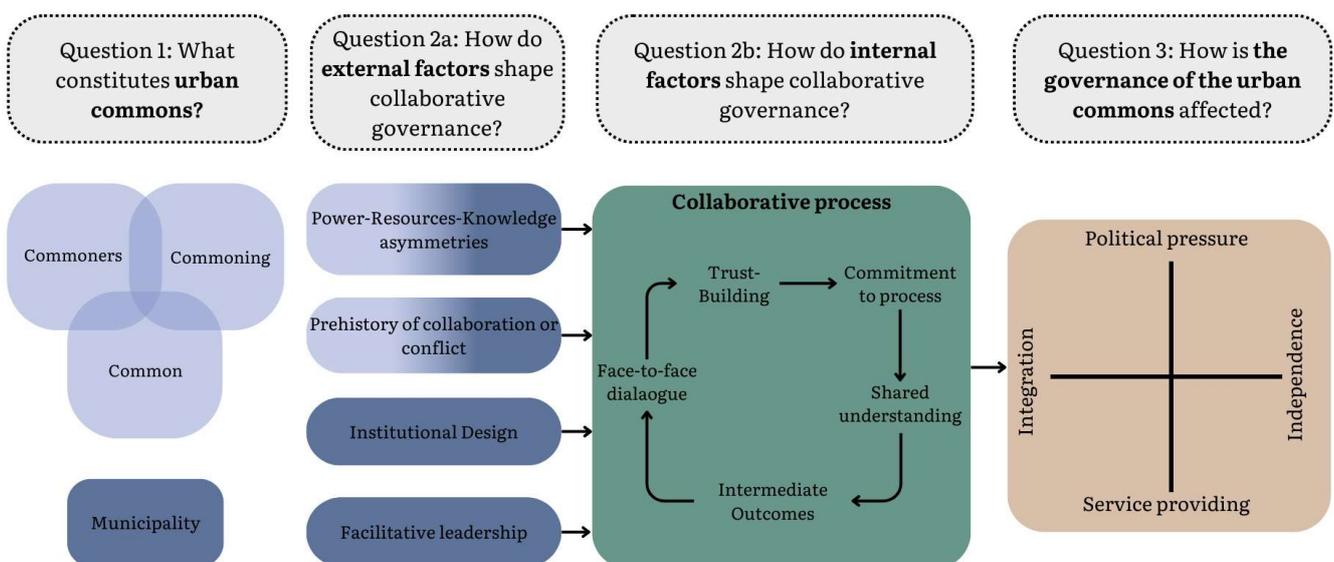
Figure 4 Conceptual framework

3. Research Methodology

In this section, the research approach, design, data collection methods and data analysis techniques employed in this study are described. This study adopts a mixed methods approach to investigate all the factors that are relevant towards answering the main research question: How does Public Collective Collaboration influence the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam? First, more will be explained about the mixed methods research design followed by an overview of the operationalisation of the research questions and the accompanying concepts from the conceptual framework. After that the method for the case selection is provided. Finally, a more in-depth account is given of how the various research and analysis methods have been applied.

3.1 Research design

This research has been set up to be mixed methods because the complexity of the problem necessitates multiple interpretative perspectives. Specifically, it integrates constructivist, empirical, design, and critical perspectives, which each require distinct methodological approaches.

The constructivist perspective is central to the exploration of the first sub-question, which draws on the theoretical framework to conceptualize urban commons. However, the validation of the concept relies on empirical evidence from a survey. This validation strengthens the understanding of the contextual factors, which helps to understand how these play in to the next parts of the research.

The empirical and design perspectives play a major role in the exploration of the dynamics of collaboration in sub-questions 2a and 2b. To understand the effects collaboration can have, the main elements of collaboration need to be understood and mapped. Organisational and Institutional design play a role in this. Interviews serve the main purpose of mapping the real-world experiences of collaboration.

Finally, the critical perspective is present in the third sub-question, which aims to critically evaluate the possible (un)intended effects of collaboration. Connecting the data from collaborative processes, descriptions of organisational behaviour and other relevant contextual factors requires insight from different theoretical critical perspectives. Critically analysing these data sources enables a balanced view on the possible effect of collaboration.

3.2 Operationalisation

Question	Concept	Dimension	Data collection	Data analysis method
RQ1: What constitutes urban commons in Amsterdam?	Urban Commons	Common	Survey, Interviews	Data analysis, Thematic analysis
		Commoners	Survey, Interviews	Data analysis, Thematic analysis
		Commoning	Survey, Interviews	Data analysis, Thematic analysis
RQ2a: How do external factors shape the collaborative governance between the commons and the Municipality?	External factors, Collaborative Governance, starting conditions	Power-Resource-Knowledge asymmetries	Policy/document review, Interviews	Thematic analysis
		Prehistory of collaboration or conflict	Policy/document review, interviews	Thematic analysis
		Facilitative leadership	Policy/document review	Thematic analysis
		Institutional Design	Policy/document review	Thematic analysis
RQ2b: How do internal factors shape the collaborative governance between the commons and the municipality?	Internal factors, Collaborative governance	Trust Building	Survey, Interviews	Data analysis, Thematic analysis
		Face to Face Dialogue	Survey, Interviews	Data analysis, Thematic analysis
		Intermediate outcomes	Survey, Interviews	Data analysis, Thematic analysis
		Commitment to process	Survey, Interviews	Data analysis, Thematic analysis
		Shared understanding	Survey, Interviews	Data analysis, Thematic analysis
RQ3: How is the Governance of the urban commons affected by the collaborative governance between the Commons and the municipality?	Governance of the Commons, Collaborative governance	Positioning	Interviews	Thematic analysis
		Functioning	Interviews	Thematic analysis

Table 3 Operationalisation of core concepts and research questions

3.3 Case selection

To make a selection of commons in Amsterdam the following approach was taken. Using web scraping methods with Python, data points were extracted from several websites that displayed social initiatives within Amsterdam. The data was extracted from the following websites [amount of cases]:
- Social handprint [578]: The Social Handprint is a website that shows the societal impact of organizations based on the Sustainable Development Goals.
- LSA [13]: The National Cooperation Association of Active Residents is an association of resident initiatives throughout the Netherlands.

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- Cooplink [22]: Cooplink is an association of housing cooperatives
- 02025 [58]: Network organization 02025 connects as many organizations and people as possible working towards the shared goal of affordable and clean energy in Amsterdam.
- GoodFoodClub [17]: The GoodFoodClub is an initiative of the Nature and Environment Federations. It aims to increase the share of sustainable and local food and support everyone who is committed to this goal.
- Loka Loka [5]: Loka Loka is a platform that connects consumers with local, organic food sources and businesses, promoting sustainable, nature-inclusive agriculture and fostering a closer relationship between people and their food.
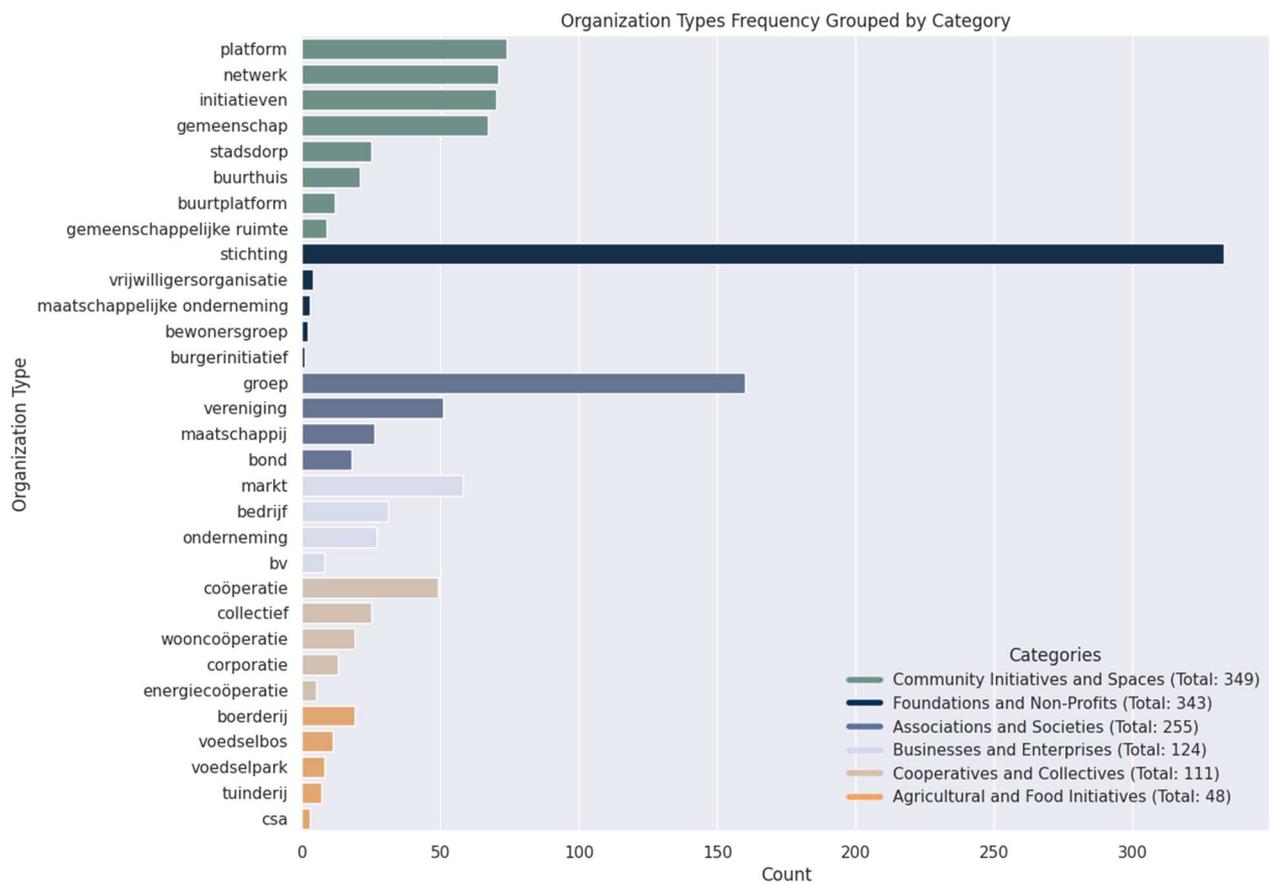
Figure 5 Overview of organisation types in total list

In total this led to a list of 693 initiatives. This list is a reflection of all kinds of social initiatives in the city, without a selection on specific parameters. Therefore, a preliminary classification of this data was performed to evaluate the usefulness of this list. This classification can be seen in figure 5. It displays the frequency of words that represent some form of organisation type in the titles and descriptions of the initiatives. Please note that one initiative could therefore be classified into multiple categories. What becomes evident from this analysis is that there is a large proportion of non-profits, 'stichtingen', and community initiatives and spaces, characterised by a broader range of identifying words. Businesses and Enterprises

are also represented, as are Cooperatives and Collectives, though they form a smaller proportion of the list. None of these categories are specific enough to directly correspond to urban commons, although some, such as Cooperatives, are generally associated with them. This classification thus primarily highlights that the database potentially includes a variety of urban commons. However, this does not provide enough guidance to identify initiatives that align with the theoretical definition of urban commons.

To address this, a second level of selection was performed. This selection process, which is explained in detail next, involved applying specific criteria derived from the theoretical framework to identify initiatives that demonstrate the defining characteristics of urban commons, such as collective ownership, community governance, and resource-sharing.

To achieve this, the initiatives were cross-referenced with the three main attributes of urban commons identified in the literature review. This process involved a keyword selection method implemented using Python. Keywords were generated for each of the three domains—use (commoners), management (commoning), and resource (common). These keywords were interpretatively derived from the reviewed papers and the details in Table 1, with terms provided in both English and Dutch. An overview of the resulting keyword list is presented in Table 4 on the next page.

Following that, a new list of initiatives was generated that contained at least one keyword in the title or description for each of the three domains. This left a list of just 61 commons in the city of Amsterdam. In the map in figure 6, you can see the locations of these initiatives throughout the city (marked with red dots). The green area shows the distribution of initiatives from the first list over the neighbourhoods. The figure shows that there is a good representation of initiatives from all neighbourhoods in the city.
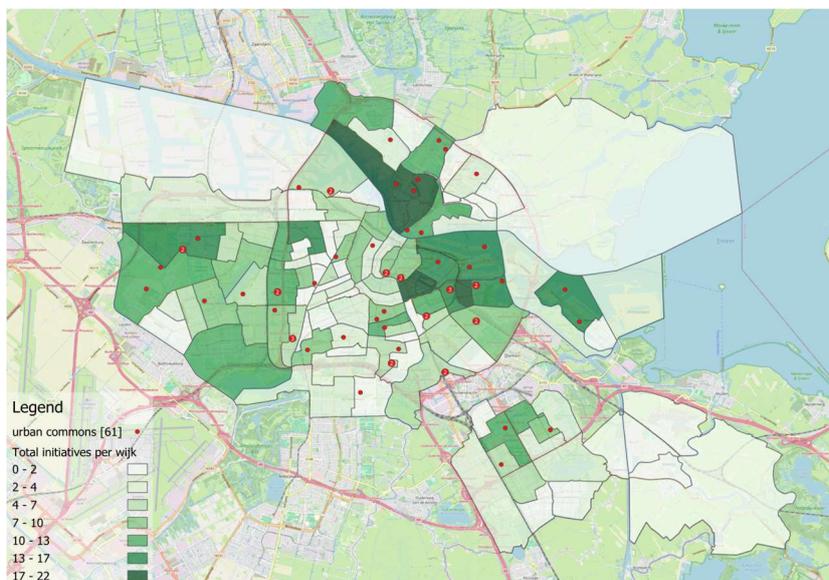

Figure 6 Overview of total initiatives per neighbourhood (green) and Urban Commons from final selection (red)

A final manual step was performed to check how accurate the results were. The websites of all 61 initiatives were checked against the definition of urban commons from the literature review. After closer inspection, 30 cases proved to not fully be in line with the definition of urban commons, or were duplicate cases. Cases were selected for the next step only if the website demonstrated that they satisfied all three attributes of an urban common. Finally, 31 commons remained. These were all approached to fill in a survey and join in an interview.

These initiatives have various core areas of commoning that they relate to. A few projects prioritize urban agriculture and local food systems. Additionally, other initiatives focus on environmental sustainability, particularly in areas such as renewable energy, waste management, and the creation of green urban spaces. A number of the commons strive towards cultural and social development, while others explicitly focused on general community engagement . There is also a clear group of housing cooperatives. An overview of these cases can be found in Annex 1. The results section of sub-question 1 provides further details on how the three primary elements of urban commons function in practice.

Category	Keywords
Use of Resource (Common)	English: *technology, time, labor, materials, money, excludability, subtractability, form, function, infrastructure, energy, housing, food, water, parks, green spaces, gardens, land, public spaces, agriculture* Dutch: *technologie, tijd, arbeid, materialen, geld, uitsluitbaarheid, subtractiviteit, vorm, functie, infrastructuur, energie, woning, voedsel, water, parken, groenvoorzieningen, tuinen, land, openbare ruimtes, landbouw*
Management Institutions (Commoning)	English: *rules, governance, control, monitoring, institutions, user rules, punishment, assemblies, regulation, financing, design, cooperative, association, community governance, local governance, decision-making, resource allocation, investment, maintenance, committees, autonomy* Dutch: *regels, bestuur, controle, monitoring, instituten, gebruikersregels, straffen, vergaderingen, regelgeving, financiering, ontwerp, coöperatie, vereniging, gemeenschapsbestuur, lokaal bestuur, besluitvorming, middelentoewijzing, investering, onderhoud, commissies, autonomie*
Users/Community (Commoners)	English: *community, boundaries, rights, cooperation, neighbours, members, participation, value, building, residents, volunteers, stakeholders, families, local businesses, social networks, civic groups, users, inclusivity, collaboration* Dutch: *gemeenschap, grenzen, rechten, samenwerking, buren, leden, deelname, waarde, opbouw, bewoners, vrijwilligers, belanghebbenden, gezinnen, lokale bedrijven, sociale netwerken, burgergroepen, gebruikers, inclusiviteit, samenwerking*

Table 4 Keywords cases selection

3.4 Data collection methods

The following section goes into more detail on how the data collection of the various research methods took place.

Survey

The survey was designed to gather data on urban commons in Amsterdam, focusing on four key areas. The first three areas specifically aimed at answering the first sub-question: "What are the commons in Amsterdam?". The questions were based on the three main factors: users, resource, and management. The first part of the survey identified the type, formation, and sustainability of each initiative, addressing the 'resource' factor by understanding what these commons provide to the community and how they are expected to develop. The second part focused on governance and management, exploring the legal structures, decision-making processes, and day-to-day operations. This corresponds to the 'management' aspect by providing insights into how these initiatives are run and organised. The third section assesses community engagement, looking at local participation and the extent of involvement from the surrounding community. This relates to the 'users' factor by understanding how participation of users is mobilised within each initiative. Finally, the survey explored the relationship between urban commons and local authorities, the Public Collective Collaboration. The answers to these question helped to formulate the interview guide that explored this topic more in depth. The survey was distributed with Qualtrics via email. The data analysis and plots were generated using Python. At the end of the survey, participants were asked whether they wanted to participate in a follow up interview. The survey questions can be found in Annex 2.

Interviews

Based on the interest expressed in the survey, seven interviews were conducted with representatives of urban commons. To ensure diversity among the selected cases, the data gathered from the survey was carefully considered, specifically checking for enough variation in 'resource'. The interviews aimed to explore more in-depth insights into the practices, challenges, and perspectives of urban commons on collaboration. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, guided by a prepared list of questions to steer the conversation while allowing for flexibility. The interviews were held online as well as on location at some urban commons, depending on feasibility. Ethical considerations, including obtaining consent for recording and transcription, were applied throughout the process. The interview guide can be found in Annex 3.

Additional Online Data

During the manual inspection of the selected cases, many different additional sources of data such as newspaper articles and video interviews were identified that were relevant to the research questions. Not only did these provide insights into cases that did not respond to the survey/interview requests, but in some cases it also provided a historical perspective, where the answers from older data could be compared to the answers from the survey and interview responses gathered for this research. Due to the value of these insights, these articles and interview transcripts were included in the data and coded using Atlas Ti to ensure integration into the broader data set. However, close attention was paid to avoid over reliance on these secondary sources in the results.

Policy documents

To address the second research question, a selection of policy documents, position papers, and publicly available municipal data was gathered and analysed. These materials highlighted recent and historical perspectives of certain departments within the municipality on public-collective collaboration. The selection process focused on documents that were relevant to urban commons and aligned with the main research questions. While some documents were provided by municipal contacts, all materials were publicly available through Openresearch.amsterdam, which is a digital platform for policy and research in Amsterdam. The analysis employed thematic coding to extract patterns and insights, which were then compared and cross-referenced with data from interviews and surveys to construct a cohesive understanding of the policy landscape.

3.5 Data Analysis

Because the cases and data sources varied, the final results were compared using an interpretive approach. The coded transcriptions in Atlas Ti were analysed in relation to the main dimensions that were identified in the conceptual framework. Explicit, contrasting or highly relevant insights from the data in regards to the specific dimensions were selected as input for the results. Relevant excerpts from the data were included to provide context and support the findings. The main insights form the survey were also included, to contextualise the internal validity of the results. A comprehensive summary of the cases and their associated data is provided in Annex 1.

3.6 Reflexivity

  This research focuses on urban commons in Amsterdam, a topic shaped by my personal experiences and background. My understanding of commons is deeply influenced by family histories and personal engagements with communal living and cooperation. For instance, my grandmother told me of how her village in England came together to celebrate the end of the war on a shared field known as "the commons." This principle continues to resonate within my family, as my aunt and cousins are involved in collectively purchasing fields for shared use in their village. Similarly, my parents have embraced cooperative living through their participation in a housing cooperative, and I have lived in a communal housing project for two years. Currently, my work for an international energy cooperative further immerses me in the principles of collective ownership and collaboration.

  These personal connections to the commons shape my perspective and research. While they enrich my understanding of the social and practical dimensions of the commons, they also introduce potential biases. My firsthand appreciation for the benefits of commons might lead to an overly optimistic framing of their potential, while my familiarity with their challenges might influence the way I interpret data or prioritise issues. Recognising these influences, I have sought to approach this research with critical awareness, ensuring that my analysis is guided by rigorous methodologies and grounded in diverse perspectives beyond my own. This reflexive stance aims to balance personal insight with scholarly objectivity, contributing to a nuanced exploration of urban commons.

4 Results

The results are structured based on the three sub-research questions. The first question is answered by the data collected in the first part of the survey and supported by more context from the interviews. Question 2a is answered by analysis of the policy documents, and supported by relevant insights from interviews. The results of question 2b are based on the relevant insights from the survey as well as interviews. The third part will synthesise the information from the interviews about how the collaboration of urban commons affects positioning and functioning of the commons. Because no two commons are the same, the results presented need to be interpreted for what they are: the experiences of the specific common in a specific moment in time. In the discussion and conclusion, an a more general overview and interpretation of the data will be provided.

4.1 Research Question 1: What constitutes urban commons in Amsterdam?

The results of research question 1 are distributed along the 3 main dimensions of the urban commons: users, management, resource, as outlined in the conceptual framework.

The resource: Commons
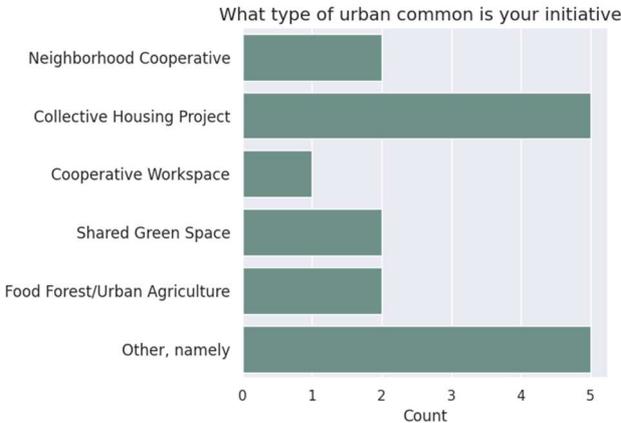
Figure 7 Urban Common type
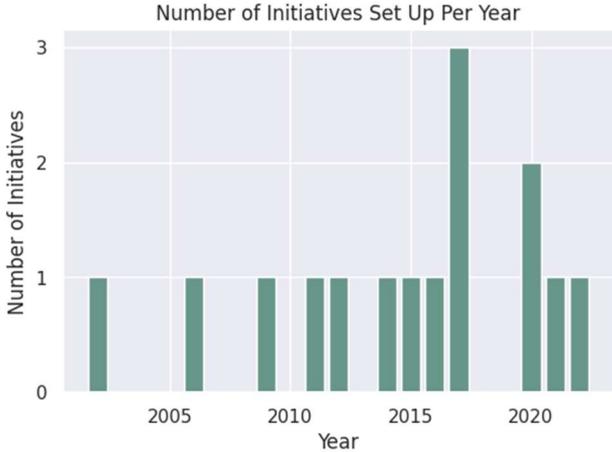
Figure 8 Initiatives per year

Based on the results of the survey, the urban commons in Amsterdam encompass a wide variety of grassroots, community-based initiatives that aim to collectively manage shared resources and spaces. They focus on different forms of communal activities, such as cooperative housing projects, shared workspaces, urban farming and food production and community green spaces. Interestingly, the biggest category of all, was initiatives that answered 'other, namely'. The answers provided to that category showed a large variance. This is a clear indication that although there are some generally larger categories of similar commons, many

commons are (somewhat) unique in the type of resource that they manage. Figure 8 shows that many of the cases have been set up relatively recently, with 66% being set up in 2014 or after, and none from before 2002.

Case descriptions

To introduce all the specific cases, a short description of all of the resources managed by the commons that have been part of the interviews and the desk research is given. **Community Land Trust – H buurt (CLT-H)** set out to acquire land to realise long-term affordable housing and neighbourhood services. Currently, their strategy has altered to just developing a housing cooperative through a tender offered by the municipality. In the long run, they hope to still be able to acquire land. **Bajesdorp** is a housing cooperative and 'broedplaats', cultural breeding ground. Its runs an art space and a large communal garden. **Slow Food Amsterdam** is part of a worldwide organisation 'Slow food' that aims to promote biodiversity and variety, especially in relation to food and animals. They are co-initiators of the common *Voedselpark Amsterdam*, which is an organisation that aims to set up a communal farm for the city on land that was designated to become a distribution centre for a major supermarket. **Akropolistoren** is a cooperative resident association that collectively owns a few common spaces: a garden, tower room and exposition space, in a residential building for people aged 55 and older. These spaces are used for a wide range of activities. Some other spaces are also managed/used informally. **HeenenWeer** is an association that owns a small fleet of tiny electric vehicles (Canta's) providing taxi services to 'immobile' people for 1 euro. Crucially, its main purpose is that it is an initiative against loneliness, and all of the clients are regarded as members. **De Warren** is a housing cooperative that consists of 36 houses and general spaces, among which are a makerspace, children place area, theatre room, office space, washing room, living room, rooftop terrace and a garden. **Bewoners Schinkelkwartier** is a neighbourhood platform that aims to gather and advocate for citizens from the Schinkelkwartier neighbourhood as it goes through a large-scale neighbourhood development. The Municipality has given the association an official status as 'buurtplatform' or neighbourhood platform. **De Nieuwe Meent** is a housing cooperative that is still under construction. The building will contain 40 housing units, communal spaces and non-housing units. **Food Council MRA** is a non-profit platform that aims to bring together initiatives and governments in the stimulation of sustainable and healthy food for rich and poor. It is initiator of the commons *Voedselcirkel Amsterdam*, which is a commons that collects and distributes leftover food. It's also co-initiator of *Voedselpark Amsterdam*, just like Slow Food Amsterdam. **De Bonte Hulst** is a housing cooperative that is still in the planning phase. The design is not yet finalised, but the building will have roughly 30 middle-sector rental

apartments. **Park Buurthaven** is a temporary park in which many features are managed by the neighbourhood. The features include a dog play area, a Vegetable Garden School Amsterdam, a Gallic table, a poster panorama of the Social Artistic Museum and a playground. **Vuilnisoproer Nieuw-West** is an initiative that brings together citizens of Nieuw-West, a region of Amsterdam, and works together with the municipality of Amsterdam to clean up trash hotspots. Street cleanliness can thus be considered the main resource that is managed.

These descriptions showcase that there are large variations in the type of resource that is being managed by commons. Additionally, it shows that a significant number of cases actually manage a collection of different resources, which together comprise one single urban common.

The management: Commoning

In terms of their legal organisation, many of the commons that responded to the survey operate as associations ("vereniging") or cooperatives ("coöperatie"), which are the most common legal structures, as shown in Figure 9. Others are structured as foundations ("stichting") or informal groups. These differences in legal organisation signify different objectives of the organisation. Cooperatives typically generate profits that benefit their members. While associations also have members, their profits, financial or otherwise, cannot be redistributed to them. Similarly, foundations cannot distribute profits, but unlike associations, they are managed by an appointed board. In contrast, both associations and cooperatives are governed by a members' council. The prevalence of associations and cooperatives are thus an indication that legal these legal instruments are used to empower the members of the urban common.


Figure 9 Legal structure

However, the majority of the respondents (8 out 14) indicated that the board is responsible for the daily executive management of the initiative. Most respondents indicated that the member contribution was mainly consolidated in 'ALV's', or General Meetings of Members. Other respondents indicated that day to day operating and decision making power was delegated to all the members. In most cases, these initiatives were collective living projects. The proximity and intimacy of such a common might explain why all members are closely involved, rather than a select group. Most cases also mentioned that, in practice, there are various degrees to people's involvement. The most common pattern observed is a small 'core' group, one level outside of that is a bit bigger group of committed helpers, and finally a bigger group of incidental helpers. Various respondents mentioned that it is rather important for the core group to have certain competencies and that board experience and very strong motivation are key to long-term success and stability.

The governance structure is in place to ensure the long term sustainability and success of the organisation. The respondents to the survey on average awarded the following points (out of 100) to how future-proof their organization was in terms of finance (70), active members (78), and legislation/permits (70). What stood out was that the lowest response for finance (35) and legislation/permit (21) was much lower than active members (62). The dependency on factors outside of the direct influence of the common (i.e. the municipality) could be an explanatory factor to this effect.

A significant result from the interviews was that various initiatives reported struggling with finding people willing to contribute who also have the needed time and skillsets. Both CLT-H Buurt and De Bonte Hulst talk about how they try to select people who subscribe to the values of the initiative and apply them to their own lives. This is done in an attempt to sort through people who are only interested in the cheap housing that's on offer. In a similar vein, a representative of Heen en Weer stated about working with volunteers: *"you have to be very realistic (...) some people are very driven, they have a need to prove themselves (…) and sometimes you have to press the brakes, in order to prevent disappointment"* Similarly, a representative of Slow food mentions uncertainty related to volunteers: *"that's the case with all volunteers: people say I will come and help, but in the end you need to see."*

Finally, working together with other stakeholders and partners is a major activity of commoning. Not a single survey respondent indicated not to be involved in partnerships or networks with other organisations. As can be seen in figure 10 on the next page, similarity and vicinity play the biggest role in the collaboration with partners and stakeholders. These results can be interpreted as a reflection of the application of polycentricity to benefit the commons. For example, partnerships could help with raising funds, or provide leverage in discussions with the municipality. However, working with many partners or stakeholders could also be seen to have a negative implication as illustrated in the next paragraph.

Figure 10 Partnerships or networks

An illustration of the negative implications of collaboration can be found in the interview with a board member of Akropolistoren, a collective living project. He mentioned that there was an issue with sinking tiles in front of the building, due to the tower being built on a newly developed island. To resolve the issue, they had to communicate with the housing corporation, the housing corporation of the neighbouring building, the neighbourhood café and doctor's office that are located in the same building, the owner of the underground parking garage, the energy company and the municipality. This showcases the complex dynamic commons often face, especially in cases where they have limited authority. Continually navigating these complex situations requires effort from those that are involved. This lead to the final aspect of the commons, the commoners.

The Community: Commoners

The commons in Amsterdam that replied to the survey showed a variance in size. The number of active members ranged from small groups of fewer than ten people to larger projects involving over 100 participants, as shown in figure 11 on the next page. However, the community that is reached by the commons extends further than just their active members. As shown by figure 12, the local community is almost always included in the activities of the common to some degree.
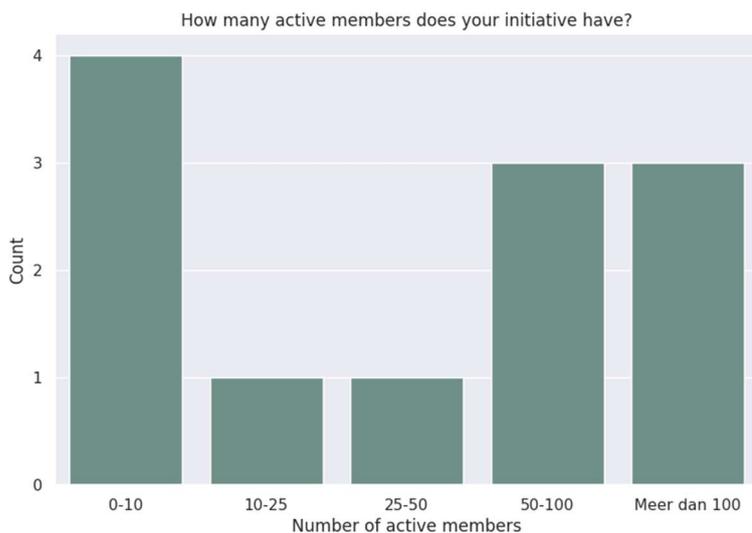
Figure 11 Number of active members

Figure 12 Community involvement

Many different answers were provided in response to what the main target group of the initiative was. The main trends that could be identified from these responses were the following:

- Vulnerable groups: e.g. people with low income, mental health issues, addiction problems, or immobile residents
- Community and neighbourhood: local residents and neighbourhood communities
- Demographics and ideologies: e.g. seniors (55+), Humanistic values, people who are socially conscious, green, and focused on sustainability.
- Specific lifestyles and interests: individuals interested in communal living and working, people that care about e.g. more local food, improving neighbourhood cleanliness etc.

These target groups reflect that some commons are more focused on service provision to certain groups, whereas others are focused on propagating a certain lifestyle connected to a certain view of the world or political agenda.

Another major point regarding who/what commoners are is that they are almost exclusively volunteers. For example, at Bajesdorp, a squatters movement turned into a housing cooperative, all members have to do a full day of unpaid work to keep the common running. HeenenWeer, a micromobility taxi service, is completely dependent on volunteers for its operation. While some bigger organisations might have a few paid employees, commons in Amsterdam seem to universally depend on the efforts of unpaid members and volunteers.

4.2 Research Question 2a: How do external factors shape the collaborative governance between the commons and the Municipality?

So far, only results regarding the first sub-research question have been discussed: what constitutes commons in Amsterdam? The next section of the results will go into the external and internal factors that influence the collaborative process between the urban commons and the municipality of Amsterdam. This next section will first explore the four factors that are considered external to the process: prehistory of collaboration, Power-Resource-Knowledge asymmetries, facilitative leadership and institutional design. The prehistory of collaboration and facilitative leadership tend to be dynamics that vary from case to case. Therefore, these dynamics are analysed only through the lens of specific commons. Because the asymmetries and institutional design also display larger patterns which are observed in policy documents, the analysis includes accounts of how the municipality sees these factors.

Prehistory of collaboration or conflict

The prehistory of collaboration or conflict is relevant to the collaborative process, as identified by Ansell & Gash (2008). The pre- prefix is used to indicate that this refers to history that precedes the current collaborative process. In some cases, there is a very clear prehistory. In others, it becomes harder to see what is considered prehistory and what is considered past experiences of the same collaborative process. This section will be limited to descriptions of cases with a strong prehistory narrative.

Voedselpark Amsterdam started as an antagonistic/protest movement that tried to prevent the construction of a distribution centre. The movement gathered signatures, protested in front of supermarkets, and stood outside the city hall for an entire week to talk to civil servants to gather support. At a later stage, the movement decided to become less antagonistic and tried to work together with the municipality to realise a food common on the land. While this prehistory also caused support groups to organise within the Municipality, it could also explain why some civil servants are still hesitant and distrustful towards collaboration with the organisation.

CLT-H Buurt received various research subsidies and the help of experts at the start of the initiative, even though the municipality was very reserved about the idea at first. Later, the municipality was happy to be the first city that will bring Community Land Trust to the Netherlands. Though little detail was given in the survey, CLT-H even indicated that it has recently received a formal 'administrative commitment' from the municipality. While the official process of building a housing cooperative is yet to take place, this prehistory of collaboration can benefit future collaboration.

Bajesdorp, a housing cooperative, started as a squatter movement. When it first took residency, squatting was still tolerated by the government although it was technically a violation of property rights. However, in 2010 the municipality of Amsterdam explicitly banned squatting. Later, this position of conflict led to talks between the municipality and Bajesdorp about how the squatters' movement could become a legally recognised entity. These talks later led to the process of the creation of the Bajesdorp housing cooperative. This was made possible because, in the tender for the development of the larger area, specific criteria were included that enabled Bajesdorp to strike a deal with the project developer. This case clearly shows how a legal conflict formed the basis for the start of a collaboration procedure. The legal conflict was partially created by choices made by the municipality, which could have influenced the motivation to collaborate.

Two senior citizens, Saar Boerlage and Dini Eekhuis initiated Akropolistoren. They were well connected, Boerlage had a long career in national and municipal politics, and Eekhuis was active within the ANBO, the National Association for the Elderly. After visiting a similar project together, they reached out to the municipality with the idea to set up collective elderly housing in Amsterdam. The Municipality then connected them with a housing corporation with whom agreements were made and a building was provided. Although the building is still owned by the housing corporation, the residents cooperative can decide who is admitted and is also paid for the upkeep of various common areas in the building. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the interview, it is fair to assume that the history and personal connections between the municipality and the initiators benefitted the success of the collaboration.

Power-Resource-Knowledge asymmetries

Besides the prehistory of collaboration or conflict, Power-Resource-Knowledge asymmetries are an important factor in regard to the starting conditions of the collaborative process. In policy documents written by the municipality, some of these asymmetries are also acknowledged, both positively and negatively. A description of both is given first, and afterwards, specific cases that arose from interviews are described.

One of the main strengths of commons in the eyes of the municipality is that commons are assumed to be service-providing in many ways. For example, a housing cooperative might contribute to neighbourhood safety and cleanliness, connection among neighbours can help to battle against loneliness and sustainable building methods could contribute to sustainability targets. Having commons as such an 'integral' value-building tool is seen as a valuable addition to what the municipality can do. One other major factor of the commons is its democratisation and inclusion

power. It is no coincidence that the amsterDOEN Program is part of the larger democratisation program of the municipal coalition. The central website of this program, states that *"Commons can strengthen the social structure of the neighbourhood, support the local economy and cultural sector, contribute to the integration of newcomers, and provide a new impetus for the transition to a sustainable food and energy supply (Amsterdam, n.d.)"*. The municipality thus recognises this positive asymmetry of what commons can achieve compared to the Municipality.

The municipality also recognises major asymmetries in which the Municipality has the upper hand. One of the biggest challenges concerning the commons is the high costs of land and real estate in Amsterdam and the competitiveness in the market in this domain (Hulst et al., 2024). Having to compete with private sector actors who have better access to financing, and have far more experience with what is needed, commons are often unable to compete. This is a major weakness since spaces and the resources associated with land and real estate are often central to the formation and success of commons.

Additionally, documents from the municipality show that many commons are perceived to lack the capacity to operate independently. It suggests that substantial structural and professional support is often needed. Notably, it says *"We cannot expect these (Energy cooperatives) to emerge spontaneously on a large scale from the communities (Bloemen & de Groot, 2022, p. 13)"*. This shows distrust and a lack of faith in the capacity of commons. Interestingly, this perspective seems to oppose a remark from Vuilnisoproer Nieuw-West from the survey: *"The municipality CANNOT organise initiatives on behalf of residents and must connect with local initiatives. After that, they can become partners"*.

In the analysed documents the political role of commons in Amsterdam is somewhat acknowledged, particularly in how these initiatives interact with traditional governance structures. While the municipality may not heavily emphasise the political potential of commons, there is recognition of their ability to create new institutions. Such institutions could influence political processes and contribute to governance at various levels, from neighbourhood-focused projects to city-wide initiatives. The municipality also recognises that Commons can take on responsibilities often associated with governmental functions, especially within social services. With the decentralisation of social care, some care collectives play an expanded role in addressing community needs that the municipality fails to address (Hulst et al., 2024). The Municipality highlights this as an 'opportunity'. This is a clear indication of the possible integration of commons into the service provision of the Municipality. It is acknowledged that these commons may also encounter financial and organisational challenges as they adapt to these responsibilities. The municipality recognises the contributions of commons in these areas and appears to be moving towards a model

of collaboration that formally supports their capacity to complement or enhance certain municipal functions. Driessen (2024) characterises the role of the government towards commons as a 'serving government'. This term echo's previous concepts that have attempted to redefine the role between government and citizens, such as Big society in the UK or the participation society in the Netherlands, which were both abandoned rather quickly (Hurenkamp, 2020). However, the 'serving government' seems to be different from these, as the main emphasis lies on the redefined role of the government, rather than the role of society.

During the interviews, many cases described the forms of asymmetries they experienced. Some of these asymmetries are more internal to the collaborative process, such as the freedom to share information. The following section outlines examples of asymmetries which are relevant as external factors to the process as they arose from the interviews.

As an illustration, to make the micro-mobility taxi service HeenenWeer a success, parking spots were required. HeenenWeer depends on the municipality's support because the municipality manages those spaces. Furthermore, the municipality also provides subsidies, financial expertise and a large network of care professionals who bring clients to the initiative. These resource asymmetries make HeenenWeer largely dependent on the municipality.

All housing cooperatives that were interviewed also highlighted that there are financial and knowledge asymmetries. The municipality writes out tenders to select housing cooperatives. This enables cooperatives to acquire land, which is not possible in the market. This gives the municipality the power to make demands regarding the site characteristics. The housing cooperatives also mention that they generally lack specific knowledge about project development and financing opportunities. The municipality provides access to experts within the organisation and gives out loans to the housing cooperatives. The asymmetry of knowledge and expertise was also described by initiators of Voedselpark Amsterdam as follows:
"Because within the municipality, there is, of course, a tremendous amount of expertise, experience, and ideas, which we naturally want to make use of as well, because we are just a small group of engaged activists who only have part of the answer ourselves."

Facilitative leadership

Facilitative leadership as an external factor to the collaborative process mainly refers to the presence of a third party that displays some form of mediation or leadership throughout the process (Ansell & Gash, 2008). There are many different experiences in Amsterdam to this end. However, in most cases discussed in this research, this dynamic was observed as the interplay of a certain municipality

department that facilitates the interactions with another department. For example, Bewoners Schinkelkwartier mentions:

"A team has been established within the municipality that actively tries to connect us to relevant discussions. I think that's the biggest help—that we have, so to speak, a guide within the municipality who can connect us with, well, contacts who might otherwise be less inclined to meet with us or attend a meeting with us."

However, in the same interview, Bewoners Schinkelkwartier says that while the Alderman of the Democratisation department says residents are important, the Alderman responsible for Land and Development says residents are only slowing everything down. Bewoners Schinkelkwartier: *"They never speak to each other, and so they continue to, well, formally disagree on the matter."* Similarly, in other cases, no such thing as facilitative leadership was experienced. This mainly means that interactions between different departments of the municipality are non-existent. Critique of this 'siloed' nature of the functioning of the municipality was almost universal throughout all the interviews. For example, De Bonte Hulst reported that technical demands from different departments were practically contradictory. The data does suggest a distinction between technical municipality departments causing more 'siloed' issues compared to more political or neighbourhood-focused departments within the Municipality.

In other cases, facilitation was also provided by third-party actors like placemakers, developers or politicians. These can be experienced as helpful but in some cases, they are not. In the newspaper article about Park Buurthaven, one of the voluntary park managers says: *"The available budget of nearly one million euros is said to have largely gone to project managers and placemakers, rather than to the park itself."* This case illustrates how facilitative leadership, when overly prioritized, can detract from the original aims. More broadly, it points to a systemic issue where the consultancy industry develops its own internal logic, prioritizing its interests over the issues it is meant to address.

Institutional Design

The literature on institutional design mainly refers to the basic protocols and ground rules for collaboration. As becomes clear from policy documents, the amsterDOEN program aims to progress such formalisation, but the program is still highly developing. What can be observed is the ambition to structure the collaboration to provide more guidance for both commons and civil servants. The first noteworthy point is that a connection is made between the autonomy of the commons while aligning the collaboration to benefit policy goals. Strengthening the independence of the Commons is very important to their functioning. The amsterDOEN program strives to reinforce the organisational capacities and self-governance structures of the commons. One clear example is the support of the

MeentCoop, which organises an incubator for commons (Hulst et al., 2024). Another document also states the program wants to protect the commons from excessive demands or interference from funders.

Another important factor is the role of tenders in supporting Commons. The municipality frequently refers to tenders as a tool to validate and financially support commons initiatives. This gives commons opportunities to compete with commercial providers. In a scenario sketch of a future common, a neighbourhood cooperative is described that has won a tender at the expense of commercial parties, and collaborates innovatively with the municipality to explore new hybrid forms between public, private, and collective sectors (Bloemen & de Groot, 2022). Enabling commons through tenders showcases a dynamic where the Municipality can frame the conditions of the collaboration.

However, documents by the municipality also recognise that this is a struggle in the interaction with commons as there could be an 'absence of an overarching view of the value generated and a lack of holistic recognition of its significance"(Hulst et al., 2024). In other words, if all the municipality's departments only recognise the added value of a commons from their perspective, collaboration might seem little worthwhile. On the other hand, it could also threaten the autonomy of the commons if this integral value creation becomes a precondition for support.

The best empirical examples of the way institutional design affects the collaborative process is the 'kaartenbak' and tender procedure for housing cooperatives. This provides a clear stepped approach with what is expected at every step. When asked about the ideal collaboration with the municipality, a representative of Bajesdorp mentioned *"That tender procedure is also broken down into pieces, so as a layperson, you indeed know what is expected of you. It is clearly defined."* A different example of less successful institutional design is described by Bewoners Schinkelkwartier:

"We then have a formal organization, which is called a neighbourhood platform. Well, that is defined by the municipality of Amsterdam. (...) It has formal status, right? So, there is now also a recognition procedure. (...) But it is still limited for now, and before this, we were also in a... What's called a testbed, and we certainly feel like guinea pigs in the testbed."

4.3 Research Question 2b: How do internal factors shape the collaborative governance between the commons and the municipality?

The next section explores how the five main elements that are considered internal affect the collaborative process. This gives an idea of how collaboration takes place. The five elements are: trust building, face-to-face dialogue, intermediate outcomes, commitment to process and shared understanding. The results are a mix of relevant data from the survey, document analysis and interviews.

Trust Building

Trust is a crucial element in achieving successful collaboration. However, the results show that trust between the commons and the municipality is not a given. In the survey 38% of the commons expressed a lack of trust, suggesting strained relationships between parties. Additionally, the responses to the question from the survey about the key features of the initiative that facilitate or hinder collaboration with the Municipality describe indicators which are beneficial to building trust. Facilitating factors mentioned include the effort to work as partners and to start with a clear vision. A respondent states that its initiative demonstrates significant community engagement and aligns its goals with the goals of the Municipality, which is beneficial for the collaboration. Another respondent suggests that its initiative is backed by a professional and knowledgeable team, which adds credibility. Additionally, a well-structured organisation with a strong membership base enhances its capacity to offer valuable services to the community, creating goodwill with local officials.

However, all these elements are preconditions which make commons look trustworthy, rather than being activities that build trust. Some answers were also provided toward that end. A respondent recommends attending municipal meetings to foster familiarity and build political and administrative support. Two initiatives advised inviting officials to experience initiatives firsthand to better understand their value and make their services visible to the community through activities.

In the interview with the initiator of Voedselcirkel, a common that brings together nine food redistribution organisations, trust was highlighted as a crucial element in the development of the organisation. A lot of work has had to be put in continually to keep all the stakeholders happy and on board. Similarly, when Voedselpark Amsterdam transitioned to try to be a more cooperative partner to the municipality, they had to make an effort to start working from a basis of mutual trust.

Another interesting result based on document analysis is that the municipality is concerned about the risk of co-optation by the market. This refers to an instance where the value generated within commons could be re-appropriated if adequate safeguards aren't in place. For example community land trusts that attempt to keep land out of the speculative market must ensure permanent decommodification. This is relevant to the municipality because if decommodification is not permanent, the

support given to commons might seem like state support or favouritism. Needing to formalise permanent decommodification can be seen as a lack of trust, as this should be central to the idea of commons.

Face to Face Dialogue

Having forms of direct and open contact is very important to continue the collaborative process. All the commons indicated to have meetings with the municipality. Most of the initiatives stated that they have monthly meetings, with roughly similar amounts indicating more and less than monthly meetings. When asked about the nature of these meetings, eight respondents indicated working on a project-based collaboration, and seven indicated meetings related to financing. Finally, five answered to have informal meetings.
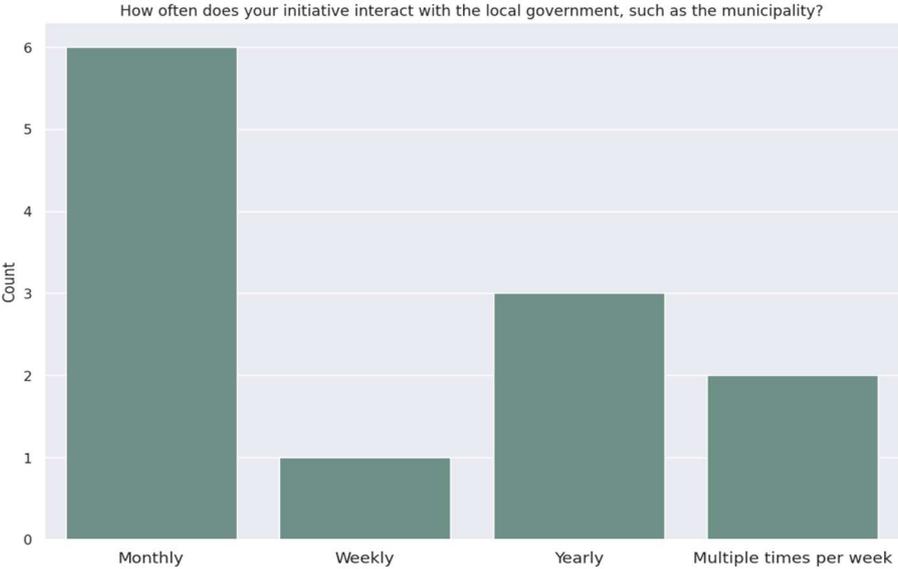
Figure 13 Frequency of interaction with local government

Several remarks were made in the survey about how this plays out in practice. One respondent highlighted that it is crucial to involve municipal officials from the outset, clearly communicating project goals, needs, and community support. Several initiatives emphasised the importance of building and maintaining personal relationships with government organisations, despite challenges posed by frequent changes in political landscapes and staff turnover. One response stated that finding common ground in communication is important. The flip side of the importance of communication also became clear from the survey, from examples of problematic communication. These examples included delays in responses from municipal officials and inaccuracies that arise during discussions, potentially due to a lack of knowledge. Another respondent advised documenting all agreements in writing and via email, as verbal commitments can be unreliable.

Intermediate outcomes

Intermediate outcomes like recognition, smaller projects or joint fact-finding are important in keeping the collaboration moving forward. Such intermediate outcomes often require some form of support from the municipality. In the survey, commons were asked about the types of support their initiatives currently receive from the government. The data shows that 62% of individuals or organisations received financial support, while only 15% received legal assistance. Infrastructure support was provided to 23%, and the same percentage reported receiving no support. This highlights a significant reliance on financial resources, revealing a notable gap in other forms of support. Other forms of support mentioned were: advice, subsidies, access to networks and governmental commitment. Some of this support might not be an intermediate outcome but rather a final outcome of the process. However, these responses still give an impression of what the focus of such intermediate outcomes might be. In response to another survey question a common reported that while initial cooperation may be straightforward, obstacles in execution can emerge. Especially if promised actions are not being adequately followed through. This is demonstrated in the newspaper interview with Park Buurthaven:

"Over the course of four years, a lot of time and energy has been invested in the process. When it becomes clear that, in the end, little comes of all the great plans, people drop out in disappointment."

While Park Buurthaven really states that people drop out, Bewoners Schinkelkwartier demonstrated a different dynamic.

"To be honest, in recent years, we've noticed that results have been coming in very slowly, bit by bit, while we feel like we've had to give up a lot. So, over the past years, there has really been, let's say, increasing escalation, where we've increasingly resorted to formal power tools to, well, strengthen our position."

These two naratives clearly demonstrate what possible outcomes can be if intermediate results are not generated.

Commitment to process

Commitment to the collaborative process by the commons and the Municipality is crucial for generating tangible outcomes at the end of the process. As one respondent succinctly puts it: *"Patience and persistence are essential to achieving your goals"*. The data from this research shows that commitment is an important challenge in most processes. In the survey commons were asked about the challenges faced in collaborating with local government. 62% of respondents reported encountering bureaucratic hurdles, indicating that red tape is a major obstacle in their partnerships. Insufficient resources were cited by 31%, highlighting a potential barrier to effective collaboration. In open questions the pressure on municipal officials was also a recurring theme; respondents observed that this

pressure can make officials hesitant to take risks. As a solution, commons encouraged giving officials more decision-making power.

Park Buurthaven gave a negative example in its interview about a lack of commitment: *"Over the course of three years, around twenty different people were involved with the park. It was a serious mess. Warnings from the neighbourhood that things were not going well were ignored".* The interviewee of Food Council MRA reflected on what an ideal collaboration with the municipality should look like: *"The ideal collaboration is, well, one where you create a space to engage in an open and, above all, structured way. Right now, it's mostly sporadic and, well, also very politically dependent. We would like municipal professionals to engage in collegial dialogue with citizens and be able to, well, demonstrate where they stand."* This sketch of an ideal situation shows a current lack of commitment in the collaborative process.

Shared understanding

Shared understanding implies having a shared problem definition and values. One of the main questions from the interviews was whether the commons felt that the municipality understood and respected the initiative's core values. Several housing cooperatives mentioned that this was certainly the case. However, this might be caused by selection bias, as housing cooperatives are selected in the tender process based on the values they present. When the interviewee from Slow Food was asked the same question, he replied resolutely *'No, the municipality only cares about money'*. This highlights the diversity in experiences and how different departments and commons have very different processes.

Interestingly, when asked about major challenges in collaboration 54% of respondents mentioned "other" challenges, indicating a range of issues that may not have been explicitly categorised. This again reflected the diverse experiences in these partnerships. These additional remarks pointed out that some officials lacked the necessary decision-making power. Respondents also noted slow procedures. Additionally, two respondents noted a lack of knowledge among officials and a limited or non-existent understanding of commons. Another respondent corroborated that the cooperative's self-directed approach does not always fit comfortably within the municipal framework and mindset.

4.4 Research Question 3: How is the governance of the urban commons affected by the collaborative governance between the commons and the municipality?

After understanding all the elements that comprise an urban common and the collaborative process, the next part sheds light on the outcome of all these elements. While there are various possible outcomes of this process, this thesis focuses only on

the effect on the governance of the commons, as defined in the conceptual framework, as outcome. The literature review showcased that two main dimensions capture the tensions in the governance of the commons: positioning and functioning. The data collected for this research generated a broad range of insights related to these 2 concepts.

Positioning – integration versus independence

The following section will explore examples of cases that showed to have experienced tension, synergies or change in their positioning due to collaboration with the municipality. Each case will highlight in bold which internal or external factor(s) of the collaborative process were the main cause of these changes.

The first case is Bajesdorp, which is the housing cooperative that originated as a squatter's community and was being threatened with being shut down. Although Bajesdorp is now preserved, the interviewee states that it is pushed in 'the straightjacket of urban development', and can operate less autonomously then before. *"A little less free and autonomous than before, but a place with future prospects, as one thing is certain: the new Bajesdorp will stay."* This quote illustrates that for Bajesdorp there was a clear trade-off between autonomy and its long-term viability. This can be traced back to the **power asymmetry** between the squatters and the municipality that arose when the squatters gained an illegal status. The initiative had to integrate into other structures and developments or it would not continue to exist.

The old Bajesdorp was a mix of living, working and public functions. The group wanted to bring those function dynamics to the new building. However, all the rules of the municipality didn't make realizing this mix easy. Living and working in one building doesn't fit within the municipality's thinking boxes, and things that won't fit within a box can take a long time to come to life. (…) In later negotiations with the municipality, the studio function was established, with the municipality requiring Bajesdorp to become a breeding ground. Ultimately, the combination of living and working was realized in this way, and this is largely due to the fact that the participants of Bajesdorp took care of the negotiations themselves.

This recollection of events shows that a lack of **shared understanding** between Bajesdorp and the municipality caused the common to remain largely independent in negotiations with the developer. This case thus clearly illustrates that both the starting conditions and shared understanding can affect the tension between integration and independence.

The next case is an interaction between the Akropolistoren and the municipality. The Akropolistoren explained that they wanted to have seating around the building. Therefore they participated in the 'Buurtbudget' for the funding, which is

a yearly democratic online election for low-budget neighbourhood initiatives. However, this caused a significant increase in the budget for the project. Akropolistoren calculated that if they executed the plan themselves it would cost 3500 euros, but the municipality calculated the cost at 10.000 euros. Akropolistoren said this was because costs for project management and supplies are higher for the Municipality. According to Akropolistoren, the project did not get enough votes to be accepted due to the high costs. Consequently, the initiative sought to find the 3500 through other means. In this case, the **institutional design** of the collaborative process led to a lack of **intermediate outcomes** which caused the common to take a more independent approach.

The micromobility taxi service HeenenWeer showcases a high level of integration with the municipality. The initiative states that this provides many benefits. For example, the integration gives a great network of users and professionals who can support and promote the initiative. Additionally, having a good relationship and 'good and capable' people that are part of the 'stadsdeelraad', helps to overcome obstacles. The municipality also gives crucial financial advice to keep the association financially healthy and gives suggestions on how to professionalise the organisation. However, when asked, HeenenWeer stated that the municipality does not affect its autonomy whatsoever. It indicated that the main reason is the strong personal connections with and commitment from civil servants. This displays powerful **shared understanding** and **commitment to the process**. Crucially, this case also shows that integration and independence don't necessarily oppose each other. This is a clear result that confirms what was mentioned in the literature review: integration and independence don't have to be mutually exclusive.

In contrast, Bewoners Schinkelkwartier showed very clear recognition of the tension between integration and independence. To this end, the interviewee stated:

"Yes, so we're really like someone walking a tightrope—on one hand, trying to achieve something meaningful for residents, charting our own autonomous course, and making sure our voice is heard. On the other hand, there's the government and the project team that find this very threatening. They often say, "Well, just join us, and then we'll work together to make something great out of it." But that's often not what residents here want to achieve. So, yes, we really take on the role of a mediator in this."

On page 47 of this thesis, the quotation by Bewoners Schinkelkwartier shows that the balance of the tightrope has been shifting more towards independence. This is taking place due to a lack of **intermediate outcomes**. The initiative feels it is not generating enough results, and this makes it hard to maintain participation amongst citizens. In an attempt to generate more intermediate outcomes, the group is now seeking more independence in the process. This might however also be explained as

a tension in the functioning dimension of the organisation. This brings us to the next dimension that was studied in the results.

Functioning - Political pressure versus service provision

The functioning dimension of political pressure versus service provision could be observed in a fair amount of cases. Like the positioning dimension, there are various elements in the data which influence the functioning of the commons. These cases and the crucial elements are described in the following section.

Firstly, starting with Bajesdorp again, which displayed clear signs of tension in positioning as well. The housing cooperative Bajesdorp originated from a group of squatters. Squatting can be seen as a form of political protest, that makes a statement against vacancy and for maintaining a habitable neighbourhood. However, looking back on what Bajesdorp is now, it turned out to be more of a 'placemaking force' than a political force. The squatters group organised a lot of events, and started a social community centre and a vegetable garden. As was described before, the group eventually transitioned to a housing cooperative. When asked about this, a representative of the group said the following:

"Bajesdorp is a protest from within, not a banner on the barricades, but becoming a part of the city and the policy. In a collective rather than an individual manner, change is made."

The change in functioning took place over a long period, which makes it hard to point to specific factors that contributed to that effect. However, this change in organisation also affected the people who were involved in Bajesdorp. Many people left because, amongst other reasons, *"there were also people who did not like the transition from squatting to buying and/or did not want to become project developers themselves."* This demonstrates that there is a feedback loop from the outcome, the governance of the commons, back to the basic functions of what the commons is, such as who the commoners are.

Another case that started with a political mission is Voedselpark Amsterdam. This is best demonstrated by the old name of the organisation: 'Behoud Lutkemeer!' (Maintain Lutkemeer!). The organisation started as a protest group against the sale and transformation of the polder (named Lutkemeer) into an industrial area. However, after two years the organisation decided to change its course of action and become less political. Regarding this decision, the interviewee stated *"It takes two to tango"*. After two years of activism, the organisation saw that there was more understanding and support from citizens and some government officials. However, there was still a lack of concrete **results** and the **trust** between the initiative and the municipality was very low. Shifting the organisation towards a proposal to buy the land for a food common was thus meant to achieve more success in the collaboration. The

interviewee stated *"After two years we said, (…) Instead of simply opposing, we should focus on making proposals to ensure that the municipality opens up to an alternative use of the area."* This also indicates looking for **shared understanding**. This analysis thus shows that the organisation had to take a less antagonistic role as a condition to gain access to the crucial elements of the collaborative process.

Finally, a different case, Bewoners Schinkelkwartier is trying to be a partner in the development of a new neighbourhood. In an ideal scenario, Bewoners Schinkelkwartier would end up in a co-creation process to assist in designing the future neighbourhood. However, in the interview, the representative explains that the municipality does not appreciate having to make compromises in collaboration:

"So, what I do see is that, whatever kind of initiative there is, the municipality prefers to see us as friendly residents organizing a barbecue that makes everyone happy and creates a nice atmosphere. Things like tackling loneliness or fostering cohesion—well, those kinds of policy goals are achieved without the municipality really having to contribute much, right? Except maybe giving €250 for a barbecue and a tent. That's kind of the ideal scenario for the municipality, and the fact that we really get involved in their plans makes it quite difficult for them to work with us as a partner. Because it's a bit like the more we are right, the less the municipality is, you know? It feels a bit like a zero-sum game for them."

The description of the municipalities' attitude shows **a lack of trust** and **shared understanding** of the benefits of collaboration. The Bewoners Schinkelkwartier experience that it is not input but rather their consent that the municipality is after. These factors of the process are causing the initiative to be more service-providing (tackling loneliness and fostering cohesion) than to have a political say (co-creating neighbourhood designs). This is demonstrated in the remark given by the interviewee: *"Yes, it's convenient for us to align with the municipality on certain points, but that also means we have to compromise on how we would ideally do things ourselves."*

5 Discussion

5.1 Research problem and main findings

This thesis set out to explore the question: How does Public Collective Collaboration influence the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam? The literature review showed that Public Collective Collaboration can be broken down into many different elements, both external and internal. The results show that both these internal and external factors have the possibility of affecting the governance of the commons. A possible pattern that could be observed is that external factors change the governance of the commons through 'minimal requirements' to join the collaborative process. If an initiative is too political or independent, it is harder to gain access to the municipality. However, internal factors showed a higher prevalence in the data as an influence on the positioning and functioning of the common. The results suggest that intermediate outcomes and shared understanding are the most influential factors that can alter those dimensions.

How these factors, or a lack thereof, are of influence is more difficult to conclude in general terms. Some cases experience the positioning and functioning dimensions as a zero-sum game (Bewoners Schinkelkwartier), whereas other cases experience them to be positive-sum (HeenenWeer). These different experiences can be linked to the neo-Institutional versus neo-Marxist debate of enhancement versus co-optation. Through the lens of this thesis, that debate could be reformulated to the ability of collaborative governance to reduce the mutually exclusive nature of the positioning and functioning dimensions. This position enables a more empirical and less ideological foundation to researching the effects of PCC. However, the limited sample size and external validity of the results prohibit from conclusively identifying specific patterns of influence between internal factors of the collaborative process and the governance of the commons. Expanding this field of study could lead to more concrete results in the future.

5.2 Theoretical implications of the results

The results regarding the first sub-question, about what constitutes the urban commons in Amsterdam, are largely in line with what can be expected based on the literature. However, the first section about the resources showcased that the resources are more varied and unique than some research and policy documents suggest. Even clear categories like housing cooperatives all have their own nuances to the resource that is managed. Regarding the management, the data showed a variance in legal frameworks, size and hierarchy. These nuances are closely linked to the external factors of collaboration, specifically power-resource-knowledge asymmetries. Finally, the data gathered regarding the community mainly highlighted a distinction in the data between service provision to target groups or ideologically

motivated target groups. This can also be seen as feeding into the power-resource-knowledge asymmetries of the collaborative governance framework.

Most cases adhere to the three main elements: management, community and resource. This is a logical result of the case selection method which checked specifically for the prevalence of these three elements. However, several cases did not self-identify as a common, even though they met the three criteria. The literature review did not discuss the importance of this self-identification as a commons. The benefit of not selecting self-identifying commons, is that it increases the chance of including cases that are normally overlooked in commons policy and research. The downside is that these organisations are only required to meet the three criteria at a minimal level, which could indicate only minimal commitment in several areas. For example, one case answered in the survey that the local community is not involved, whereas this would normally be expected of commons. There is little research that references or deals with this consideration since most larger case studies select cases based on participation in a commons-specific policy (de Nictolis & Iaione, 2021; Pera & Bussu, 2024; Thompson & Lorne, 2023) or focus only on a small amount/number of self-identifying commons (Calzati et al., 2022). A notable exception is research by Bianchi et al. (2022), which follows a similar approach to this thesis of generating a large database and selecting cases based on adherence to a specific definition. For the selection, Bianchi et al. apply a visual ethnographic method: manually checking all the websites of the cases. This was not feasible for this thesis due to the large number of cases found (693) but is recommended if a more complete overview of commons is required.

The results of sub-question 2a, about the external factors that contribute to the collaborative process, showcase that these factors are highly relevant to some cases. While the prehistory seemed to only apply to specific cases, it did have a relevant impact on those. On the other hand, the power-resource-knowledge asymmetries were universally recognised, both from the commons perspective as well as the municipalities perspective. The service provision potential plays a major role in this, which can act as the leverage for collaboration between commons and the municipality. Regarding the institutional design, the siloed nature of the municipality was clearly recognised by commons and municipality as a complicating factor. Finally, facilitative leadership seamed to be especially relevant to specific cases. The problems that were mentioned also seemed to reflect the issues of the siloed nature of the municipality, but at the same time highlighted efforts that are at work to overcome said issues.

The external factors considered were drawn from the framework by Ansell & Gash (2008). The theoretical framework showed that these external factors were not present in the research design of Healey (1996) and Meerkerk (2024), even though

Meerkerk references Ansell and Gash extensively. However, the results of this sub-question clearly demonstrate that the influence of these factors cannot be overlooked. Future commons focussed research should be aware of this. It should be acknowledged that there are examples of research that explore the effect of these specific factors individually like de Nictolis & Iaione (2021) about institutional design, Pera & Bussu (2024) about facilitative leadership and Bianchi (2022) about starting conditions. The inclusion of all these elements and analysis from both the commons' and the municipalities' perspectives, makes this research stand out from those examples. Additionally, the overview it generates increases the relevance to knowledge users in Amsterdam, who might not be consciously aware of the contribution of all these factors. The downside to this is that the depth of analysis is limited.

The descriptions of how the cases encounter the five internal elements of the collaborative process, in light of research question 2b, are another crucial step in the contribution of this thesis. Whereas the external elements are more suited to be analysed the individually, the internal elements show a greater degree of interconnectedness. The different elements and recognisable narratives that the cases present, enable an image of collaboration to arise that goes far beyond certain normative descriptions of commons-municipality collaboration found in literature. The theoretical framework demonstrated that these normative descriptions do not incorporate a stepped approach to collaboration, like Arnstein (1969), nor do they specify the different elements of collaboration, like Ansell & Gash (2008). However, the empirical results regarding the internal elements, show that the distinction between the elements is relevant and shows signs of a stepped approach.

For example, trust-building was found to be a crucial first step in several cases, as without trust, the following elements, such as communication and face-to-face dialogue, often failed to lead to effective collaboration. In cases where trust was established, there was greater commitment to the collaborative process. However, when this commitment was not accompanied by tangible intermediate outcomes, the collaboration was often perceived as tokenism, undermining the process. Furthermore, the element of shared understanding emerged as particularly important in facilitating meaningful collaboration. When stakeholders did not share a common vision or understanding, collaboration tended to stagnate. The cases also demonstrated that intermediate outcomes, such as small wins or concrete actions, were essential for maintaining momentum in collaboration. When these were absent, participants felt disengaged, and the collaboration lost its sense of purpose.

This combination of how the various elements interact in the creation of collaborative outcomes, is well-known and studied in the field of collaborative governance. However, this has not been readily applied specifically to public-

commons partnerships or collaboration. This is therefore an important development in light of what was extensively discussed in the literature review: a need for empirical explorations of the contextual and path-dependant nature of public collective collaboration. Moreover, these results proved to be a crucial data in answering the final research question.

The results from research question 3 reveal that the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam is significantly shaped by the collaboration with the municipality. The findings highlight that the integration versus autonomy dimension is particularly shaped by intermediate results and shared understanding. A lack of these factors was mentioned as causing initiatives to adapt, both towards and away from the collaboration. Additionally, some commons that experienced positive results and understanding signified their role as fully autonomous and others as straightjacketed. This highlights that similar factors can have a different outcome on specific commons. Regarding the functioning dimension, trust and shared understanding emerged as the primary indicators. These were mainly mentioned in cases where a lack of either or both excluded the commons from either a political or a service providing role. Although commons often aim to combine these two roles, the municipality struggles with this duality and tends to steer the commons towards focusing on one or the other. However, cases that successfully manage both roles have learned to be tactical and pragmatic, internalising this tension and learning to live with it. These results underscore the importance of both relational and practical factors in shaping how collaborative governance affects the governance and success of urban commons in Amsterdam.

These results provide substantive and interesting directions for future research. The results show that clear connections can be made between different elements of the collaborative process and changes in the governance of the commons. The possibility of these changes is widely acknowledged in the literature that debates the neo-Institutional and neo-Marxist positions of enhancement or co-optation. This discussion has produced various works that provide cases to advocate either one of those positions, or a nuanced position (Bianchi, 2022). This thesis goes beyond those works by answering what Bianchi (Ibid.", p. 1797) calls for in her conclusion: *"Only through an empirically informed knowledge of urban commons– local state relationships (…) will we be able to advance our understanding of the potential scope and limitations of urban commons-led collective action in cities".* This exploration of the direct connection between factors within the collaboration process and the effect on the governance of the commons needs to be expanded to commons from different contexts and periods, with the intent of cross-examining the patterns that might evolve. This should enable more insight into which factors are

relevant to transitioning the collaboration from a zero-sum dynamic to a positive-sum one.

5.3 Research strengths and limitations

The previous section explored how the findings of this thesis align with existing research, while this section reflects more extensively on the research methods, highlighting their strengths and limitations. As mentioned before, the collaboration between the municipality of Amsterdam and urban commons presents challenges in establishing external validity, as the context-specific and path-dependent nature of the cases limits broader applicability. Additionally, collaboration is a continuous and evolving process, making it difficult to distinguish between internal and external factors influencing the outcomes. This research attempted to overcome these challenges through the application of a mixed-methods approach, which combines generalisability with an in-depth exploration of specific issues. By having structured case selection, survey questions and semi-structured interview questions, the methods applied can easily be replicated in a different city. However, the specific dynamics of the context of Amsterdam could still be included through interviews and policy documents.

Secondly, the study's exploratory design, while effective at identifying organisations that do not self-identify as commons, is constrained by a small number of cases. This approach could be strengthened by a larger setup, possibly using a snowball method to capture a more diverse range of organisations. Notably, a significant proportion of the included cases were housing cooperatives, which may have skewed the findings toward this specific subset. Meanwhile, energy cooperatives were underrepresented, with only one survey response and no interview data, leaving a notable gap in the dataset. The selection of interviewees based on survey responses and willingness to participate may also have introduced bias. Furthermore, the semi-structured nature of the interviews, while enabling flexibility and rich detail, carried the risk of the researchers' opinions or interests subtly shaping the questions. Despite this, the approach allowed for deeper engagement with relevant topics, enhancing the richness of the data.

In summary, while the research design provided valuable insights, its limitations, such as case selection bias, contextual specificity, and underrepresentation of certain types of commons, point to opportunities for refinement in future studies. A broader and more systematic approach could help address these gaps while preserving the depth of analysis achieved here.

5.4 Information for knowledge users

Finally, this section will reflect on the implications of this research for people outside of academia, both in Amsterdam and beyond. The research shows that there

is a trend in growing collaboration between the commons and the government. While this collaboration is usually far from perfect in theory, many of the respondents remain hopeful about the future developments in the collective sector, even in the face of adversity. This optimism and drive can be a powerful narrative to inspire other actors in the chain to mirror this hope and optimism. Politicians, sceptics, policy officers or other leaders will likely benefit from practically experiencing the power of commons, not through a PowerPoint but through hands-on experiences.

For people working in the municipality, this thesis should inform about the effects of procedural and distributive justice in collaboration. There are clear interactions between the process and the outcome of collaboration. When trying to improve collaboration, civil servants should therefore not focus on just improving just the fairness of the process or the fairness of the outcome. To illustrate this with an example: the municipality aims to have 10% of the housing stock in Amsterdam be collective housing by 2040. To achieve such a goal, the municipality will have to ramp up the creation of housing cooperatives, but at the same time should not compromise on the quality of collaboration. The conceptual framework provides an effective overview to analyse whether all elements of collaboration are being filled in effectively. Being able to trace patterns of collaboration can help urban commons and civil servants to analyse the possibly unintentional effects on the positioning and functioning of the commons.

Another important takeaway is that commons are more diverse and exist in more places than is sometimes considered. While knowledge about the commons is on the rise, many spots practically act as a commons without being recognised as such. Learning about and supporting the management practices of these 'hidden' commons, can be a great starting point for further strengthening the commons movement in the city. Having collaboration be commons-led, will foster diversity and strengthen the general movement. The empirical evidence in the research should motivate all to continue to expand fair and deliberative processes that produce collaborations that give autonomy and support to commons.

5 Conclusion & recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore how Public Collective Collaboration (PCC) influences the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam. By examining both external and internal factors of collaboration, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how commons interact with the municipality and how these interactions shape governance outcomes. The findings highlight the complex interplay between integration and autonomy, as well as the political and service providing aspects of commons. The results conclusively reveal that the governance of urban commons in Amsterdam is significantly shaped by the collaboration with the municipality. The results highlight specific avenues of this influence, but at the same time highlight how these avenues appear contradictory in various cases. The study contributes to the broader academic discourse on urban commons governance, offering new insights into the relational dynamics of public-commons partnerships.

The findings indicate that external factors, such as power-resource-knowledge asymmetries, facilitative leadership, and institutional design, create the foundational conditions for collaboration. For instance, initiatives that align with municipal goals or present strong organisational capacities are more likely to access support and resources. However, the siloed nature of municipal departments and bureaucratic hurdles often hinder effective collaboration. These challenges suggest a need for more cohesive institutional frameworks and leadership that improves alignment between the commons and the municipality. The policy documents that were analysed already showed awareness of these issues, but concrete solutions are still developing.

Internal factors, including trust building, shared understanding, intermediate outcomes, and commitment to the process, were demonstrated as crucial elements of collaborative success. Trust building, intermediate outcomes and shared understanding were particularly significant for balancing the dual dimensions of governance of the commons: positioning (integration versus autonomy) and functioning (political versus service provision). Collaborative processes that displayed trust building, intermediate results and shared understanding were better equipped to navigate these tensions and achieve meaningful outcomes. Conversely, a lack of trust building or intermediate outcomes often led to perceptions of tokenism, as experienced by other initiatives.

A crucial takeaway is that the conceptual framework developed in this research thus provides a relevant avenue for exploring how enhancement or co-optation might take place. These findings underscore the importance of a dynamic and context-sensitive approach to collaborative governance of the commons. While existing literature often presents normative models about what collaboration should

entail, this study highlights the need for empirical, path-dependent analysis that accounts for the diverse realities of urban commons.

6.2 Recommendations

The empirical exploration of the connection between collaboration and the governance of the commons is only just underway. Building a 'commonsverse' requires effort by all stakeholders to develop new insights, frameworks and practices to enhance both autonomy and support of and for the commons. The next section will give an indication of recommendations for urban commons, the municipality and research on the topic.

Recommendations for Urban Commons

On the one hand, urban commons would do well to search collaboration that enhances their autonomy while supporting their capabilities. For example, urban commons should look to participate in commons peer support systems to gather resources and legitimacy. However, they should also actively look to connect to municipal departments that are more geared towards the support of commons than limiting their interactions to topic specific departments of the municipality.

Urban commons with clear and stable governance structures are more suited for collaboration with the municipality. To strengthen governance structures, it is essential to develop internal frameworks that balance autonomy with collaboration. Transparency and accountability can be leveraged to build trust among stakeholders. Additionally, reflection on governance factors using the conceptual framework should be conducted to provide valuable feedback to collaboration partners.

Finally, capacity building can enhance skills in governance and financial management, enabling more effective management of urban commons. As the capacity of the core team of the commons increases, the dependence on the municipality for these capacities decreases. On the other hand, the initiative should remain critical that the logic and spirit of commoning is uniquely different from that of the municipality. Capacity building as mentioned above should therefore be applied as a means to an end rather than as a goals in itself.

Recommendations for the Municipality of Amsterdam

To enhance collaborative frameworks, the municipality should expand initiatives like *Kaartenbak* and *AmsterDOEN*, enabling support for commons across various sectors. Assigning dedicated facilitators to guide commons through collaboration and bridge departmental silos will also strengthen these efforts.

Supporting the independence of commons is equally important. The municipality can achieve this by providing financial safeguards and reducing bureaucratic hurdles, thereby empowering commons to operate more effectively.

However, it is crucial to avoid overstepping and allow commons to retain decision-making authority, especially in resource management.

Promoting awareness and knowledge sharing is vital for aligning municipal goals with the values and needs of urban commons. Hosting workshops and forums can facilitate this alignment, while increased training for municipal staff on the principles and practices of commons governance will ensure a deeper understanding of their dynamics.

The municipality should actively identify and engage with non-self-identifying commons, recognising that these groups often meet the functional criteria of commons without explicitly labelling themselves as such. Given the unique nature of each commons, the municipality must be cautious about labelling or grouping them too quickly, as this may overlook their specific needs and dynamics. By broadening its outreach and support mechanisms, municipalities can ensure these initiatives receive the resources and guidance needed to thrive.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should focus on long-term analysis to study the evolving dynamics of Public Collective Collaboration (PCC) over extended periods. This approach can shed light on the lasting impact of collaboration on urban commons. Additionally, comparative studies of PCC in different cities can help identify best practices and transferable lessons. This could contribute to a broader understanding of effective collaboration models for urban commons. Methodological advancements, such as broader case selection and systematic approaches like visual ethnography, could address gaps in representation and external validity, particularly by incorporating underrepresented commons like energy cooperatives.

While the internal elements of collaboration have received some attention in commons literature previous to this thesis, the exploration of the external factors to the collaborative process warrants more attention in research. Understanding the detailed dynamics of power-resource-knowledge asymmetries, along with the prehistory of collaboration and conflict, can provide deeper insights into the subsequent steps of the collaborative process.

Most importantly, future studies should focus on identifying the specific conditions that allow the two key governance dimensions, autonomy versus integration and political versus service provision, to be experienced as positive-sum. Understanding how these dynamics evolve and manifest over time will be crucial for refining governance strategies and fostering more sustainable, inclusive collaboration between urban commons and municipalities.

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7 Annex 1: Overview of cases

Initiative	Survey	Interview
Voedseltuin Ijplein	✓	
Coöperatieve Vereniging Bewoners Akropolistoren	✓	Self conducted interview
Stichting Heenenweer	✓	Self conducted interview
Wooncoöperatie Het Nieuwe Bajesdorp	✓	Online interview
Wooncoöperatie De Bonte Hulst	✓	Self conducted interview
MeerEnergie U.A.	✓	
Slow Food Amsterdam	✓	Self conducted interview
Vereniging Community Land Trust H-Buurt	✓	Online interview, Online learning document
De Pijp Samen Schoon, Groen en Duurzaam	✓	
De Groene Gemeenschap	✓	
Stichting Noorderpark	✓	
Vuilnisoproep Nieuw West	✓	2 Newspaper interviews
MijnStadstuin	✓	
Cooperatie Samen aan de Slag	✓	
Bewonersvereniging De Halve Wereld		
Stadslandgoed Nieuw West		
Sociaal Tuinieren		
Farmsterdammers		
Park Buurthaven		Newspaper interview
De Plantage		
CASA SOFIA		
Bewonersvereniging de Mirandabuurt		
Kunst- en Cultuurgebouw Tugela85		
Stichting Productiehuis Noord		
Buurtboerderij Gliphoeve		
buurtcoöperatie de Eester		
Buitenplaats Wester-Amstel		
Bewoners Schinkelkwartier		Self conducted interview
Banne Duurzaam		
De Bundel		
Additional cases		
De Warren		Online interview
De Nieuwe Meent		Online interview
Food council MRA		Self conducted interview

8 Annex 2: Survey questions

Q1 Introductie Beste deelnemer, dank voor uw deelname aan deze enquête. Uw initiatief is belangrijk voor het begrijpen van stedelijke commons en hun samenwerking met lokale overheden. De vragen richten zich op de oprichting, juridische structuur, bestuurlijke vormgeving, en de betrokkenheid van de lokale gemeenschap, evenals uw ervaringen met de gemeente. Het invullen duurt ongeveer 5 minuten.   Uw antwoorden zullen vertrouwelijk worden behandeld en uitsluitend worden gebruikt voor academisch onderzoek. De inzichten die u deelt, helpen bij het verbeteren van de samenwerking tussen initiatieven zoals het uwe en lokale overheden. Nogmaals bedankt voor uw medewerking!

Q2 Wat is de naam van uw initiatief?

_____

Q3 Wat voor type stedelijke common is uw initiatief?

- Cultureel of gemeenschapcentrum
- Buurtcoöperatie
- Collectief woonproject
- Cooperatieve werkplaats
- Voedselbos/stadslandbouw
- Gemeenschappelijke groene ruimte
- Collectieve energievoorziening
- Deelinitiatief
- Anders, namelijk

Q4 In welk jaar is het initiatief tot stand gekomen?

_____

Q5 Hoe toekomstbestendig is uw initiatief op de lange termijn voor zover u dat nu kan overzien?

	niet toekomstbestendig			zeer toekomstbestendig		
	0	20	40	60	80	100
Op het gebied van financiën ()						
Op het gebied van actieve leden ()						
Op het gebied van wetgeving/ vergunningen ()						
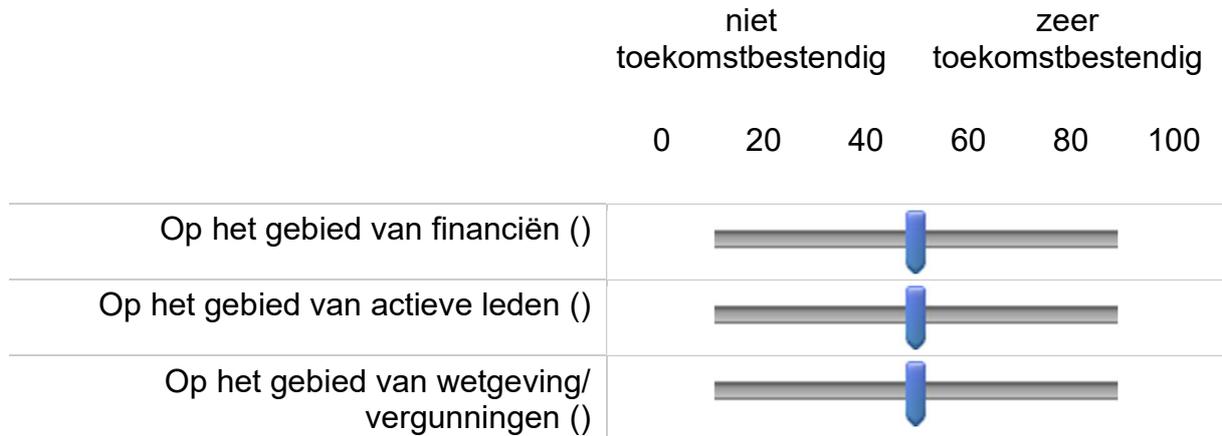
Q6 Wat is de juridische structuur van uw initiatief?

- Coöperatie

- Stichting

- Vereniging

- Informele groep

- Anders namelijk

_____

Q7 Hoe is het dagelijks uitvoerend bestuur van het initiatief vormgegeven?

_____

Q8 Hoe is de inbreng/zeggenschap van de deelnemers aan het initiatief vormgegeven?

_____

Q9 Hoeveel actieve deelnemers heeft uw initiatief ongeveer?

- 0-10
- 10-25
- 25-50
- 50-100
- Meer dan 100

Q10 Hoe zou u de doelgroep van uw initiatief omschrijven?

_____

Q11 Hoe actief is de lokale gemeenschap betrokken bij de activiteiten van uw initiatief?

- Altijd actief betrokken
- Vaak actief betrokken
- Soms actief betrokken
- Zelden actief betrokken
- Niet actief betrokken

Q12 Heeft het initiatief partnerschappen of netwerken opgebouwd met andere commons of organisaties? (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

- Nee
- Ja, met soortgelijke projecten in de buurt
- Ja, met andere soorten initiatieven in de buurt
- Ja, met soortgelijke projecten uit de rest van nederland
- Ja, met brancheorganisaties
- Ja, met onderzoeksintituten
- Anders, namelijk

_____

Q13 Hoe vaak heeft uw initiatief een interactie met de lokale overheid zoals de gemeente?

- Meerdere keren per week

- Wekelijks

- Maandelijks

- Jaarlijks

- Nooit

Q14 Wat is de aard van uw eventuele samenwerking met de lokale overheid?

- Financiering

- Informeel overleg

- Projectmatige samenwerking

- Geen samenwerking

- Anders namelijk

_____

Q15 Welk soort steun ontvangt uw initiatief eventueel van de lokale overheid?

- Financiële steun

- Juridische ondersteuning

- Infrastructuur

- Geen ondersteuning

- Anders namelijk:

_____

Q16 Met welke uitdagingen bent u, indien van toepassing, geconfronteerd bij de samenwerking met de lokale overheid?

- Bureaucratische strubbelingen

- Gebrek aan vertrouwen

- Ontoereikende middelen

- Anders namelijk

_____

Q17 Wat zijn volgens u de belangrijkste kenmerken van uw initiatief die de samenwerking met de staat vergemakkelijken of belemmeren?

_____

Q18 Welke lessen uit uw samenwerking met de gemeente kunnen nuttig zijn voor andere organisaties of initiatieven die met gemeentelijke instanties werken?

_____

Q19 Dit was de enquête, hartelijk bedankt voor het invullen! Zouden we u of iemand binnen uw organisatie mogen benaderen voor een interview om nog dieper in te gaan op dit onderwerp? Het interview kan zowel online als offline afgenomen worden.

- Ja, geen probleem (s.v.p. email adres invullen)

_____

- Nee, liever niet

9 Annex 3: Interview questions

About the participant:

Name:
Initiative:
Position/role:
Sex: M/F:

Open vragen begin gesprek:

1. Kunt u iets vertellen over wie u bent en wat uw rol is binnen dit initiatief?
    a. Wat motiveert u persoonlijk om betrokken te zijn bij dit initiatief?"
    b. Hoe is het in de loop van de tijd veranderd?
    c. Hoe ben u in eerste instantie betrokken geraakt?
    d. Welke verantwoordelijkheden heeft u?
2. Kunt u vertellen hoe en waarom dit initiatief is ontstaan?
    a. Welke behoeften of problemen wilden jullie met dit initiatief aanpakken?
    b. Wat waren de eerste stappen die jullie hebben gezet om het initiatief van de grond te krijgen?
    c. Zijn er bepaalde gebeurtenissen of omstandigheden geweest die een belangrijke rol speelden bij het opzetten van het initiatief?
3. Identificeert u zich met het idee van een commons-initiatief of stedelijke commons? Waarom?
    a. Welke aspecten van het commons-concept spreken u het meest aan en waarom?
4. Kunt u beschrijven waar het initiatief zich op dit moment vooral mee bezighoudt en wat de belangrijkste activiteiten zijn?
    a. Welke vormen van waarde worden toegevoegd/gegenereerd door dit initiatief?
    b. Denkt u dat dit initiatief impact heeft op deze buurt? Wat voor impact?
    c. Hoe meet je de impact die jullie maken in de buurt?
5. Wat zijn de belangrijkste waarden of idealen die aan de basis liggen van dit initiatief?
    a. Hoe zorgen jullie ervoor dat deze idealen behouden blijven naarmate het initiatief groeit?
    b. In hoeverre bepalen deze idealen en principes de manier waarop het initiatief wordt bestuurd of georganiseerd?

Meer gerichte vragen:

6. Kunt u beschrijven hoe de samenwerking tussen uw commons-initiatief en de gemeente is ontstaan en hoe deze zich in de loop van de tijd heeft ontwikkeld?
    a. Welke voordelen ervaart u vanuit de samenwerking met de gemeente?

      b. Welke uitdagingen of spanningen zijn er opgekomen tijdens het samenwerken met de gemeente?

7. Denkt u dat de gemeente de kernprincipes van uw commons-initiatief begrijpt en respecteert in deze samenwerking?
8. Wat zou volgens u een ideale samenwerking tussen de gemeente en uw commons zijn?
9. Hoe zou uw commons-initiatief beïnvloed worden als er geen formele samenwerking met de gemeente zou zijn?

Specifieke vragen mbt literatuur:

10. Er wordt in academische kringen vaak gesproken over een spanningsveld van uitsluiting en/of inlijving van commons wanneer commons samenwerken met de gemeente. Hoe ervaart u dit spanningsveld in de context van uw commons-initiatief?"
      a. Hoe ziet u de impact van de samenwerking met de gemeente op de politieke rol en de dienstverlening van uw commons-initiatief?
      b. Op welke manier heeft de samenwerking met de gemeente invloed gehad op de autonomie van uw commons-initiatief, en hoe gaat u daarmee om?

Conclusie:

Is er nog iets wat u zelf graag kwijt wilt?

Zelf meegeven: Wat heeft het meeste indruk gemaakt op mij?