

Research Plan

Explore Lab  
Faculty of Architecture and the  
Built Environment

Delft University of Technology  
Faculty of Architecture and the  
Built Environment

Explore Lab  
MSc3 - MSc4  
2023 / 2024

Research Plan  
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The Dutch constitution, article 22, declares that ‘Bevordering van voldoende woongelegenheden is voorwerp van zorg der overheid’.<sup>1</sup>This translates to ‘provision of sufficient housing possibilities should be taken care of by the state’. Housing is thus a fundamental right of Dutch citizens, and it belongs to the core activities of the Dutch state. However, from the 1980s the state started to withdraw from their constitutional duty on housing provision. Policymakers believed that the welfare state had reached its limits and pleaded for a government with less responsibilities regarding housing provision. This shift led to an ever-increasing deficit of housing within the Netherlands, which is expected to grow due to additional population growth over the coming years. According to statistical estimates, the housing shortage in 2030 will be between 759.000 dwellings and 1.022.000 dwellings.

Another consequence of a shrinking government is the commodification of housing within the Netherlands. Whereas the ratio rental/ownership sat around 60/40, this ratio flipped since the 1980s. Nowadays, roughly sixty percent of the Dutch housing stock consists of privately owned property.<sup>12</sup>The remaining forty percent is rented property. Rented property is divided into two types: social housing and commercial rental. The first type is provided by the government, and often has a long waiting list. In Amsterdam, for instance, this goes up to 13 years.<sup>13</sup>The second type is dependent on the speculative market which leads to high living expenses and in most cases outweigh the costs of homeownership. Consequently, most people prefer homeownership because of its cost effectiveness and the perceived lack of suitable alternatives.

In 2022, the state has acknowledged that they failed to fulfil their constitutional duty of housing provision in recent decades. (their presence was too minimal regarding their constitutional ).<sup>2</sup>Therefore, the state published a report how to regain their position in the Dutch housing market: the *Nationale Woon- en Bouwagenda*.<sup>2</sup>The *Nationale Woon- en Bouwagenda* focuses mainly on stimulating the production of dwellings. One of the first pages reveals the ambition of producing 100.000 dwellings per year for the coming ten years. Reading the *Nationale Woon- en Bouwagenda*, it becomes evident that the state is determined to counter the persistent housing shortage within the Netherlands.

This strategy – of throwing in heroic slogans and numbers – is anything but new or innovative. For example, between 1965 and 1974 Sweden ran its infamous *miljonprogrammet* (Million Dwellings Programme).<sup>3</sup> At that time Sweden faced a considerable housing shortage due to labour immigration and the post-war baby boom. To cope with the housing shortage, the state launched the *miljonprogrammet* which was to produce 100.000 dwellings per year. The fast, large-scale, and technically rational construction of the 1.000.000 dwellings led to harsh criticism targeted predominantly at its monotonous design and technical defects. The households who could afford to move away left those who could not afford to move behind. Consequently, these housing developments became disproportionately inhabited by lower-income groups. Another

<sup>1</sup> Rijksoverheid (2023). De Grondwet der Koninkrijk der Nederlanden.

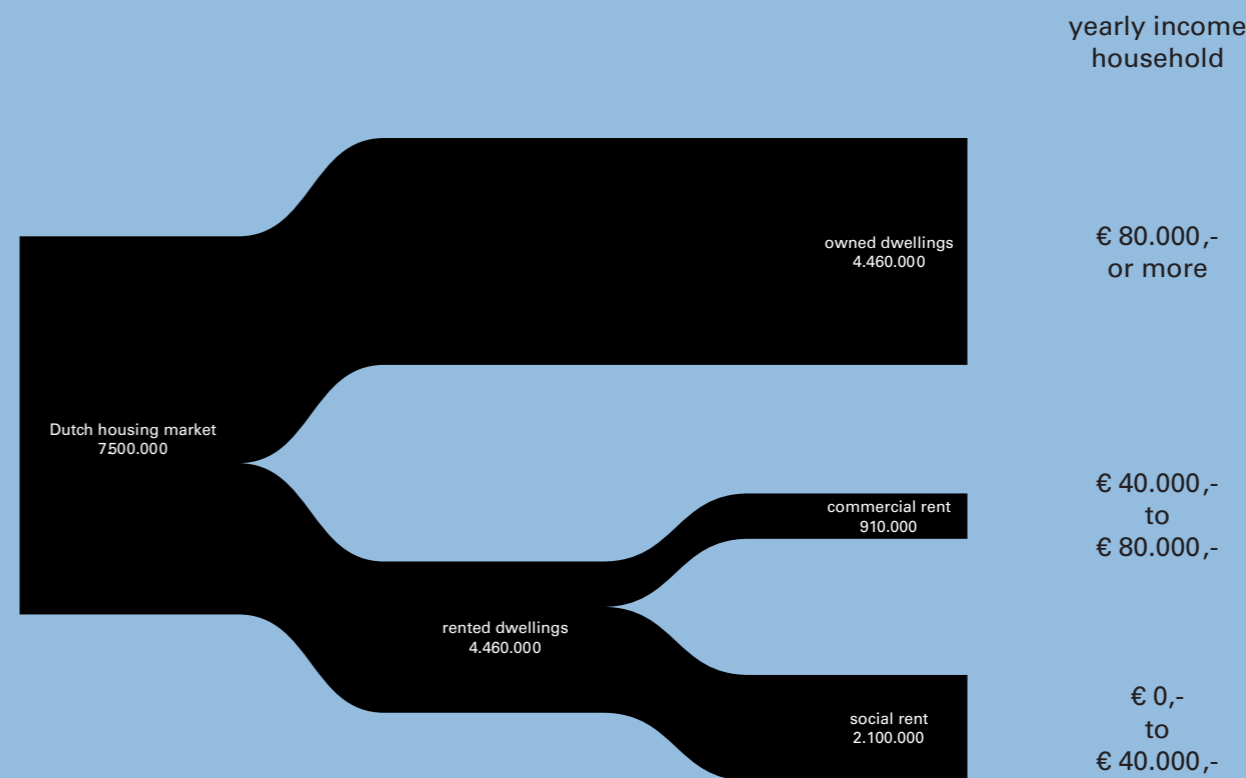
<sup>2</sup> Rijksoverheid (2022). Nationale woonagenda.

<sup>3</sup> The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (2008). A History of the Swedish System of non-profit municipal Housing.

<sup>10</sup> Boelhouwer, et al. (2020)

<sup>11</sup> Lengkeek, A., & Kuenzli, P. (2022). Operatie wooncoöperatie: uit de wooncrisis door gemeenschappelijk bezit.

<sup>12</sup> NOS. (2021)



The diagram above is based on a lecture from Peter Kuenzli (2022) in which he explains the housing shortage in the Netherlands. The different ranges of yearly incomes of households are roughly based the following principles:

- For owned dwellings, the bank provides a mortgage of 4 to 4,5 times the year income of a household. The average price of a house is € 450.000,- and therefore Kuenzli states that households with a yearly income of € 80.000,- or more are able of buy a dwelling.
- For social rent, the government merely accepts households with a yearly income up to € 40.000,- since social housing is subsidized by the government.
- The remaining group of incomes is automatically dedicated to commercially rented property. However, the availability is low and the rental prices are relatively high.

example can be found in Eastern Germany where between the 1970s and 1990s the German state realised over 2.100.000 new dwellings under the headline “*Besser, billiger und schneller bauen*” (“better, cheaper and faster construction”).<sup>4</sup> Several small towns around East Berlin were designated for the industrial production of vast, new, and heavily standardised housing blocks. However, after 1989 – fall of the Berlin wall – the population of former Eastern Germany dropped from 15.3 million to 12.5 million and consequently a significant housing surplus started to develop. Finally, one should not forget the *Wederopbouw* (reconstruction) of the Netherlands during the 1960s and 1970s which resulted in nearly 1.500.000 newly built dwellings.<sup>5</sup> Each example is remarkable in terms of its scale. However, all three examples left a significant and problematic inheritance, which still exists today.

At the 2022 International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam Floris Alkemade, a former government architect of the Netherlands, addressed the Dutch government’s ambitions set out in the *Nationale Woon- en Bouwagenda*.<sup>6</sup> He argued that the heroic number of producing 1.000.000 dwellings in ten years is nonsensical. To Alkemade, proposing these kinds of nonsensical ambitions indicates the state’s impotence to grasp the problematic and complex housing market within the Netherlands. Instead, Alkemade urged to seize this moment of crisis to transform the current culture of building within the Netherlands.

The Delft University of Technology conducted research regarding the proposed housing policy within the Netherlands through the *1M Homes* initiative led by Marja Elsinga.<sup>7</sup> Their research concluded that producing 1.000.000 dwellings in the coming ten years will not solve the housing shortage. Instead, Elsinga and her team looked for instance at the amount of available square meters per citizen, which is currently 53 square meters. The research group claims that these available square meters are sufficient and therefore recommends investigating how these – already built – square meters can be used more intelligently.

Peter Glas, Delta Programme Commissioner of the Netherlands, offers another critical perspective on the state’s ambition to produce 1.000.000 dwellings. Glas pleads for a housing policy that also considers the long-term effects of climate change.<sup>8</sup> In his essay, he focuses especially on the risk of flooding and the acceleration of extreme weather conditions within the Netherlands. He highlights that the current housing policy focussing mainly on the Randstad, in the west of the Netherlands. Although he acknowledges that this strategy is sensible from an economic perspective – as a considerable part of the Dutch economic activity currently occurs in the Randstad – Glas points out that most areas of the Randstad are situated below sea level and consequently risk flooding. He thus argues that this even greater focus on the Randstad could lead to considerable financial and societal burdens, especially given that 82% of



<sup>1</sup> Marzahn, Germany  
<sup>2</sup> Millionprogrammet, Sweden  
<sup>3</sup> Wederopbouw, The Netherlands

<sup>4</sup> De Graaf, R. (2017). *Four Walls and a Roof: The Complex Nature of a Simple Profession*. Harvard University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Lengkeek, A., & Kuenzli, P. (2022). *Operatie wooncoöperatie: uit de wooncrisis door gemeenschappelijk bezit*.

<sup>6</sup> Alkemade, F. (2022). “Het getal van een miljoen woningen is een onzinnig getal” – Archined. <https://www.archined.nl/2022/11/het-getal-van-een-miljoen-woningen-is-een-onzinnig-getal/>

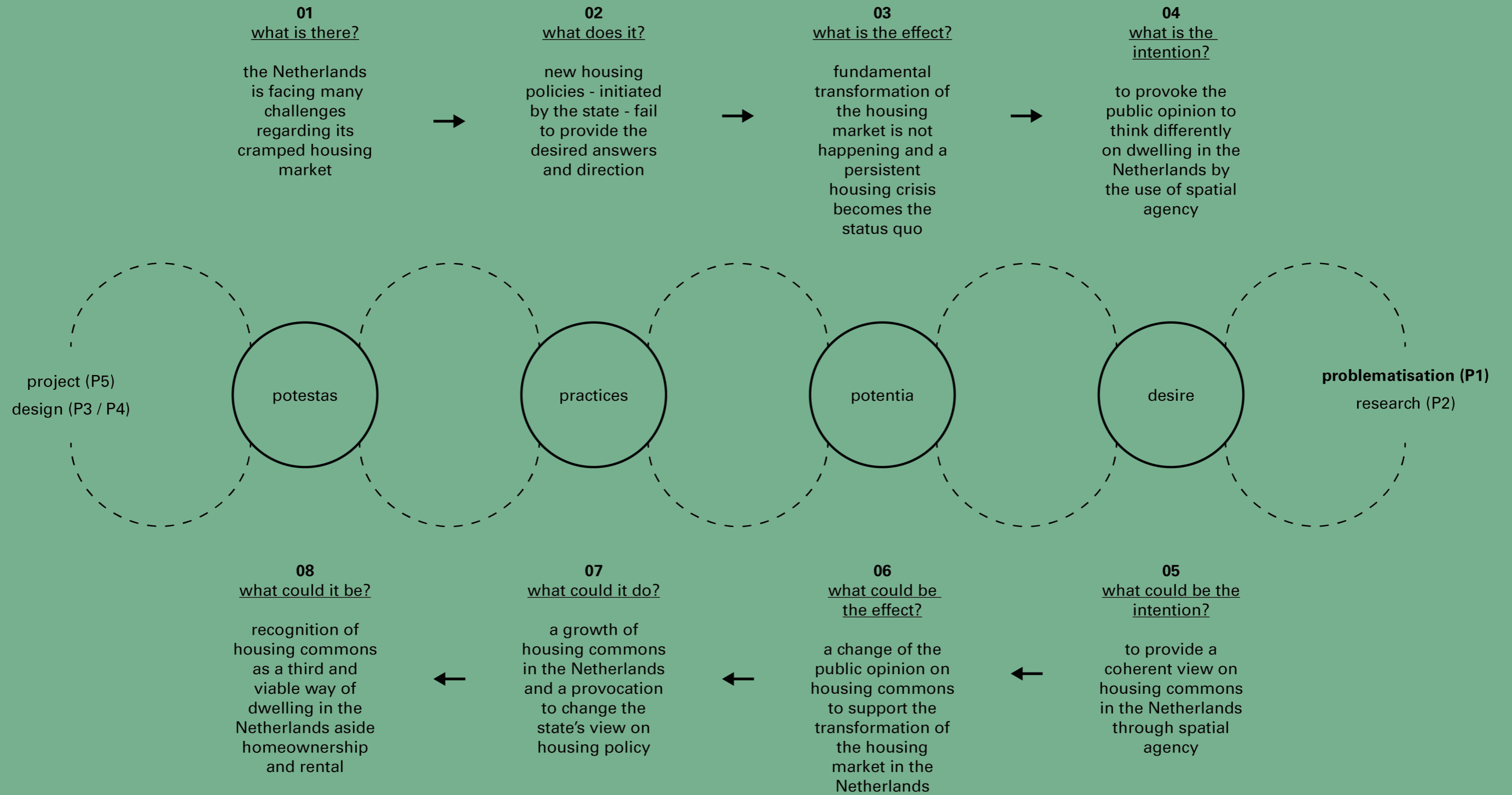
<sup>7</sup> Elsinga, M. & Van Bortel, G. (2023). “We won’t solve the housing crisis by building 1 million houses” TU Delft. <https://www.tudelft.nl/en/2023/bk/we-wont-solve-the-housing-crisis-by-building-1-million-houses>

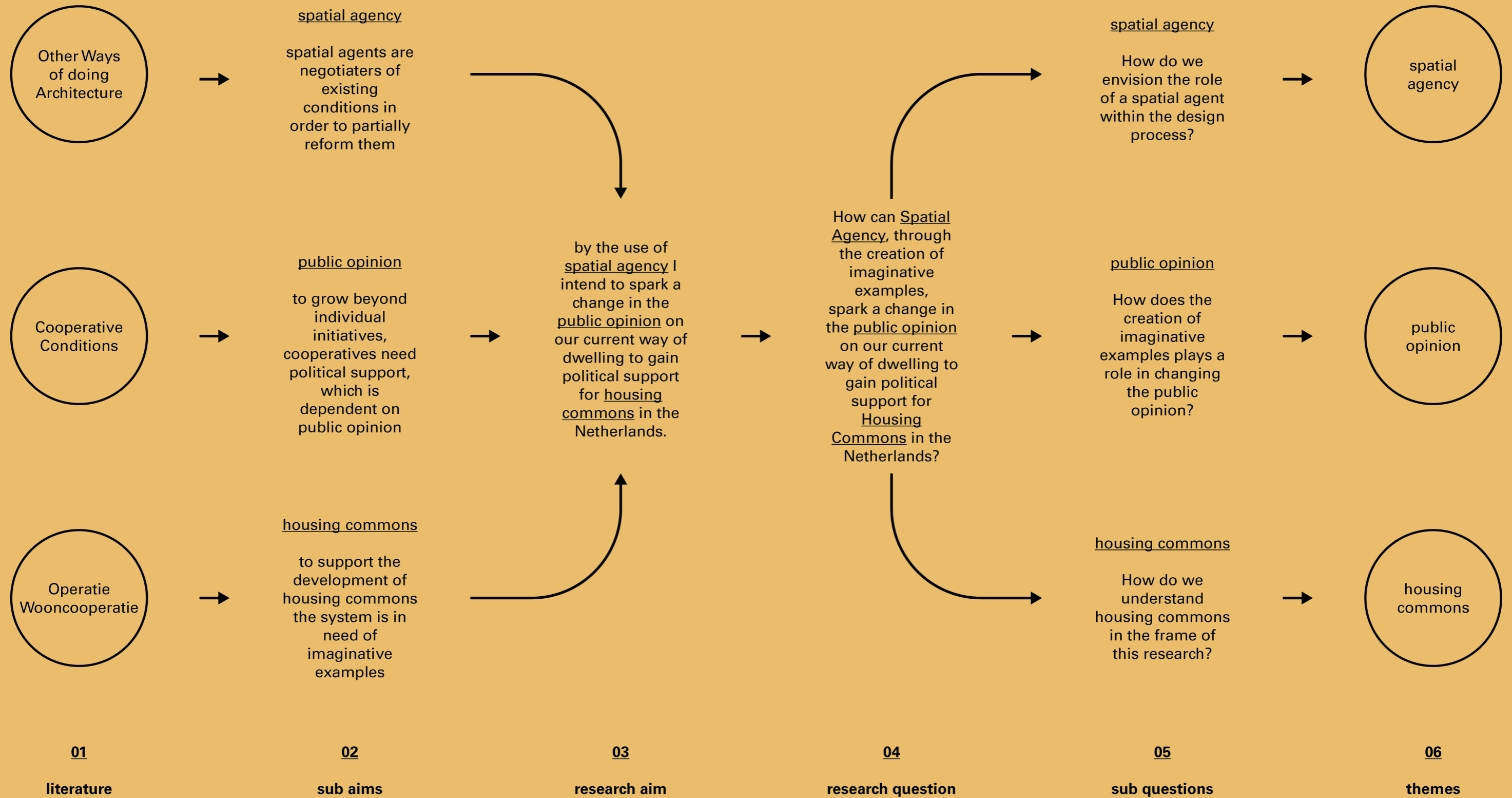
<sup>8</sup> Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat. (2021). *Briefadvies Deltacommissaris woningbouw en klimaatadaptatie*. Publicatie | Deltaprogramma. <https://www.deltaprogramma.nl/deltacommissaris/documenten/publicaties/2021/12/06/briefadvies-deltacommissaris-woningbouw-en-klimaatadaptatie-spoor-2>

the newly planned 1.000.000 dwellings are situated in vulnerable areas containing soggy soil conditions and potential flood risks.

Glas's reflections are adopted in a recently published study entitled "*Vier Scenario's voor de Inrichting van Nederland in 2050*"<sup>9</sup> This study presents four spatial strategies. Although all four differ from one another, all comply with the vision of Glas who argues that we should prioritise the quality of our soil and water system to truly set out a resilient future for the Netherlands. Furthermore, the study advocates long-term thinking (100 years and beyond). Especially, when it comes to the realisation of infrastructure and to a certain extent dwellings.

<sup>9</sup> Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving (2023). Vier scenario's voor de inrichting van Nederland in 2050. PBL Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving. <https://www.pbl.nl/publicaties/ruimtelijke-verkenning-2023-vier-scenarios-voor-de-inrichting-van-nederland-in-2050>





I.01 research aim

By imagining the housing commons within the Netherlands through spatial agency, I intend to provoke people to change their current ideas on housing. Within the literature housing commons are generally seen as the third way, operating independently from the speculative housing market and the subsidized social housing market. Although housing commons are a widespread phenomenon throughout the world, its development within the Netherlands has thus far been rather limited – with most examples situated in the Randstad. This research puts forward the hypothesis that this moderate development of housing commons within the Netherlands results from an absence of a clear image of housing commons in the Netherlands. Consequently, Dutch citizens can not define for themselves what housing commons could potentially be within the Netherlands. In other cases, housing commons are being mistaken for housing corporations while they don't share characteristics. Therefore, to support the development of housing commons in the Netherlands it is crucial to have a spatial representation of housing commons to refer to.

I.02 research question

How can Spatial Agency, through the creation of imaginative examples, spark a change in the public opinion on our current way of dwelling to gain political support for Housing Commons in the Netherlands?

The sub questions:

- > How do we envision the role of spatial agent within the design process?
- > How does the creation of imaginative examples plays a rol in changing the public opinion?
- > How do we understand housing commons in the frame of this research?

**Spatial Agency** > By adopting the term spatial agency instead of architectural agency, this research argues that architecture (and therefore space) should be put in a broader social context. Today, the role of the architect is often reduced to that of a technical facilitator who must implement decisions made by others. Therefore, it would be beneficial to reframe our profession as spatial agents. Agents are neither completely free as individuals, nor are they completely entrapped by structure. Spatial agents are neither impotent nor all powerful: they are negotiators of existing conditions to partially reform them. Spatial agency implies that action to engage transformatively with structure is possible but will only be effective if one is alert to the constraints and opportunities that the structure presents. The use of spatial agency was stimulated by the works of Massimo De Angelis, John Habraken, Anne Kockelkorn, Arie Lengkeek, Stavros Stavrides and Manfredo Tafuri. Their works – all in their own way – advocate that architecture should be seen as something broader and more powerful in terms of impact and political discourse. Consequently, traditional architecture might not be the best solution anymore. This tension and debate between spatial agency and architecture interests me.

*The addition of a building is not necessarily the best solution to a spatial problem and that there are other ways of making spatial difference.*

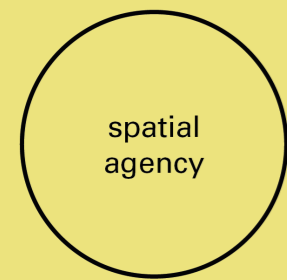
*The intent of the agent needs to be responsive and flexible because the structure in which an agent operates is transforming constantly.*

- Cedric Price



**Housing Commons** > the ideological instrument to display the proposed spatial agency. People nowadays have a limited understanding of what housing could mean to them. In the Netherlands for instance people do not consider ways of dwelling which differ from the status quo (private home ownership or rental, be it subsidized or commercial). Furthermore, the boundaries or definitions of housing commons are not properly defined now, and housing cooperatives are often confused with housing corporations. By imagining the housing commons within the Netherlands through spatial agency, I intend to provoke people to change their current ideas on housing.

**the Netherlands** > I believe it is important to start the research by looking at the Netherlands as a whole. The housing shortage is pressing in every region within the Netherlands and therefore it would be ideal to find a spatial language for our housing commons which is applicable to every region within the Netherlands.



spatial agency

How do we envision the role of a spatial agent within the design process?

**The academic**  
Anne Kockelkorn

**The advocate**  
Arie Lengkeek

**The architect**  
Ninke Happel

**The cooperative**  
Trevor James

**The dweller**  
Stad in de Maak

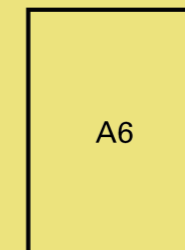
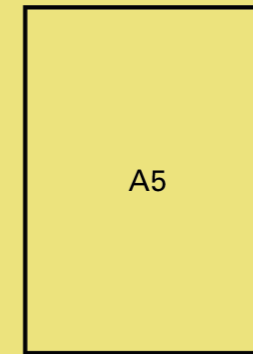
**The financier**  
GLS Bank

**The journalist**  
Josta van Bockxmeer

**The municipality**  
Gemeente Rotterdam



**spatial examples**  
as index cards



design principles

**week 4.1**  
preparing questionnaires  
scheduling interviews

**week 4.2**  
preparing interviews

**week 4.3 / 4.4**  
conducting interviews  
literature review  
case studies  
design proposals  
outline graphic novel

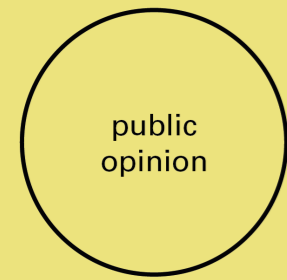
**week 4.5**  
transcribing interviews  
design proposals

**week 4.6**  
first version graphic novel  
design proposals

**week 4.7**  
draft graphic novel  
design proposals

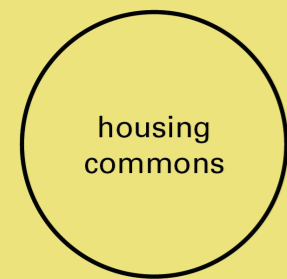
**week 4.8**  
final graphic novel  
printing

**week 4.9**  
P2



public opinion

How does the creation of imaginative examples plays a role in changing the public opinion?



housing commons

How do we understand housing commons in the frame of this research?

01

themes

02

sub questions

03

interviewees

04

spatial examples

05

final products

06

timeline

III.01	methods	<p>The desired research outcome is a so-called graphic novel in which different perspectives on housing commons in the Netherlands are being integrated to one coherent booklet. In my opinion an integrated story of different perspectives from different actors on housing commons is missing at the moment. The aim is to find common grounds to research how spatial agency can support the development of housing commons in the Netherlands. To establish a publication which also speaks to the imagination of its readers the interviews are supported by case study projects. In this way the graphic novel aims to relate the regulatory aspect to the spatial aspect in one integrated publication.</p>
III.02	interviewees	<p>The selection of interviewees is intended to represent the stakeholders which are active within the current debate regarding the development of housing commons in the Netherlands. The seven proposed stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>The academic</b> (Anna Kockelkorn)</li> <li>&gt; <b>The advocate</b> (Arie Lengkeek)</li> <li>&gt; <b>The architect</b> (Ninke Happel)</li> <li>&gt; <b>The cooperative</b> (Trevor James)</li> <li>&gt; <b>The dweller</b> (Stad in de Maak)</li> <li>&gt; <b>The financier</b> (GLS bank)</li> <li>&gt; <b>The municipality</b> (Gemeente Rotterdam)</li> </ul>
III.03	interviews	<p>The interviews will be structured according to the three sub themes which are derived from the main research question and sub questions. However, because of the variety of interviewees – in terms of their expertise and the field in which they're active – the key questions will be specified to let the interviewees' expertise flourish. Furthermore, the duration of the interviews will be limited to 30 minutes.</p>
III.04	questionnaire	<p>As mentioned above, the three sub themes are derived from the main research question. These three sub themes are specified according to the expertise of every individual interviewee. The three sub themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Spatial Agency</b></li> <li>&gt; <b>Public Opinion</b></li> <li>&gt; <b>Housing Commons</b></li> </ul>
III.05	timeline	<p><b>week 4.1</b>      preparing questionnaires                          scheduling interviews</p> <p><b>week 4.2</b>      preparing interviews</p> <p><b>week 4.3 / 4.4</b> conducting interviews                          literature review                          case studies                          design proposals                          outline graphic novel</p> <p><b>week 4.5</b>      transcribing interviews                          design proposals</p> <p><b>week 4.6</b>      first version graphic novel                          design proposals</p> <p><b>week 4.7</b>      draft graphic novel                          design proposals</p> <p><b>week 4.8</b>      final graphic novel                          printing</p> <p><b>week 4.9</b>      P2</p>

The outcome of the research is expected to demonstrate how spatial agency can be used – during the development and design process of housing projects – to support the development of housing commons in the Netherlands. This outcome will be presented through the medium of a graphic novel. Here different perspectives on housing commons in the Netherlands are being integrated into one coherent publication. The publication should speak to the imagination of its readers through text and image. It aims to give a clear image and definition of housing commons in the Netherlands and how spatial agency can support the development of housing commons in the Netherlands.