



**Driving Urban
Transitions**



DELIVERABLE 5.2

HOW TO ENABLE COMMONING ACCESSIBILITY PRACTICES: SIX POLICY HYPOTHESES

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2 INTRODUCTION

The question of whether it is possible – and desirable – to plan for forms of self-organization and commoning, and what kind of governance this might require, has been a recurring one in recent years (Bianchi, 2022; Brinkley, 2020; Feinberg et al., 2021; Katsigianni et al., 2025; Leitheiser et al., 2022; Pavoni et al., 2025; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2022). This working paper extends this line of inquiry to the commoning of accessibility (CA), which refers to the processes through which groups of people collaboratively create and manage “access to needed/desired socio-spatial resources” (Pucci et al., 2025, p. 13). CA practices include, for instance, community transport and shared mobility schemes or collective efforts to create and sustain place-based social, cultural and care amenities such as shops, cafés, neighborhood centres, or healthcare facilities. This working paper departs from the following aims and objectives, as articulated in Task 5.2 of the Common Access research proposal: 1) to understand the policy barriers and enablers to commoning accessibility, and 2) to formulate a series of hypotheses based on qualitative research carried out in the Netherlands. At the same time, it explicitly moves *beyond* a singular focus on barriers and enablers, by teasing out the complexities and contradictions that shape the relationship between CA practices and governance and planning processes.

The difficulties in articulating a coherent planning approach to CA practices arise, in part, from the variegated nature and scope of these practices. Consider the following three examples from the Netherlands. The first one concerns an old church that is being transformed into a cultural venue and community centre by a group of active citizens. Together with the municipality, they are exploring (funding) opportunities to renovate and purchase the building, which is currently still owned by the Protestant Church. The second example is a volunteer-led transport and support scheme that assists older people who need a ride to the hospital or help with groceries or other small tasks around the house. Having existed for more than fifty years, the project largely operates independently from local government actors. The third example involves a local chapter of the cyclist union that advocates for better cycling conditions in a neighborhood characterized by cut-through traffic and limited public transport options. Among other actions, they have protested the reduced frequency of the local ferry service, an essential piece of cycling infrastructure that carries school-going children and commuters across the nearby canal. All of these practices illustrate how communities seek to reclaim accessibility as a common good, yet each of them requires a very different planning approach. The first example calls for active municipal support in navigating funding opportunities; the second benefits most from simply being “left alone” to continue operating autonomously; and the third does not require planning support for the initiative itself, but rather a reconsideration of existing planning priorities around infrastructure.

An analytical focus on policy barriers and enablers aligns most clearly with the first type of planning response, in which local governments play a supportive role by removing obstacles to community-owned real estate and by helping commoners apply for the right kinds of funding. At the same time, scholars have highlighted the limitations of focusing too narrowly on policy barriers and enablers, as it can deflect from exploring “other ways of seeing or conceptualising phenomena” and might “smuggle in” unexamined assumptions (Haynes and Loblay 2024). One such an assumption is that

commoning practices are best served by an “enabling state” (see Foster and Iaione, 2019, p. 240). Contrary to the traditional welfare state, this form of governance does not aim to simply provide for citizens but, instead, enables them to address certain needs – such as service provision – on their own (Wallace et al., 2019). Within this framework, government and planning actors are expected to actively foster cooperation among stakeholders by designing conducive legal and institutional frameworks (Calzati et al., 2022, p. 2). While this is indeed one role that governance can play, this approach leaves little room for more antagonistic relationships between the state and commoners. Nor does it acknowledge that policy not only shapes the legal and administrative parameters for commoning but is also, inevitably, an exercise in agenda-setting (Prins et al., 2025). These agendas and policy priorities determine which expressions of accessibility and mobility are considered relevant or worth planning for, while also delineating the role communities are expected to play as part of such processes (Prins et al., 2025). **In other words: the question of how to overcome policy barriers to commoning accessibility and build on enablers, cannot be decoupled from what government actors – in all their multiplicity – actually want to enable or obstruct and why.**

The hypotheses we outline in this paper, therefore, do not automatically follow the logic of an enabling state, but depart from the idea that commoning accessibility is pursued “in, against and beyond the state” (Cumbers, 2015, p. 70). Our analysis is rooted in field research in two localities in the Netherlands that each represent different accessibility challenges: the self-built area of Almere Oosterwold and the industrialized IJmond region alongside the North Sea Canal. Based on interviews with nineteen CA projects that vary widely in their aims and degree of institutionalization, we outline six ways in which CA-practices encounter the state. The hypotheses we introduce reflect distinct tensions, struggles and opportunities that materialize through these encounters.

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND CONTEXT

3.1 Context: Almere Oosterwold and the IJmond Region

This working paper builds on qualitative fieldwork conducted in two localities within the wider Amsterdam Metropolitan Area: one of the testbeds of the Common Access project. In line with the project focus, which seeks to move beyond an analysis of dense urban centres, the research was developed with a particular sensitivity to municipalities and neighborhoods that occupy a more peripheral position within this wider metropolitan system. The selected sites – Almere Oosterwold and the IJmond region – each exemplify such dynamics.

It is important to emphasize that *periphery* is not used here as an absolute term or geographical location. Rather, it reflects the political-economic hierarchies that exist between different localities and that “shape how urban centres burst apart and dissolve into bordering territories” (Prins & Dasgupta, 2023, p. 236). For instance, peripheries are often sites of real-estate speculation and urban development, yet also typically have to absorb certain environmental costs due to the

proximity of highways, industries, or waste disposal sites. On the one hand, peripheries may be faced with institutional neglect or defunding, while at the same time serving as spaces for (creative) experimentation or informal community support. These dynamics also inevitably affect the distribution of accessibility and the manifestation of commoning practices.

3.1.1 Almere Oosterwold

Oosterwold represents an experimental and organic form of land development on the rural outskirts of the city of Almere (Figure 1). Almere is a secondary city within the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area and was planned as New Town – built on reclaimed land – to accommodate former residents of Amsterdam (Chevalier & Tzaninis, 2022). Just like the city of Almere, Oosterwold evolved as a planning experiment. The project was officially launched in 2014 and designed to encourage self-organisation and DIY urbanism (Chevalier & Tzaninis, 2022; Rauws, 2016). In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, this vision gained particular traction, as a stagnating land market and significant financial losses for the city of Almere created an incentive for low-cost development strategies (De Voogt, 2018). Future residents were offered affordable plots on the condition that they would develop the area themselves. This meant that both the costs and responsibilities of land development were transferred to citizens, who were expected to create their own amenities, services, and infrastructures. Within this framework, residents had considerable freedom to design and build their homes according to their own wishes. This freedom, however, came with certain “rules of the game”, such as dedicating fifty percent of their plot to agriculture, ensuring space for publicly accessible footpaths around their land, and constructing access roads (RRAAM, 2012). Importantly, these guidelines also stipulated that public investments should “follow” bottom-up developments, meaning that public spending was essentially tied to the area’s ability to generate revenue (RRAAM, 2012, p. 108).

The Oosterwold experiment shares important characteristics with the idea of an “enabling state”, as the role of the involved government actors is – at least in theory – deliberately limited to inviting and facilitating bottom-up initiatives. It represents a radical reversal of the “traditional Dutch model of planning from plan-led, top-down governance” (Chevalier & Tzaninis, 2022, p. 218) and aligns with broader changes in the Dutch governance landscape. In fact, Chevalier and Tzaninis (2022) observe that Oosterwold has been promoted by the municipality of Almere as an inspiring example of the vision behind the new national Environmental and Planning Act that was introduced in 2024. This Act aims to transform Dutch governance by placing “individual and private initiatives centre-stage in the development, use and management of the built environment” and by encouraging citizen participation (Chevalier & Tzaninis, 2022, p. 218).

One assumption underscoring the design of Oosterwold was that providing room for self-organization would not only encourage forms of community building (Nio, 2020), but also the bottom-up creation of needed amenities and services (Chevalier & Tzaninis, 2022). As we will show in the empirical section of this paper, there is indeed a great variety of community-led initiatives in Oosterwold, ranging from residents starting their own school or constructing a neighborhood centre to mobility-oriented practices such as a neighborhood bus, informal car-sharing, and carpooling schemes. At the same time, the project has also shown the limitations of transferring

the responsibility for providing essential public goods – such as sewage collection, cycling infrastructure, and education – entirely to residents (Gebiedsteam Oosterwold, 2023; Van Straalen et al., 2017). It is not just the complex, networked nature of certain amenities and infrastructures that makes it difficult for citizens to realize them, but also the fact that all land and roads in Oosterwold are privately owned, with land prices rapidly increasing (Schmidt, 2024). In many ways, the area has evolved into “a living lab for a new type of public domain developed on private land” (Nio, 2020, p. 78). This development has coincided with a lack of public meeting places, playgrounds, youth centers and other welfare services (Burgers, 2021; Gebiedsteam Oosterwold, 2023; Nio, 2020), posing distinct accessibility challenges.

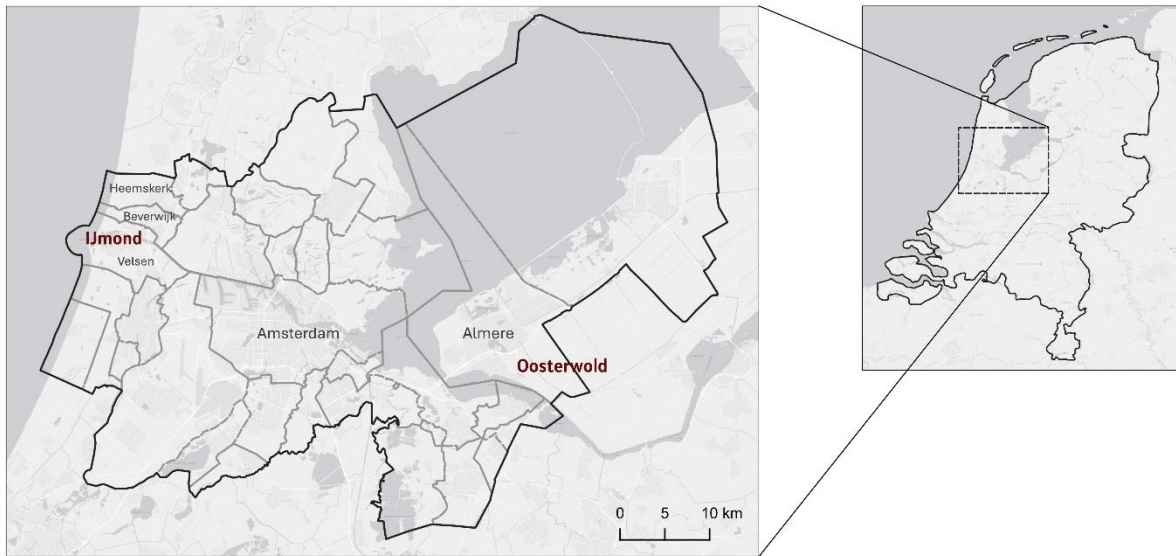


Figure 1: Perimeter of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region and approximate locations of the field sites.

3.1.2 The IJmond Region

Contrary to the rural and sparsely populated area of Oosterwold, the IJmond (Figure 1) represents a region that has been profoundly shaped by industrialization. The digging of the North Sea Canal (1865–1876), to connect Amsterdam to the sea, served as a major driver of both industrial growth and urbanization in the area. Extending across both sides of the canal, the IJmond region covers three municipalities – Velsen, Beverwijk, and Heemskerk – and comprises a mix of (sub)urban areas and old village cores like Wijk aan Zee. The area has significantly been shaped by the establishment of the Tata Steel plant (formerly *Hoogovens*, or “blast furnaces”), which was founded in 1918. The plant has been both a source of pollution and health risks in the area, as well as an important provider of employment (Patin et al., 2025, p. 4). Historically, the company also played a central role in organising community life in the area – arranging housing for workers, and supporting sport clubs and social facilities (Spruit, 2019; De Wildt, 2019). Till this day, it operates its own bus service for employees.

While the IJmond area benefits from regional accessibility programs within the wider Amsterdam Metropolitan Region, it also faces a number of distinct risks and obstacles. For instance, the

municipality of Velsen is associated with car dependency and an elevated risk of transport poverty (Dalla Longa et al., 2024), particularly among older residents who have to travel to care facilities (Samen Bouwen aan Bereikbaarheid, 2022, p. 25). There is also a perception that certain mobility options have decreased or deteriorated over time. For example, the Beverwijk station no longer has express train services, and major employers such as Tata Steel remain difficult to reach by public transport (MRA, 2021, p. 25). In addition, the North Sea Canal poses a natural barrier, and the absence of a bridge exacerbates isolation. A particular bottleneck, especially for cyclists, is the fact that the ferry service across the canal has been reduced from two boats to one (MRA, 2021, p. 25). The only car tunnel across the Canal is frequently congested, contributing to cut-through traffic and delays for commuters. At the same time, the wider IJmond region has also been singled out for public transport improvements such as the introduction of a high-quality bus system (HOV) and investments in a continuous cycling network (Provincie Noord-Holland, n.d.).

The region also has a long history of community action, including six different community transport initiatives – three of which have been operating for more than fifty years (Kenniscentrum Vrijwilligersvervoer, 2022). Moreover, in the village of Wijk aan Zee, which is part of the municipality of Beverwijk, residents have long organized bottom-up cultural and social activities, particularly through the “Cultural Villages of Europe” network. This charter of European villages promotes mutual exchange, strengthens local identity, and inspires small-scale community initiatives rooted in village life (De Vries, 2003).

3.2 Methodology

The aim of conducting fieldwork in both these areas has been to identify relevant CA practices and to conduct semi-structured interviews with people actively involved in these projects. The various CA initiatives were sampled inductively through fieldwork and desk research. A week-long stay in each neighborhood allowed for initial observations and the establishment of first contacts. Informal scoping conversations were carried out with professionals, such as welfare workers or civil servants, to better understand local accessibility challenges and relevant policy domains. Moreover, online desk research and resources such as neighborhood Facebook groups, local newspapers, helped to identify relevant initiatives and contacts, which were then approached for semi-structured interviews (see the **Appendix** for the interview guide).

The table below provides an overview of the 19 interviews conducted and the different CA practices discussed. These practices varied widely in scope, aims, and degree of institutionalization, ranging from informal forms ride-sharing practices and local advocacy work around cycling to more formal initiatives such as the Bike Kitchen in Velsen-Noord, which is run by a local welfare organization with the support of volunteers. We aimed to strike a balance between practices focusing on mobility or infrastructural challenges, and those centring the development or maintenance of services such as a neighborhood centre, pub, care initiative, or a community garden. In reality, however, it proved difficult to categorize practices neatly into mobility-, connectivity-, or proximity-based forms, as one form of commoning accessibility often bled into another. We visited a care initiative that also operated “buddy bikes”, a community transport scheme that had also established its own community centre, and a village pub that managed a van for local

transportation needs. In many cases, a variety of spatial-social resources were drawn into the orbit of commoning practices. In Oosterwold, moreover, people were often involved in more than one initiative, meaning that interviews frequently covered multiple themes.

	AREA	FOCUS	CA-PRACTICES
1	<i>Oosterwold</i>	<i>Community-led school</i>	<i>Citizens starting their own primary school</i> <i>Informal carpooling among parents and neighbors</i> <i>Road safety initiatives</i>
2	<i>Oosterwold</i>	<i>Small-scale cultural venue</i>	<i>Development of a small-scale cultural venue and community space in the backyard of residents</i> <i>Creation of a publicly accessible forest garden</i>
3	<i>Oosterwold</i>	<i>Artwork/ protest accessibility</i>	<i>Small-scale action (through guerilla art) to protest protested the decision not to replace the broken elevator leading to one of the area's main bus stops</i> <i>Organization and maintenance of shared green spaces</i>
4	<i>Oosterwold</i>	<i>Car-sharing (1)</i>	<i>Efforts to promote car-sharing</i> <i>Initiative to set-up a community bus</i> <i>Road safety initiatives</i>
5	<i>Oosterwold</i>	<i>Car-sharing (2)</i>	<i>Efforts to organize informal car and ride-sharing among neighbors</i> <i>Organization and maintenance of shared green spaces</i>
6	<i>Oosterwold</i>	<i>Network pedestrian routes (1)</i>	<i>Citizen-led pilot to create an integrated network of walking routes</i> <i>Initiative to set-up a community bus</i> <i>Advocacy cyclist union</i>
7	<i>Oosterwold</i>	<i>Network pedestrian routes (2)</i>	<i>Efforts to improve the accessibility of different pedestrian routes alongside individual plots</i>

			Road safety initiatives
8	Oosterwold	Care initiative youth	Small-scale care initiative for young people Development of communal meeting spaces
9	Oosterwold	Social housing project (with a focus on shared community spaces)	Development of communal meeting spaces Shared community garden Informal ride-sharing among residents
10	IJmond (Velsen)	Community garden	Development of three different community gardens on empty stretches of land
11	IJmond (Beverwijk; Wijk aan Zee)	Community-owned café	Villagers setting up their own community-owned pub Organizing transportation through a shared bus/van
12	IJmond (Velsen)	Cyclist Union	Advocacy around cycling conditions, cut-through traffic, and road safety.
13	IJmond (Velsen)	Community transport (1)	Community transport scheme for older people and people with disabilities Shared community centre Organizing social activities (swimming, knitting, cards)
14	IJmond (Velsen)	Community transport (2)	Community bus for outings and excursions Organizing a yearly festival
15	IJmond (Heemskerk)	Community transport (3)	Community transport scheme for older people Helpline for people who need support with small tasks around the house
16	IJmond (Heemskerk)	Care initiative for people with dementia	Care farm and nursing home for people with dementia Shared community space Availability of "buddy bikes"

17	<i>IJmond (Velsen)</i>	<i>Bike-Kitchen</i>	<i>Recycling and repair of abandoned bicycles, which are sold at affordable prices to local residents</i>
18	<i>IJmond (Beverwijk)</i>	<i>Cultural community centre</i>	<i>Transformation of a former church into a community centre and cultural venue</i> <i>Participation in the "Cultural Villages of Europe" network</i>

4 TOWARDS FORMULATING HYPOTHESES

4.1 Encounters with the State

As we have outlined in the Introduction, the relationship between commoning accessibility and policy cannot be easily reduced to a comprehensive set of enablers and constraints that can simply be encouraged or lifted in order for these practices to thrive. Instead, in this empirical section, we provide a better understanding of how CA-projects actually encounter government and planning actors and processes, before outlining a set of hypotheses that capture the distinct tensions, struggles and opportunities that materialize through these encounters. Based on our research in the Dutch context, we argue that CA-initiatives encounter the state in the following ways:

- 1.** *Through policy agendas and priorities articulated across different scales and sectors, which shape both the distribution of accessibility and the roles communities are expected to play in its delivery.*
- 2.** *By creating and maintaining common goods that may replace, complement, or compete with state-sanctioned public goods.*
- 3.** *Through their reliance on, or intersection with, existing social and physical infrastructures.*
- 4.** *In interactions with laws and regulations that define the possibilities for collectively owning, purchasing, taking over, leasing, or renting property and other resources.*
- 5.** *Through contact with civil servants or other state representatives that may function as brokers or gatekeepers for access to funding, skills, and knowledge.*
- 6.** *Through demands for formalization and regularization of their activities and organizational forms.*

Building on this, we have formulated six hypotheses that we will further substantiate with empirical data in the ensuing sections.

	ENCOUNTER	HYPOTHESIS
1.	Mis/alignment with policy priorities	<i>The legitimacy and (public) funding opportunities for CA practices, as well as their future prospects, will depend on the ability and willingness of commoners to align with dominant policy agendas</i>
2.	Relation to public goods	<i>CA practices work towards the realization of certain “common goods” and cannot be viewed or treated as a one-on-one substitute for “public goods”.</i>
3.	Reliance on social and physical infrastructural	<i>The origination of CA practices depends on communities meeting each other somewhere; either online or at (semi-) public spaces. Moreover, CA projects often require access to physical spaces (to park vehicles, organize meetings, or store materials) to function</i>
4.	Legal conditions for collective ownership	<i>CA practices are shaped by laws and regulations that determine the scope for collectively purchasing, taking over, leasing, or renting property and other resources.</i>
5.	Contact with state representatives	<i>Many CA projects rely on sympathetic civil servants or other brokers who are willing to guide them through complex bureaucratic landscapes. A clear point of contact within the municipality (or province) is therefore an important enabler.</i>
6.	Demands for formalization	<i>Most CA projects benefit from a degree of informality, especially during their pioneering phase, and run the risk of being smothered or stifled by stringent regulatory processes.</i>

#ONE: MIS/ALIGNMENT WITH POLICY PRIORITIES

The legitimacy and (public) funding opportunities for CA practices, as well as their future prospects, will depend on the ability and willingness of commoners to strategically align themselves with dominant policy agendas.

If we recognize that policy does not merely shape bureaucratic and legislative conditions, but is also an exercise in agenda-setting (Barbehön et al., 2015), it follows that in order to be eligible for (public) funding CA practices often need to strategically align themselves with shifting policy priorities that play out across different scales and sectors. For initiatives that rely on structural subsidies this can be a continuous effort, as becomes clear from the example of a community transport scheme in the IJmond region, which had existed for forty years. The initiative depended on a modest annual municipal subsidy of five thousand euros. However, the chairman explained that each year, they had to reapply for the same amount and persuade the municipality of their continued need and relevance:

Well, for us it's always been... Look, if the municipality were to partially pull the plug tomorrow, then we'd have a problem. So when they said a few years ago, "well, subsidies are going to be cut," it actually took us quite a bit of effort to convince the alderman that we shouldn't be among the organizations where cuts needed to be made.

Such funding streams are also linked to certain policy trends and fashions. For instance, one of the volunteers at a Bike Kitchen in the IJmond region mentioned that their project aligned particularly well with the municipality's emphasis on cycling and active lifestyles. The initiative received most of its funding from the municipality, as it was run by a local welfare organization in collaboration with volunteers who faced a labour market disadvantage. The aim of the project was to upcycle abandoned bicycles and sell them at reduced prices to make cycling more accessible to people on lower incomes. What worked to their advantage was that their project was looked upon favourably by political parties across the political spectrum.

More pioneering CA initiatives that are not yet embedded within existing institutional and funding landscapes often have to experiment with adapting their messaging to garner support from different actors. For instance, when a group of active citizens in the village of Wijk aan Zee sought to take over the local pub, which was about to close, they experimented with different messages for different audiences:

Depending on who you're talking to, you make it a bit more commercial, or you emphasize the cultural side a little more. Or you highlight the social side a bit more—that's possible too. I mean, we have the village community centre here, where they provide meals for seniors, for example. But in the summer they're closed for six weeks because of the summer holidays. So then you can show that, well, we could take over some of their functions during the summer. And you know, you can emphasize those aspects a bit more—the wellbeing side.

Securing support from government actors, in particular, can enhance the legitimacy of a project. For example, one of the initiators of a residential care farm for people with dementia in the IJmond region explained that receiving a provincial subsidy helped them gain the trust of the housing corporation which ultimately built the care farm that they now rent. Still, it required considerable effort to convince the municipal council, which was initially reluctant to accommodate an additional care facility in the area. To build broader support, the initiators therefore approached and met with all local political parties, including those that were less likely to endorse the project:

We then approached all the political parties ourselves [...] to personally tell our story and explain why it is also important for people with dementia to have a

pleasant living environment and to be seen as human beings. That was a very important step.”

However, fostering goodwill across the political spectrum is not always feasible or desirable. This also becomes clear from a communal living project in Oosterwold, which initially started with the aim of providing housing and community spaces for refugees. The initiator of the project explained that this focus had changed over time. Partly, this was due to organizational changes following a fallout and legal conflict with a partner organization. But, as the project lead elaborated, it was also because it proved difficult to maintain an exclusive focus on refugees in a municipality where far-right political parties enjoyed significant support.

An example like this thus clearly shows that alignment with dominant policy agendas is not always desirable and may be particularly challenging for projects that represent groups or causes that are politically ostracized or marginalized. Moreover, CA projects often do not merely want to fit into the existing system, but also aim to change it by challenging, reshaping, or broadening existing policy priorities and directions. For instance, the aforementioned care farm for people with dementia has now successfully carved out a place for itself within the regional care landscape, yet it also seeks to change mainstream health care in the Netherlands by setting an example of how things can be done differently. The project aligns itself with a broader movement and network of organizations called *radicale vernieuwing zorg* (“radical care innovation”), which strives to transform health care by prioritizing people and relationships over protocols and regulations.

Such forms of movement- and momentum building may be even more important for projects that adopt a slightly more confrontational stance toward governance actors and that rely less on public sources of funding. This is true, for instance, of advocacy groups like the cyclist union, for whom policy change is a primary goal. A representative of a local chapter in the IJmond region elaborated on the variety of tactics they employed to change mobility policies, including lobbying, actively intervening in local decision-making processes – for example, by attending information sessions on new infrastructure projects and presenting themselves as relevant stakeholders – or by approaching the press. This was evident in their advocacy for a second ferry across the nearby canal, as its low service frequency constituted a major bottleneck for cyclists needing to reach the other side for school or work:

I think our pressure regarding that second ferry certainly played a role. At a certain point, we obtained—informally—a copy of the agreement: the ferry operation contract, which set out the arrangements. At some point, it turned out that the document could actually be found online in a formal capacity. So we passed it on to the press. After that, the municipality could no longer ignore the issue.

It is important to underscore that it is not only policy agendas directly related to accessibility and the distribution of services that are negotiated through CA practices. Indeed, as we have shown in

Deliverable 5.1, the encouragement of active community involvement has itself become a policy agenda – turning commoning practices into an explicit object of governance (Prins et al. 2025). This is clearly visible in Oosterwold, which exemplifies the dialling back of the state and transfer of responsibilities to citizens as a form of do-it-yourself urbanism (Chevalier & Tzaninis, 2022). While this vision is actively embraced by citizens of Oosterwold, the project still involves a constant (re)negotiation over what citizens can reasonably be expected to do themselves. Indeed, while the initial idea was that the necessary amenities in the area would develop more or less organically, the limitations of this approach soon became clear. Not only do municipalities have a “duty of care” regarding the provision of certain services, such as waste collection (Van Karnenbeek et al. 2021), but the complex scalar dimensions of certain infrastructural goods – such as roads – also make it difficult to organize these in a bottom-up manner. In 2022, the municipality of Almere therefore actively solicited legal advice on whether, by assigning responsibilities to residents, the municipality falls short in fulfilling its duties of care, tasks, and responsibilities (Dirkzwager 2023).

This negotiation over the distribution of responsibilities also becomes clear from the example of the community bus that recently started operating as a pilot in Oosterwold. The initiative responded to the fact that public service delivery in this rural area is rather limited: there is a public bus that connects the area to the adjacent city of Almere, but it only operates on weekdays, with stops spaced far apart. In collaboration with the municipality and the local bus company Keolis, a community working group has therefore initiated a pilot for a neighborhood bus that services poorly connected areas. While it is still unclear whether this will serve as a structural solution or a temporary one, the board of the initiative has a preference for the latter: “It is our intention that it will eventually be a regular [bus] service. That is the aim. We do not want it to operate as a community bus for years to come.” Instead, they hoped that in two years’ time, when the tenders and contracts for bus companies in Almere were renewed, the route would be incorporated as part of the public transport concession.

A misalignment between the aims of CA practices and those of governance actors might thus also occur because commoners feel that the state should be responsible for meeting certain accessibility needs. For instance, the foundation that had been established to run the community bus in Oosterwold viewed the project as a means rather than an end in itself. Their ultimate aim was to improve mobility and connectivity through multiple approaches, including lobbying for the extension of existing routes and exploring opportunities to set up an informal ride-sharing system. This shows that bottom-up forms of organizing accessibility can bleed into forms of advocacy, and underscores that CA projects may seek legitimacy beyond institutionalisation and formal recognition (Calzati et al., 2022, p. 12). Depending on their aims and tactics, such initiatives might therefore also pursue support and form alliances with non-state actors, including social advocacy groups, charities, or companies.

#TWO: RELATION TO PUBLIC GOODS

CA practices work towards the realization of certain “common goods” and cannot be viewed or treated as a one-on-one substitute for “public goods”.

While it can be tempting to view CA practices as a substitute for state-sanctioned ways of guaranteeing accessibility to essential services, it is important to recognize that these practices come with their own, distinct goals, organizational logics and value systems. Indeed, CA projects ultimately work towards the realization of accessibility as a common good, and emerge as an expression of social mutuality and collaboration among a specific group of people, rather than as a mandate imposed to serve the general public (see Quilligan 2012). This tension and discrepancy between public and common goods is clearly visible in the case of Oosterwold, where the focus on self-organization has led to an abundance of bottom-up initiatives, including informal car sharing schemes and the development of small-scale cultural services and neighborhood centres. Yet these CA practices differ from public amenities in that they have been developed on private land and often cater to a closed group of neighbors. Nio (2020, 78) similarly observes that most meeting places in Oosterwold consist of private initiatives, resulting in “a living lab for a new type of public domain developed on private land”.

The meeting places and neighborhood spaces that have been developed in Oosterwold differ in shape, size, and ownership. In some cases, they are collectively owned and established by a group of neighbors to function as a shared living room that can be used for social activities, flex-work, communal cooking, playing games, storing shared tools, and hosting relevant meetings or events. In other cases, they constitute semi-private spaces that are only infrequently used for cultural activities, such as performances and music recitals. One such an example is a small-scale cultural space developed by a local couple in their backyard, alongside a publicly accessible forest garden. To manage both spaces, they established a foundation; yet in practice, the site also remained very much part of their own living space:

Well in practice, let's say 95% of the time, this is just part of our house. We make music here and use it for doing odd jobs, but there are also courses and workshops held here, and – about ten times a year – meetings. But it is not about the frequency. It is about being able to offer people a place when they say: ‘I need a place for something’. But we also have to say ‘no’ regularly, because there are small choirs that say, ‘we want to rehearse here.’ Then we say, ‘yes, but it is part of our house. So if you want to come here every Thursday, we can’t have that. But if it is a one-time workshop, course, or meeting, and it fits with our agenda, it’s fine.’ So there are definitely limitations.

The fact that there are no full-fledged public spaces in Oosterwold means that there are very few places where the community at large can meet or assemble. It seems unlikely that CA practices would be able to completely “solve” this lack of public spaces, especially because commoners may have very different aims than government actors in setting up certain services. For instance,

one of the citizen-led schools that was developed in Oosterwold, was created – not to ensure the proximity of services or sufficient educational opportunities – but to offer a more small-scale and value-driven alternative to the regular education system. Or as one of the founders elaborated:

The question is to what extent the fact that our school was the first school in Oosterwold was the deciding factor for people. [...] It is another thought that comes to mind when you talk about mobility and facilities. I think: it is not just about proximity and the fact that it is present. You also see in cities that people do not always choose the school that is nearby but choose a school based on their ideals and it is my hunch that this is also very much the case with us. People pay quite a lot of money to attend our school. So if it is only for the distance, then it is cheaper to drive elsewhere.

CA practices are thus not automatically geared towards the realization, accessibility, or proximity of services per se, but often strive to create something that cannot be found within the existing system. This is also underscored by the example of a community garden that was established in the IJmond region. To some extent, the garden emerged as a replacement for a neighborhood centre that had closed down and was eventually demolished. Yet the initiators explained that it also differed markedly from such public facilities, which are often designed to serve specific welfare agendas or to support groups in need. The garden, instead, functioned simply as a place “where people met each other because they lived in the same neighborhood” and was ran and sustained by the community itself:

And that is why I do think we need each other. You can't do it without the municipality, because the land belongs to the municipality and we need their conditions. But if they were to do it themselves, if the initiative were to come from the municipality, then I don't know whether you would still have people who would take it up together.

This aspect of mutual sociality and collaboration was stressed by many CA initiators as an example of what makes these kind of projects unique and valuable. At the same time, the fact that such projects are often enmeshed with the labour and efforts of particular pioneers may also create a certain in-group effect – even when these projects take shape in public space. In fact, one of the active members of the community garden also grappled with issues of inclusivity, particularly in relation to the fences that had been installed around the garden to keep dogs out:

I actually happened to talk about that this morning with another garden member: that when we are in the garden, we should really keep the gates open,

so that you get used to doing that. Because right now, everyone always thinks [...] 'that is the garden of those people, you're not allowed in there'.

While those involved made concerted efforts to invite other neighbors – for instance, by handing out flyers and engaging local schools – they also observed that certain parts of the neighborhood, particularly some of the nearby flats, were less likely to frequent the garden. This raises the question whether citizen initiatives such as these can be expected to serve the general public. In their policy brief on community involvement, Hilhorst et al. (2025, p. 12) caution against such expectations, noting that most communities are inevitably characterized by a degree of familiarity and boundedness. It may therefore be unrealistic to expect a community-led garden to attract the same mix of people as, for instance, a public park.

Moreover, in some cases, a certain degree of boundedness is actually a precondition for CA-practices to function. This was, for example, the case of a community transport scheme in Velsen-Noord, in the IJmond region. The scheme was set up by a local neighborhood association that also organized other social activities, such as the annual street party. To facilitate excursions and trips, they had purchased a tour bus that could also be used by other institutions, associations, and sports clubs throughout Velsen-Noord. However, to avoid accusations of unfair competition, they had to introduce a membership system, requiring all passengers to be members of the local neighborhood association (at a cost of €7,50 per year). This also meant that they had to decline requests from organizations based in the adjacent municipality of Beverwijk.

Examples like these underline how certain organizational strategies, such as the introduction of a membership based system, enable initiatives to successfully carve out pockets of commoning within existing market economies. At the same time, the services and goods that materialize as a result of such efforts, often differ from their public counterparts. The fact that CA practices often have an added or complementary value to state-sanctioned ways of providing accessibility and amenities, means that they cannot be easily judged or evaluated by the same standards (such as “inclusivity”) or be expected to guarantee the even distribution of such goods. Indeed, one area where government actors should arguably play a role is in preserving local and regional balances between communities (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2022, p. 223).

#THREE: RELIANCE ON SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURES

The origination of CA practices depends on communities meeting each other somewhere; either online or at (semi-) public spaces. Moreover, CA projects often require access to physical spaces (to park vehicles, organize meetings, or store materials) to function.

CA practices often contribute to the development of communal spaces, infrastructures, and networks. For instance, the aforementioned care facility for people with dementia had developed a communal building to host activities, with the idea that this space could also be used by members of the wider community. Likewise, the communal living project in Oosterwold had set up

an improvised soccer field that was used by children from across the neighborhood. Furthermore, citizens of Oosterwold were also involved in creating more complex infrastructural goods, such as roads, and often made concerted efforts to establish these as low-traffic zones.

At the same time, CA projects also very much rely on existing forms of infrastructure. In Oosterwold, social media platforms such as Facebook and neighborhood Whatsapp groups play an important role in connecting neighbors who, for instance, are interested in informal car sharing or carpooling practices. Likewise, the village of Wijk aan Zee had an active Facebook group that served very similar purposes. In addition, (semi-)public spaces play an important role in bringing people together. For instance, the secretary of a community transport scheme in Velsen noted that many of the older people they drive around no longer read newspapers or are unable to use the internet. For them, hospitals and other care institutions therefore constitute key places for recruiting new members – simply by approaching people in the waiting room while dropping off someone else. Moreover, the availability of existing spaces and social infrastructures is a crucial precondition for the emergence, exchange, and fruition of the ideas that form the breeding ground for CA practices. This point was also explicitly highlighted by one of the initiators of the village pub in Wijk aan Zee:

Finally, when it comes to our vision, we are also very strongly convinced that you need a place for new things to emerge. If you don't have that, it simply doesn't happen. Yes, maybe by chance at someone's kitchen table, but you need a place where you meet one another, where you can casually exchange ideas and then think, "let's do this" or "let's do that." That is so important for vitality in a village.

From a more practical perspective, most CA projects also require access to physical spaces to park vehicles, organize meetings, or store materials. For instance, the lack of public space in Oosterwold made it difficult to find the physical space for particular CA practices, such as a parking lot for a shared car or an empty space to transform into a playground. Two neighbors involved in a car-sharing pilot in Oosterwold elaborated on their search for appropriate parking space, which they eventually found on a plot belonging to one of their neighbors.:

We then started looking for places where cars could possibly be parked. Because if you don't have space, it won't work anyway. With a lot of houses it was quite difficult because you have to drive quite a long way onto the plot. And then you don't really feel free to just take the car away from there.

While this search for physical places is particularly challenging in Oosterwold due to the lack of public space, it was also a topic mentioned in an interview about various community initiatives in Wijk aan Zee. To accommodate some of the cultural activities organized within the village, the

community used a large tent. However, the volunteers responsible for setting up the tent had no place to store the equipment and eventually had to rent a space, as one of the organizers explained:

They have been struggling for years because they had no place to put their stuff. There are no more farms here. In my home village, farms were used for this purpose, or a small factory or anything else with some space left so that you could put it away. We don't have that at the moment. This is something that the municipality should actually arrange. And the municipality never saw that they should just say to that club 'you can put your stuff there'. They had to move seven or eight times, with all their stuff.

The spaces and infrastructures that commoners help create thus inevitably build upon and intersect with existing public or private ones, and their absence can significantly hinder such initiatives.

#FOUR: LEGAL CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE USE AND OWNERSHIP

CA practices are shaped by laws and regulations that determine the scope for collectively purchasing, taking over, leasing, or renting property and other resources.

CA practices almost inevitably raise the question of how to organize community ownership or management of resources. For instance, in the case of community-led car sharing schemes one clear enabler is the ease with which a group of neighbors can jointly enter an insurance scheme. This is particularly relevant in the case of Oosterwold, where many people engage in informal car-sharing arrangements with their neighbors. One resident explained that while her household owned a single car, the remoteness of the area often meant that both she and her partner needed the car at the same time. This led them to borrow – or effectively rent – cars from neighbors, a practice that raised practical and legal questions, particularly around liability. After researching the issue online, she discovered that causing an accident while using someone else's car would fall under the car owner's liability insurance (the *WA-verzekering* in Dutch). However, causing damage to another person's car could negatively affect the insurance rates of the car owner due to insurers' no-claims policies. She therefore explored opportunities to share these risks, but did not find an altogether satisfying solution:

But I had hoped to find something simple—some kind of annual subscription, for example, or a way to add coverage to your own insurance. Something that would allow you to use your neighbors' car, or to be added as a driver to your neighbors' car. But that doesn't exist. There was one option I found that could work quite well, which indeed operates with a kind of annual subscription and

allows cars to be linked to multiple users. However, all of those cars would have to be insured with Centraal Beheer [name of an insurer]. And everyone already had ongoing insurance policies, and no one was keen to switch.

CA practices that focus – not so much on the sharing of private resources – but on the development of certain amenities such as a community-owned shop or café, moreover, are very much shaped by the laws and regulations that are in place when it comes to collectively purchasing, taking over, leasing, or renting property. In the case of Oosterwold, one judicial development that was frequently mentioned as an obstacle was the so-called Didam ruling of 2021, which stipulates that whenever the government sells land to a private actor, all potential buyers must have an equal opportunity to compete for its acquisition. This is a challenge for citizen initiatives, which are less likely to succeed when entering such a competition, although recent jurisprudence shows that exceptions can sometimes be made (Driessen 2024, 215).

In addition to legislative obstacles, initiatives often face significant administrative and financial challenges in managing their assets. This is illustrated by the project in Beverwijk that sought to transform a former church into a community center. The initiator explained that a temporary organizational structure had been devised to organize ownership and management. A foundation was established to hold and manage the monumental building, while a separate association – chaired by the initiator – was responsible for programming activities. The main challenge arose when the former congregation, which still owned the building, sought to transfer ownership definitively to the foundation. The foundation's board was reluctant to assume responsibility for the property due to the high maintenance costs and the need for an expensive renovation. As a result, the initiative began exploring various funding sources, including municipal subsidies, cultural heritage and monument grants, and crowdfunding. Hence, even when spaces are available, establishing community ownership can be a complex and demanding process.

Another obstacle is that banks are sometimes reluctant to take on community initiatives as customers. For instance, the group of neighbors who started their own school in Oosterwold had difficulty acquiring a mortgage loan, as banks were hesitant to provide them with one. The initiators of the village pub in Wijk aan Zee had a similar experience, and even struggled to open a bank account. This reluctance among banks was partly due to the project's unusual legal structure, which consisted of a private limited company and a foundation operating alongside each other, with the foundation holding a golden share in the company. For the initiators, however, it had been essential to adopt a legal form that would allow them to safeguard their vision. They even included a provision in their by-laws stipulating that, in the event of a significant change in land use or purpose, all residents of Wijk aan Zee aged 18 and over should be invited to vote on the matter.

In the context of Oosterwold, such efforts to ensure and anchor the communal vision of a project were also impacted by rapidly increasing land prices. This was highlighted by one of the initiators of a youth care facility, which included a large communal space. Together with his partner, he had purchased the land for the facility and then immediately transferred it to a foundation, to which they loaned the property. After running the initiative for eight years, the initiators decided to move on, and the foundation began actively searching for a new actor to continue their mission of working

with young people and to take over or rent the property. He explained how the rising land prices had affected this process:

We worked with the real estate agent to create a kind of brochure outlining everything: what's there, what the costs are, and what the possibilities are. What is allowed, and what isn't in terms of permits. And above all, what the objectives are – why the foundation set this up and how it wants things to develop going forward. In return, we don't need the market value; we just want to cover the costs that were incurred. So basically we said... because there has been insane land value increase here, it's just ridiculous. In total, we've left almost a million on the table, which we could have cashed in, but then it would have been bought by a housing developer [...] and that wouldn't fit with the soul of the place.

As a result of this rapid rise in land values, the case of Oosterwold is sometimes viewed as a missed opportunity to experiment with more social instruments and principles, such as ground lease arrangements or an anti-speculation clause (Rijckenberg, 2022). What such a construction might look like from the perspective of public or community spaces is exemplified by the case of Wijk aan Zee, which has a large village meadow at its heart that once served as a commons for grazing cattle. Today, the field belongs to the municipality of Beverwijk, but in 2018 it decided to transfer the stewardship, maintenance, and operation of the meadow to a designated local foundation (Beverwijk Nieuws, 2018). The site is now used for a wide range of community activities, such as festivals and informal markets, while also serving as a parking area for tourists during the summer months. Parking is coordinated by the local foundation, and the revenue is reinvested in community activities. Examples like these thus show how legal instruments can also be used to foster the commoning of important community assets.

#FIVE: CONTACT WITH STATE REPRESENTATIVES

Many CA projects rely on sympathetic civil servants or other brokers who are willing to guide them through complex bureaucratic landscapes. A clear point of contact within the municipality (or province) is therefore an important enabler.

Many CA projects have to deal with different government bodies when, for instance, it comes to acquiring the necessary permits for a particular initiative or entering certain tender procedures or funding schemes. One of the problems they face in doing so is that it can be difficult to navigate these bureaucratic contexts, as many CA practices transcend the boundaries between different departments or administrative siloes. For instance, community transport schemes technically relate to transport and mobility, but they also often have a social or care component, especially because many of them provide services that fall under the Social Support Act of 2015. This piece of legislation mandated that responsibility for long-term care was devolved to municipalities,

which – among other tasks – were required to ensure that people had access to adequate transport options within their local communities (Dijkhoff, 2014)

Beyond the presence of administrative siloes, the interaction between multiple layers of government can further complicate navigation within these bureaucratic realities. This is clearly visible in the case of Oosterwold, which was set up as a collaboration between five different government bodies: two municipalities (Almere and Zeewolde), the province of Flevoland, the Water Board, and the Central Government Real Estate Agency which owns the land. One active citizen explained how this led to people being constantly referred back and forth between different government bodies:

What I have learned is that when different government bodies are arguing with one another other, you can forget about participation. All the doors will close and then all these government bodies will start bickering with each other and you really get the short end of the stick.

Such convoluted government structures, with different departments or layers pursuing diverging or even conflicting goals, means that commoners often have to rely on sympathetic civil servants or other brokers who are willing to guide them through bureaucratic landscapes. One of the initiators of the self-organized school in Oosterwold, for instance, stressed the importance of being assigned a designated contact person with the area development agency of Oosterwold when they were in the process of acquiring their own building:

Well, it was a good thing they were going to help us, because it was really quite a tough job. Because then you have to comply with even more rules. There are noise standards, because your schoolyard produces noise, and you have to reserve so many metres for this or that [...] It is just a lot of hassle. How are you going to arrange your plot? What does the municipality think of that? How are you going to apply for your building permit?

Having a clear point of contact with the municipality or province is thus an important enabler for CA practices. This issue was also underscored by the initiators of the community garden in the IJmond region, who emphasized the importance of having a “back door” through which citizens can gain access to the municipality. In their case, initial contact with the municipality – which also provided some start-up funding for the garden – proved challenging due to frequent changes in personnel:

We were dealing with an interim staff member, and we had made certain agreements with them. At the time, that was indeed something we ran into: we had been granted a certain amount of money – if I remember correctly around

€3500, or €3000 – to set everything up. We were allowed to spend this over a period of two years, but we didn't receive the full amount upfront. Instead, we had to submit receipts and were reimbursed accordingly. That's how it worked back then. So, after the first year had passed, the person we had been in contact with was also gone. When we then tried to submit our receipts, that suddenly turned out not to be possible anymore. Yes, that was obviously a bit strange. As a result, we no longer had access to that funding.

However, shortly thereafter, the municipality began appointing community liaison officers, who kept track of developments in the neighborhood and served as the first point of contact for citizens. While this represented an important improvement, one of the initiators stressed, that now the burden of navigating between different administrative siloes fell on these officers, who still had to convince their colleagues at the legal, financial or landuse and real-estate departments.

Brokering access to municipalities, and establishing meaningful contacts with civil servants also depends on people actually being able to navigate such bureaucratic realities and feeling confident that they will be taken seriously. Indeed, some commoners were helped by the fact that they had worked for municipalities themselves. This was also true for a walking guide from Oosterwold who mentioned that he and his neighbors were quite unique in this sense:

People here are also very much involved in all kinds of processes, and know what is going on. So yes, the chance that you will interfere with plans of the municipality or make your voice heard is also greater. I am currently involved in eight different projects with the municipality.

He added that this dynamic was very much in line with the newly introduced Environment and Planning Act which, among other things, encourages the participation of citizens in decision making processes and tailoring such processes to local needs. As mentioned earlier, the municipality of Almere has similarly highlighted Oosterwold as a prime example of the kind of relationship between government and citizens envisioned under this new act (Chevalier & Tzaninis 2022, p. 218).

This new form of governance, however, was not welcomed by everyone. One of the representatives of the local cyclist union in the IJmond region, who had also worked for the municipality, expressed some apprehensions about the new Environment and Planning Act. He was particularly critical of the shift from municipal zoning plans to more loosely defined “visions” that had coincided with this new legislation. In the past, the cyclist union had been able to actively advocate for specific changes by responding to detailed zoning plans, but municipal visions were often much more elusive. According to him, the ability to exercise influence now increasingly hinged on the engagement and priorities of particular individuals:

Despite my many years of experience, I find the concept somewhat elusive. You have less influence. Or it depends very much on the project manager—how they involve people in matters. It also varies from one municipality to another. So yes, you are dependent on those factors.

Examples like these thus suggest a trend toward a form of governance in which personal relationships and networks are increasingly important. Tapping into such networks requires specific resources – such as knowledge, skills, and time – that are not evenly distributed across communities and may be further constrained by structural inequalities and oppressions.

#SIX: DEMANDS FOR FORMALIZATION

Most CA projects benefit from a degree of informality, especially during their pioneering phase, and run the risk of being smothered or stifled by stringent regulatory processes.

Most CA projects originate because citizens start experimenting and organizing together to meet their collective needs or desires. However, they are often caught up in the legal reality after an initial pioneering phase. For instance, the community-led school that originated in Oosterwold started off as a small classroom in a yurt, but had to eventually find a proper school building due to fire and safety regulations:

We basically just started. If we had done it properly we would have taken our time to set things up, but we all had children who needed to go to school [...] So we just started and actually in the process you gradually find out about all kinds of regulations.

This dynamic of starting a project first and only learning about different rules and regulations in the process was also visible in the case of the new community centre in Beverwijk. One of the organizers explained:

You actually need to apply for a catering permit. What we do requires that. But as long as no one objects, you can go a long way. Because as soon as you have a permit, you need to find out what is possible and what is not.

Other initiatives also stated that, amid the many different regulations, they sometimes tried to operate “under the radar”. This was, for example, the case with catering permits, GDPR (privacy) legislation, and – particularly in Oosterwold – land use stipulations. Moreover, some projects also

actively tried to push back against the regulatory burden that many bottom-up initiatives are faced with. One of the project leads of the care farm and nursing home for people with dementia, for instance, explained that one of her mentors had strongly advised her to take a critical look at the different laws that apply to institutional care, stressing that many of the rules that had been created were in fact superfluous:

So there are all kinds of rules and protocols drawn up, and safety [requirements], while the law is much broader if you read it to the letter. And for example the inspection body also says, 'apply or explain.' So some things we consciously do not apply, and we have also explained that. Especially at the beginning, at the care office they said: you have to have a certification, a quality mark. But we were opposed to that, because we believe that quality cannot be measured by an external agency. Or certain things that you then also have to pay a lot of money for, money that you would otherwise spend on the residents. And in this way, exceptions have also been made from time to time.

The project also tried to lead by example by running their care institution in a way that was not restrictive and allowed for new ideas and spontaneity. The initiator summed up their vision as “Yes, unless...,” meaning that, in principle, everything is possible unless there are insurmountable practical obstacles.

Not all initiatives succeed in navigating or overcoming demands for formalization. This becomes clear from an example in Velsen, where an allotment organization started an informal playground. However, the organization was eventually asked to remove their playground equipment when it turned out that the land officially belonged to the municipality, which would therefore be liable if someone were to get hurt. This led to community protests and negotiations with the municipality (Jak, 2023). In Oosterwold, citizens have also faced difficulties in setting up informal playgrounds. Some plots of land in the area have been left vacant due to archaeological findings that prevent construction. Many residents feel that these empty plots could be transformed into playgrounds. Yet, as one local walking guide explained, they have been unsuccessful so far:

I regularly meet people who complain about this. They came to live here with the expectation that the municipality will allow them to develop things by themselves, as a community. They say: 'that piece of land will never be built on. We want a children's playground there and we will pay for it!' 'No', says the municipality, 'that is not allowed: you have to buy the land'. 'But can we then make a children's playground out of it?' 'Yes, but you have to apply for a permit'. So it is all very formal and that causes people to give up at a certain point and then nothing happens. [...] It could also be that people do this temporarily until someone buys that plot, but they do not allow that.

Examples like these highlight the risk of initiatives being stifled or smothered by opaque bureaucratic procedure and demands for formalization.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Commoners rarely get to choose the conditions under which they pursue their aims and projects (Olsen, 2024, p. 2322). They are always, to some extent, operating within existing institutional and policy spaces, and their practices are both enabled and constrained by the regulatory, material, and infrastructural landscapes in which they are embedded. The hypotheses in this working paper represent an attempt to capture the myriad ways in which commoners navigate this reality by working “in, against, and beyond the state” (Cumbers, 2015, p. 70). Rather than offering an isolated view of potential policy barriers and enablers, decoupled from wider power relations and political agenda-setting, we have tried to unpack how CA projects actually encounter the state.

The hypotheses we have presented in this deliverable are grounded in a variety of commoning accessibility practices – from informal ride-sharing and protest actions to bottom-up efforts to establish schools, community centers, and other shared resources – and speak to the obstacles and opportunities that materialize through wide-ranging interactions with governance and planning processes. While some of these interactions hint at the potential benefits of a more “enabling state” – one that actively shapes the conditions under which commoning practices can emerge – others complicate this view. One situation in which this mode of governance might actually be needed is in relation to the negotiation of communal ownership. Commoners frequently use or collectively own assets, whether buildings, vehicles, or shared equipment, yet existing legislation is often poorly equipped to accommodate these arrangements. Moreover, there is also scope to further strengthen and reinforce the role and position of intermediaries: civil servants who can help commoners access government bodies, navigate complex bureaucratic landscapes, and obtain subsidies. Both of these examples thus highlight obstacles that can be mitigated and conditions that can be actively supported by an enabling state.

However, not all of the aforementioned hypotheses align as neatly with this view of the state as a facilitator. The previous section also underscores the pivotal role that governance plays in the distribution and accessibility of infrastructure, real estate, and land. While CA practices frequently contribute to the emergence of new social and material infrastructures, they also inevitably rely on pre-existing ones and may be hindered by their absence. Commoners need places to meet, organize activities, park vehicles, or store materials – requirements that can be particularly challenging to meet in contexts such as the Netherlands, where community real estate has increasingly been privatized or commercialized (Rli, 2020). Moreover, our findings also challenge the extent to which CA practices can be considered a replacement for public forms of service delivery. While some CA initiatives – such as volunteer-led transport – resemble public services, initiators often understand their role and mission as markedly different from that of the state. Many initiatives target specific groups or bounded communities rather than the general public, limiting the extent to which such services can be transferred to broader community responsibility.

Planning for commoning accessibility practices thus entails more than simply enabling or empowering initiatives through policy measures. Instead, policy interventions should be informed by a critical understanding of how planning intervenes in the distribution of social and material infrastructures and how it perpetuates – or can challenge – the processes of enclosure that have made such practices necessary in the first place.

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APPENDIX I – INTERVIEW GUIDE

TOPIC	QUESTIONS
Context accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How would you describe accessibility within [name locality]? Can you easily reach the places you need or want to travel to?</i> • <i>What are important facilities or amenities within [name locality]? For example, which facilities do you frequently use yourself?</i> • <i>What facilities or amenities do you miss within [name locality]?</i> • <i>What are important transport options within [name locality]? Which transport options do you frequently use yourself?</i> • <i>What transport options do you miss in your daily life?</i> • <i>What challenges do you recognize in terms accessibility?</i> • <i>What do you think is causing these bottlenecks?</i> • <i>How has the accessibility within [name locality] changed over time?</i>
Commoning initiative (origin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How did you first become involved in [name of initiative]? What was your motivation for this?</i> • <i>When was [name of initiative] first initiated? Who initiated it?</i> • <i>To what kind of needs within the community does [name of initiative] respond?</i> • <i>With what purpose was [name of initiative] founded?</i> • <i>Can you describe the vision of [name of initiative]?</i> • <i>Have the goals and vision of [name of initiative] changed over the years? If so, why?</i> • <i>Can you give examples of obstacles that [name of initiative] encountered? How was this dealt with?</i> • <i>Can you give examples of key successes of [name of</i>

	<p><i>initiative]? What has been the significance of these successes?</i></p>
Actors and collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How many people are currently involved in [name of initiative]? In what capacity are they involved?</i> • <i>What roles and tasks can you distinguish when it comes to running [name of initiative]?</i> • <i>Who are the users of the services that [name of Initiative] provides? Is there any overlap between the users and the organizers of the service?</i> • <i>What are the conditions for using or participating in [name of initiative]?</i> • <i>Which (external) parties (such as government agencies, welfare organizations, or companies) do you collaborate with? In what ways?</i> • <i>What challenges do you face when it comes these collaborations?</i>
Governance and policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Did the government, for example the municipality, play a role in setting up [name of initiative]? If yes, which government bodies?</i> • <i>How did you come into contact with [name relevant government body]? Who initiated the contact?</i> • <i>With which department within [name relevant government body] do you have contact? Why with this department?</i> • <i>How did you convince [name of relevant government body] of the added value of [name of initiative]? How did you pitch your idea?</i> • <i>In what way does [name of initiative] align with the (policy) goals of [name of relevant government body]? Did you have to frame your plans in a certain way to connect with this?</i>
Laws and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is the legal form of [name of initiative]? Why have you opted for this legal form?</i> • <i>What are the implications of the legal form for how [name of initiative] operates?</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What laws and regulations affect how the [initiative name] operates?</i> • <i>Are there laws and regulations that hinder the functioning of [name of initiative]? If so, which ones?</i> • <i>Did you have to apply for special permits to start [name of initiative]? If yes, which ones and how did this work?</i>
Financial means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How did you raise seed money in the early stages of [name of initiative]?</i> • <i>What are currently the main sources of revenue for [name of initiative]?</i> • <i>How sustainable are these sources of income when it comes to the continuity of [name of initiative]? Are there, for instance, subsidies that require repeated applications?</i> • <i>What are some of the financial challenges that [name of initiative] faces?</i>
Material and spatial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What kind of material resources (e.g. vehicles or tools) are needed to sustain [name of initiative]? How did you obtain these resources? Who owns these resources?</i> • <i>What kind of infrastructure (e.g. roads or electricity) is needed to keep [name of initiative] running? How is access to this infrastructure arranged? What is the condition of this infrastructure?</i> • <i>What kind of spaces (e.g. meeting rooms or parking spaces) are needed to [name of initiative]? Who owns these spaces? How is access to these spaces regulated?</i>
Role of the government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In what ways could the government promote initiatives like [name of initiative]? Are there specific barriers that the government could remove?</i> • <i>Are there any tasks that [name of initiative] performs that – in your opinion – should be the responsibility of the government? If so, which ones?</i> • <i>Are there any tasks that [name of initiative] would like</i>

	<p><i>to take over from the government? If so, which ones?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In what way does the nature of a service like [name of initiative] change when it is organized by communities themselves? Wherein lies the added value of these kind of initiatives?</i>
<p>Future of the initiative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How do you see the future of [name of initiative]?</i> • <i>What factors do you think are important to the continuity of [name of initiative]?</i> • <i>Are there any plans to further expand the activities of [name of initiative]? What is needed for this?</i> • <i>What challenges could [name of initiative] potentially face in the future?</i>