

# Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences



# TAKE [A] PART

*How can participation foster social cohesion in  
vulnerable neighbourhoods?*

## COLOPHON

### TAKE [A] PART

How can participation foster social cohesion in vulnerable neighbourhoods?

Graduation Plan  
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# STUDIO

## Planning Complex Cities

### Mentor team

**Main mentor:** Dr. Caroline Newton, Spatial Planning & Strategies

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### Argumentation of choice of the studio

I like the challenge of the complexity of the urban environment and the many actors, interests and mechanisms involved. I want to understand as best as possible how it works, which variable or system is influenced by what factor, taking into account the history of the place and the socio-political context as well as current trends. As a student of the urbanism track, I have always been more interested in the planning and strategy aspects of the discipline, as well as the theories and the sociological dimension. I want to better understand how to be an advocate for those who do not have sufficient power and capital to influence decisions that affect them, especially since I do have the capacity and privilege to do so. In the light of the recent events and developments in the Dutch society, but also the geopolitical and social developments in general, I feel the need to better understand the complexity behind for example the structural inequalities and the role of the urban environment in these processes. I want to know how the urban environment impacts individual wellbeing and quality of life, and how community is connected to both the environment and the individual. By better understanding the impact of the built environment I can then use this understanding to advocate for certain policy or spatial interventions for specific stakeholders or actors. To be able to advocate for those who are disadvantaged by society or the institutional context, it is necessary to have a grasp on the institutional context of a place as well. This will increase the probability of successful lobbying for certain interventions that will improve the individual or community wellbeing of residents of a certain urban area. The studio of Planning Complex Cities aligns with my interests, and offers me the possibility to gain more specific knowledge, learn specific skills and to get guidance from experts with useful experience and insights. I hope to be challenged by the affiliated experts to go out of my comfort zone and to learn as much as possible.

# GRADUATION PROJECT

## Title of the graduation project

### TAKE [A] PART

How can participation foster social cohesion in vulnerable neighbourhoods?

## Keywords

Urban regeneration | Social cohesion | Participation | Wijkaanpak | Spatial interventions

## Goal of the project

### Project location

The Hague Southwest, The Hague, the Netherlands

## Context

Social divisions and inequalities are ubiquitous in a society, and not a problem per se (Hoff et al., 2021; Mattison et al., 2016). The same goes for cities: every city has spatial concentrations of affordable housing and of more expensive and owner-occupied housing, and socio-spatial segregation is not undesirable per se (Cassiers & Kesteloot, 2012; OECD, 2018). However, when the social inequalities and socio-spatial segregation are persistent and institutionalized, it can result in the fragmentation of society, as certain groups are significantly (dis)advantaged regarding the cumulation of capital (Hoff et al., 2021). This impacts not only the opportunities and (subjective) wellbeing of individuals, it also affects communities and society as a whole. Especially when individuals or groups withdraw from society and discard the established norms and values, this will impact the social cohesion (Markus & Kiritchenko, 2007). When social divisions coincide with a lack of social cohesion in communities, polarisation in the social and cultural domains and a weak socio-economic position of certain groups, this can lead to social disruption and undermine the rule of law and democracy (Hoff et al., 2021, p. 10).

In the Netherlands, there is structural social inequality and social fragmentation, which manifests itself mainly in certain neighbourhoods in larger cities as a result of housing policy, the housing market system and the spatial organisation of the city (Hoff et al., 2021; Leidelmeijer & Mandemakers, 2022; OECD, 2018; Uyterlinde et al., 2022; van der Velden & Can, 2022). In these often vulnerable neighbourhoods in the larger cities of the Netherlands, the liveability is structurally insufficient. Most of these neighbourhoods demonstrate concentrations of vulnerable residents who are often challenged by several problems in multiple life domains (Leidelmeijer & Mandemakers, 2022; Uyterlinde et al., 2022; van der Velden & Can, 2022). This results in higher crime rates and a lack of social cohesion, which affects the liveability of the neighbourhood (Leidelmeijer & Mandemakers, 2022). The concentrations of families with low capital and limited social mobility have a negative effect on the chances of upward socio-spatial mobility, resulting in intergenerational vicious circles of socio-spatial segregation. The socio-spatial segregation again influences and limits the opportunities of the residents, thus reinforcing the inequalities that are reflected in the space (OECD, 2018).

## Problem statement

Urban regeneration is a type of public policy interventions which aims to address the intergenerational vicious circles of socio-spatial segregation through spatial, social, and economic interventions (Barosio et al., 2016; De Magalhaes, 2015). In 2019, after the absence of state led urban regeneration policy since 2012, the existing policy of the wijkaanpak was revised due to its inefficiency to address the structural socio-spatial segregation in larg(er) cities (Uyterlinde et al., 2022; Van der Velden & Can, 2022). The memorandum *Perspectief Bieden* (2022) describes the principles, success factors and key elements for a new policy paradigm for the area-based approach. For this new policy paradigm not the place but the people and the effect the policies have on their lives are central to the approach (Uyterlinde et al., 2022). According to the memorandum, improving the liveability and safety starts with offering a future perspective to the residents. This is translated in three main objectives for the social dimension of the area-based approach: the improvement of social mobility, the creation of a solid social base, and *sociale 'herovering'* (social reconquest) (Uyterlinde et al., 2022). For the process itself, the active engagement of the residents throughout the process is mentioned as one of the potential success factors of the revised wijkaanpak (Uyterlinde et al., 2022). Participation will thus be a key element of the approach.

There are many forms of participation, which each have its (dis)advantages. For an effective and valuable participatory process, it is important that appropriate forms of participation are applied depending on the context, the issue at hand and the people involved (Sanoff, 1999; Uyterlinde et al., 2022). Since the new policy paradigm of the wijkaanpak specifically addresses the social dimension of an urban regeneration approach, and in most vulnerable neighbourhoods the social cohesion is lacking, it can be expected that social cohesion will be one of the factors that determine the appropriate and desirable form of participation (Leidelmeijer and Mandemakers, 2022). The more because it is a condition for a solid social base as well as for the enhancement of the social mobility. Social cohesion is often described using three dimensions (social relations, attachment and orientation towards the common good), made up of several constituents (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016). Depending on which dimension and/or constituent needs to be addressed in a particular neighbourhood community, it is expected that certain forms of participation will have a positive contribution to that constituent, while other forms of participation might negatively impact the social cohesion. Especially since participation requires mutual trust, transparency, cooperation, communication, and a shared perspective or goal to work towards (Sanoff, 1999). These are all aspects which are also part of the different dimensions of social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016).

### Research question

This graduation project will explore what participation methods can foster the social cohesion in vulnerable neighbourhoods.

The main research question will be addressed with the following sub questions:

- What are the constituents of social cohesion?
- What spatial interventions foster what constituent of social cohesion?
- What participation method(s) is/are desirable for which spatial intervention?

### Research objective

The aim of the research is to create a practical matrix which connects participation practices to the constituents of social cohesion, which should assist the professionals who are involved in a wijkaanpak to select an effective form of participation for the specific context and for the

specific constituent of social cohesion that needs to be addressed. Furthermore, it is the aim of the research to formulate a research methodology which could be repeated in different settings, or which could be used to come to a more general overview of participation methods that contribute to specific constituents of social cohesion which can be used by all municipal professionals who are involved with a wijkaanpak. As such, this graduation project aims to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding social cohesion, community participation and urban regeneration policy.

#### Expected research outcomes

- A framework to support the selection? of what constituent(s) of social cohesion need to be addressed in an urban area
- An overview/catalogue of participation practices, and examples, based on an existing model of the purpose(s) of community engagement in each level of public participation (possibly the model of Geekiyanage et al. (2021))
- An overview/catalogue of examples of spatial interventions that contribute to specific constituent(s) of social cohesion
- A matrix which links the examples of spatial interventions to the specific constituents of social cohesion
- The selection of desired participation methods, by residents
- A research methodology to determine what participation method is appropriate for a specific context? Regarding the fostering of the social cohesion in a selected urban area; and/or a methodology to create a catalogue of participation methods which foster social cohesion which can be repeated in different settings and for related questions.

#### Design assignment

To design a methodology to determine what participation methods are appropriate and desirable for the specific social context of an urban area to address certain aspects of social cohesion.

The methodology will be tested in a case study (The Hague Southwest), for which a strategy will be formulated and worked out. This should result in a proposal of participation methods for specific spatial interventions for the case study area.

## Process

### Methodology

#### RESEARCH

- 1) Theoretical framework of social cohesion and participation -based on [literature selection]
- 2) Overview of spatial interventions – input from mentor team; good practices
- 3) Matrix?? of what spatial interventions contribute to which constituents of social cohesion – reviewed by experts
- 4) Overview of participation methods – input from experts (from municipalities and offices?)
- 5) Selection of participation methods for each spatial intervention – by residents
- 6) Matrix of which participation methods contributes to which constituent of social cohesion

#### EXPERIMENT

- 1) Selection of specific urban area in The Hague Southwest – based on a quick scan of plans/data/reports and input from key figures of the area
- 2) Socio-spatial, historical and governance analysis of the selected urban area – based on municipal reports and analyses/socio-spatial data/maps/field trip/reports of meetings with residents/interviews?
- 3) Determination of the social cohesion constituents that need to be addressed – input from experts and key figures of the selected urban area; municipal reports and analyses/expert reports/socio-spatial data
- 4) Selection of possible spatial interventions that can foster the specific constituents of social cohesion – input from existing research/reports of resident meetings/good practices/VNG?
- 5) Selection of participation methods for each spatial intervention – by the residents

#### DESIGN ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Design proposal for the spatial interventions
- 2) Formulation of a strategy for the implementation of the spatial interventions through the selected participation methods, with suggestions for the participation method(s)



Literature and theories

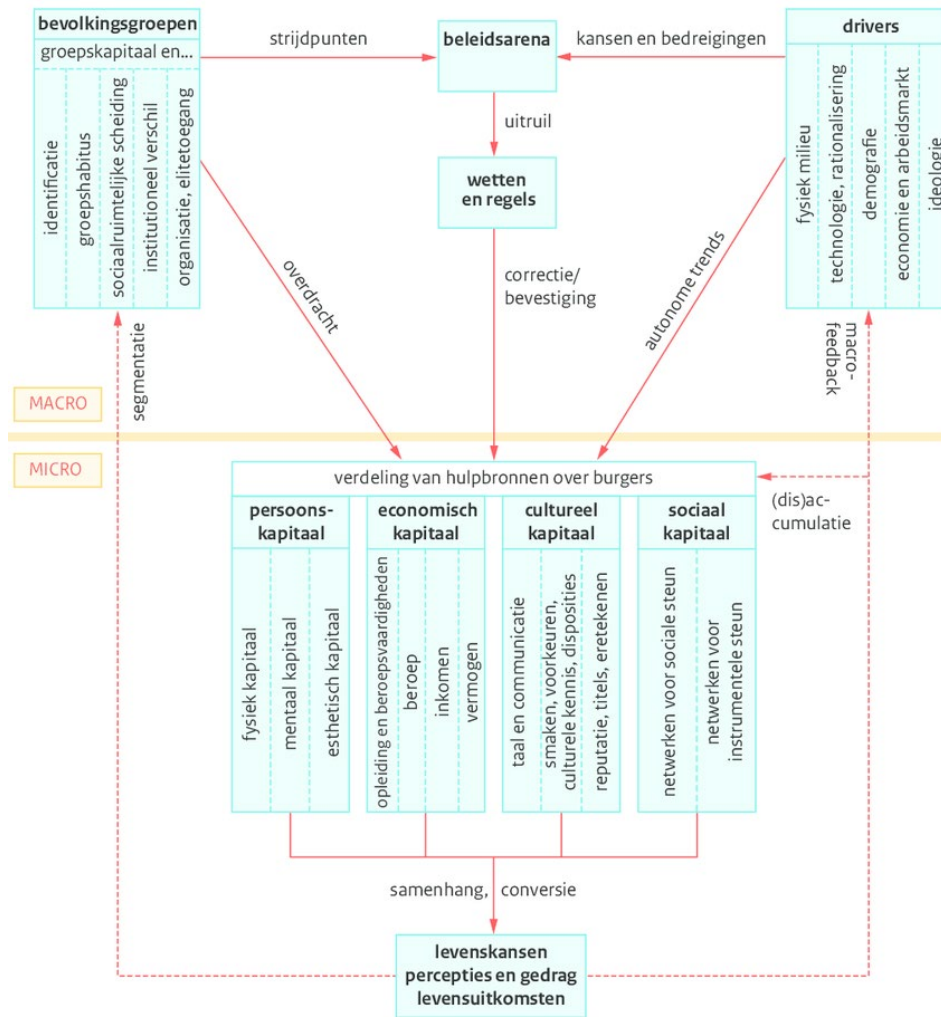


Figure 1 Verschil in Nederland: theoretisch model (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2014)

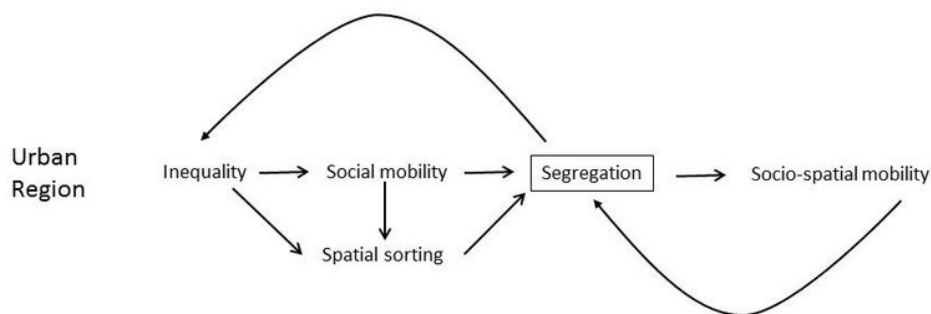


Figure 2 Vicious circles of segregation at the urban region level (Van Ham et al., 2018)

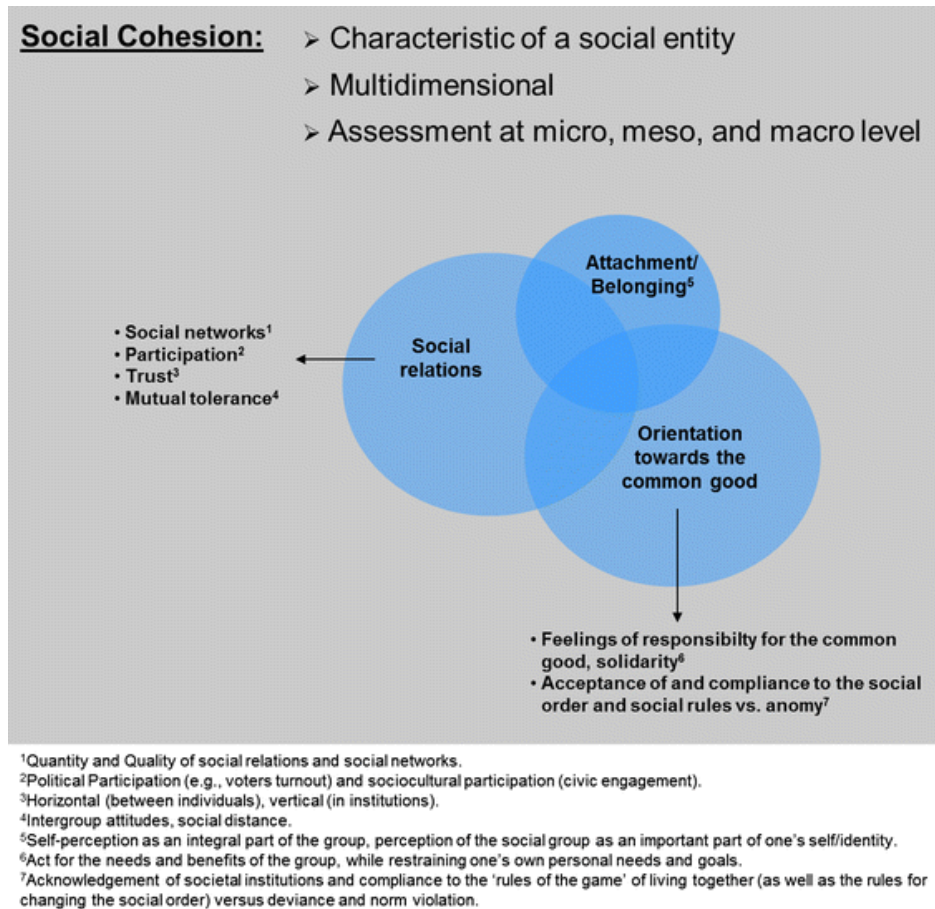


Figure 3 Three dimensions of social cohesion (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2016b)

Measuring social cohesion: a two-by-two framework

	Subjective component (People's state of mind)	Objective component (Behavioural manifestations)
Horizontal dimension (Cohesion within civil society)	General trust with fellow citizens	Social participation and vibrancy of civil society
	Willingness to cooperate and help fellow citizens, including those from "other" social groups Sense of belonging or identity	Voluntarism and donations  Presence or absence of major inter-group alliances or cleavages
Vertical dimension (State-citizen cohesion)	Trust in public figures	Political participation (e.g. voting, political parties etc.)
	Confidence in political and other major social institutions	

Figure 4 Measuring Social Cohesion: A two-by-two Framework (Chan et al., 2006)

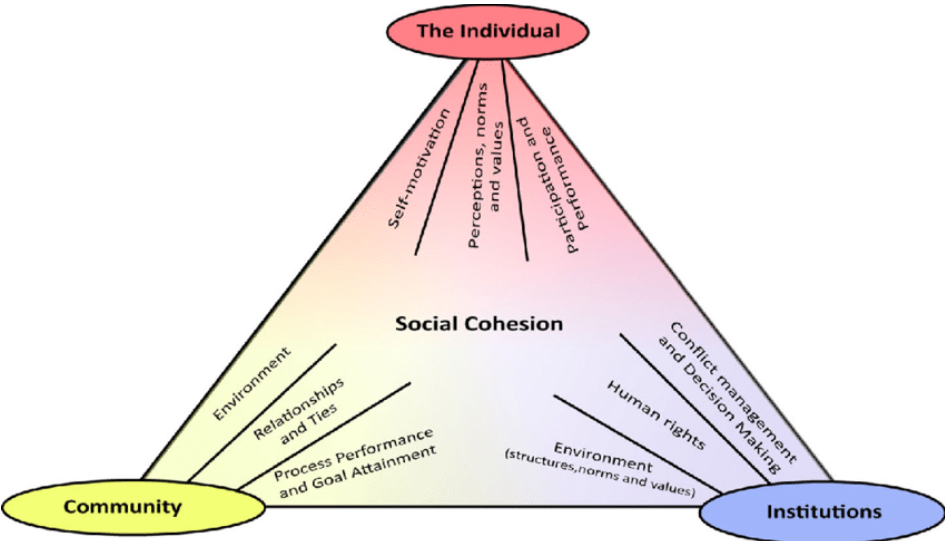


Figure 5 Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterize it (Fonseca et al., 2018)

# REFLECTION

## Relation of the graduation topic to ...

The graduation topic is the impact of social cohesion in the selection of a participation method for the wijkaanpak in a vulnerable neighbourhood

### ... The studio topic

The wijkaanpak is being revised at a moment that trust in the government(al institutions) is low among a significant amount of people, and at a moment where the Dutch society faces multiple crises or the aftermath or impact of those: the housing crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the nitrogen crisis. These crises disproportionately affect the most vulnerable people, and further the social fragmentation. There is a lot of uncertainty about the (near) future, and whether the government will offer support. However, many of these crises have a spatial dimension, and thus a spatial impact, also in urban areas. It is important to not only understand the spatial dimension and its spatial impact, but also to understand its relations to other dimensions and the possible sensitivity of certain interventions. It is necessary to be aware of the situation of the people you are designing for, and to understand the impact your proposal will have, or should have, on their lives. You need to be willing to listen to their concerns, and to work with them in order to come to an effective and valuable proposal for them, and for the long term in general. This is what the studio of Planning Complex Cities is about: it start with observations of conflicts and disparities arising from the distribution of spatial resources across communities and territories. Through transdisciplinary approaches the planning schemes, governance arrangements, and civic engagement of an urban areas is investigated. The focus is on how these influence the transformation of spatial structures, and how they can be enhanced to achieve more sustainable and just socio-spatial outcomes. Knowledge from the fields of planning, design, geography and political sciences are integrated in the graduation project. The sub-theme of Planning as Critical Engaged Practice specifically will be valuable for the context of this graduation project, as the aim of the project is to determine what participation methods are desirable when the objective is to foster a certain constituent of social cohesion.

### ... The master track

This graduation project makes use of academic research methods, in order to ensure the repeatability of the approach, and to ensure that the methodology is transferrable to other dilemmas or contexts. Furthermore, this graduation project is critical about the institutional context and the public policies applied to address socio-spatial issues. It aims to better understand the relationship between spatial interventions and the social impact, with the ultimate goal to improve individual wellbeing and decrease social inequalities through the fostering of social cohesion. For the successful implementation of the participation methods it is crucial to be aware of the local social context and the sensitivity of residents towards certain interventions or actors, of any personal biases, and of stigmatization of people or of places.

### ... The master programme

In line with the master programme of Architecture, Urbanism and Building sciences this graduation project integrates knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines, namely the social, political and physical sciences. Furthermore, it aims to combine design and planning practices with academic skills and standards following the Dutch approach. The perspective of the residents is leading, without ignoring other important actors and perspectives. the framework is dictated by the spatial planning practice and schemes. With the current housing

crisis in combination with the environmental and climate challenges the Netherlands is facing, it is necessary for urban areas to be densified. With the current pace of changes, the uncertainty about the future and the social challenges we face, it is easy to lose sight of the human dimension. Everything we do, and everything we design or decide as urban planners, has an impact on the lives of people. An impact that often is unknown beforehand, unforeseen and unpredictable. Therefore, as spatial planners and designers designing for the social realm, we need to know how to expand our practices and methods in such a way that we are at least aware of the social impact we want to achieve, and that we can come up with a design or plan that accommodates this objective as much as possible. Our approach should be evidence-based, and critical. This graduation project aims to contribute to an evidence-based approach for spatial planning and design for social impact.

### Societal relevance

Social inequalities are reinforced by socio-spatial segregation which is strongly related to welfare and housing market systems, and to the spatial organisation of this system. Those mechanism constrain and affect the opportunities of residents, thereby impacting their quality of life and wellbeing. Furthermore, structural inequalities can seriously affect society and result in conflict, social unrest, and the undermining of democracy and the rule of law. Urban policy and the built environment are of influence on the persistence of inequalities and of socio-spatial segregation. With the revision of the wijkaanpak and the formulation of a new policy paradigm, it is important to better understand the interrelation between urban policy, the spatial impact and the effects of the interventions on the community and the residents of an urban area.

### Scientific relevance

The combination of models and theories from social sciences, psychology and spatial planning, and the design of a methodology which should be applicable in other contexts. Possibly, the methodology could be further scientifically developed and be studied on a far larger scale.

### Professional relevance

The transference of academic knowledge to the institutional context which will ensure evidence-based policy (approaches), based on well-studied and tested theories and practices. The translation of academic knowledge to the institutional context and practice is important for the effectiveness of policies, to better encompass the complexity of the issues they address, and to enhance the sensitivity of the interventions to the (local) context.

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