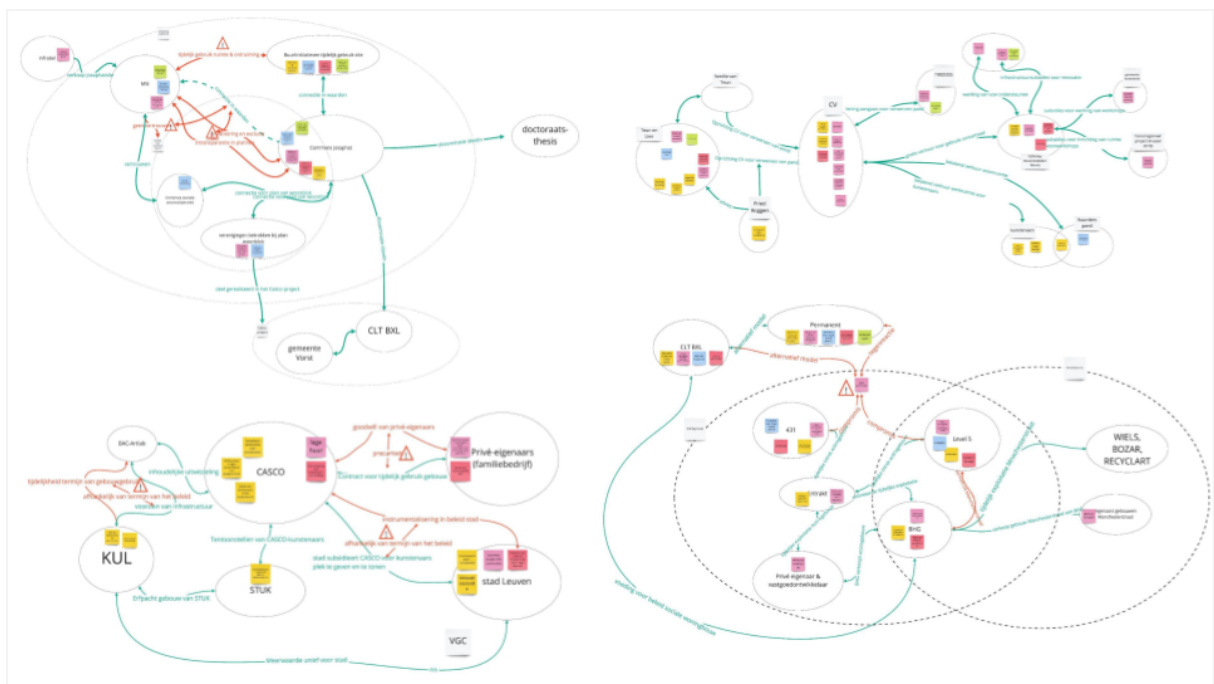


## Making (Civil) Space for Art in between Communities, State and Market

The search for affordable space with a long-term perspective in the arts always takes place in a sphere of forces between the government, the real estate market and the initiative of artists and citizens. Kunstenpunt/Flanders Arts Institute has analysed these complex interactions by investigating 13 cases (Co-Post, Casco, Morpho (before AAIR), Endeavour, Werkplaats Walter, Post Collective, Commons Josaphat, Zeezin, Permanent, Globe Aroma, Timelab, Zinneke, Cinemaximiliaan), and has developed a diagram to make these interactions, in which sustainable and affordable alternatives are developed, readable.

These are analyses of the cases discussed in the trajectory of Kunstenpunt (Flanders Arts Institute) "Ruimte voor kunst / Space for art". For each case, we made a scheme of the actors involved, their goals, their interests, and their interactions. Here you see four different cases.



They end up in a mesh of circle lines and text-boxes. I will not go into detail. The aim of this presentation is to provide some general insights and come to syntheses. One general insight is that it is complicated: **each case offers us a very different narrative of success and failure**. And none of them offered a simple ready-made recipe for obtaining space or infrastructure for art. Complexity, however, should not be an excuse not to engage with these cases.

I will try to **reduce some of the complexity of the cases, in order to make sense of them**. While also trying to avoid oversimplifying things.

Let me begin the story by introducing the **different types of actors** we encountered in all the cases.

We will start with the protagonists of these cases. The **artists** and **arts organisations**. 'Arts organisations' also refers to artist collectives here.

It is important to bear in mind that all the cases analysed take place *in cities*. In urban neighbourhoods in Flanders and Brussels. In these neighbourhoods there are of course **local residents**. Sometimes residents gather in **citizens' initiatives** – I use 'citizens' initiatives' for lack of a better word. It should be stressed that not every local resident – nor every artist – has the same residence documents. And some of the local residents also feature in the cases as **owners of a property**. A property they want to sell or to bequeath.

On the other hand, we have **local governments**. Very important actors in these cases. Because Belgium has a very complex governmental structure, we should also mention:

- the Flemish Government
- the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region
- the Federal Government
- the Provincial Governments
- the Flemish Community Commission and the Communal Comity Commission in Brussels

These **higher government levels** cover an array of different competences. And they are aided by different **government administrations**. Next to government administrations in the strict sense, we should also mention **government architects** – in Dutch 'bouwmeesters', or 'maître architects' in French. Then there are **social housing associations**. We should neither forget **state owned enterprises** (SOEs). Especially in these cases, we encountered a lot of **municipally owned companies** – MOCs, or in Dutch: 'autonome gemeentebedrijven'.

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As the cases deal with using or obtaining infrastructure, there are **real estate developers**. In some cases, there are **vacant property managers** involved – ‘leegstandsbeheerders’. We should also mention **investors** – in real estate, or in other assets – and **companies in other businesses** than real estate. Sometimes, corporations and banks brand themselves as **socially responsible**.



This list of actors is not exhaustive, but it will suffice for now. I added different colours to different types of actors. There are those at the bottom left (yellow), those to the bottom right (red), and those on top (blue). This is because I want to bring a certain order in the group of actors involved. One way of doing that is to look at their respective **goals and interests**.

One border I wish to draw here separates the red actors at the bottom right from the rest. A large deal of what these actors do is aimed at making **profit**.

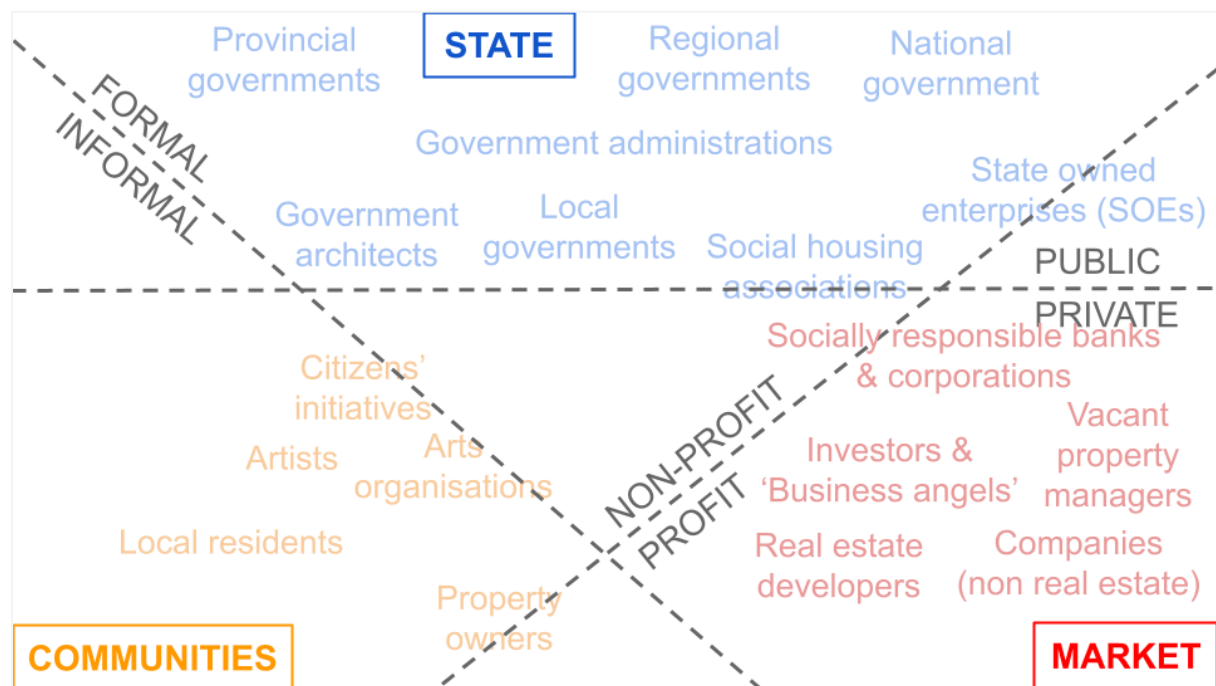
Another line can be drawn between the blue actors on top and the others. This is a division between what I shall call **public and private interests**. Here, 'private' means that their goals and interests primarily lie in serving the individual or the group at hand. This is the case, for example, with the real estate developer whose actions are aimed at selling a product, buying assets, satisfying her shareholders, continuing her enterprise, etcetera. In this sense, her

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aims are private. In a different but related way, you could say that the interests of local residents are also private. Their concern might be, for example, keeping their neighbourhood a pleasant place for them to live.

By contrast, the government actors – the blue ones on top – should be serving the public interest. ‘Public interest’ means that these actors relate themselves to the different groups and layers in a society, of which they are the democratic representatives, and for whom they redistribute the public means.

A last line separates the yellow actors at the bottom left from the others. Broadly speaking, their interests and actions are rather governed by **informal** social relationships. These are opposed to the **formal**, externalised regulations and values of market activities and the formal legislation that determine government actions.



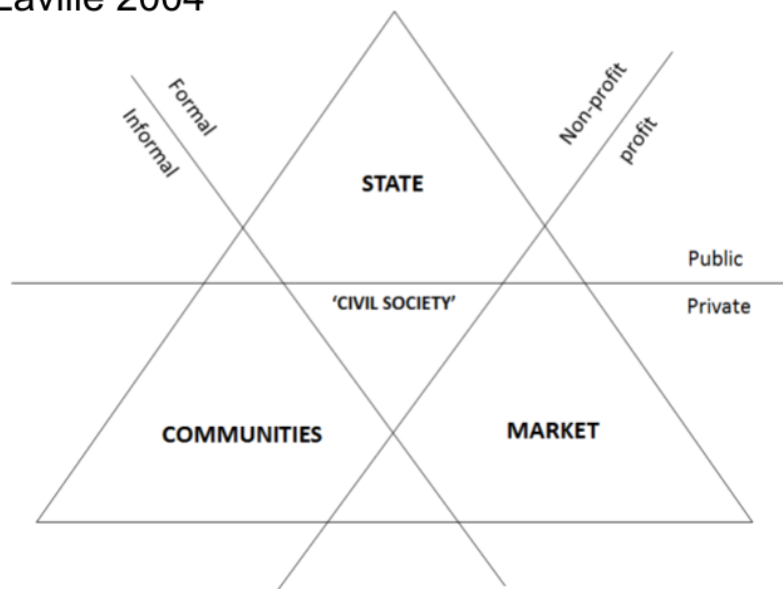
These three lines divide what I shall call **state**, **market**, and **communities**.

The dividing lines are **permeable**. That is the reason why some of the actors are represented as being on the borders and not as being enclosed by them.

Take for example:

- Citizen initiatives or art organisations. Their ways of working and their actions are in many cases governed by formalised or semi-formalised shared agreements or codes of conduct. So you could say they transgress the line between formal and informal.
- Property owners. As an individual owner of a property, they might want to sell that property with profit. Thereby, they obviously cross the line between non-profit and profit.
- State owned enterprises like municipally owned companies. Although a government is their main shareholder, their actions are in many cases aimed at making profit. Thus they cross the line between profit and non-profit. They can also come very close to the border between public and private.

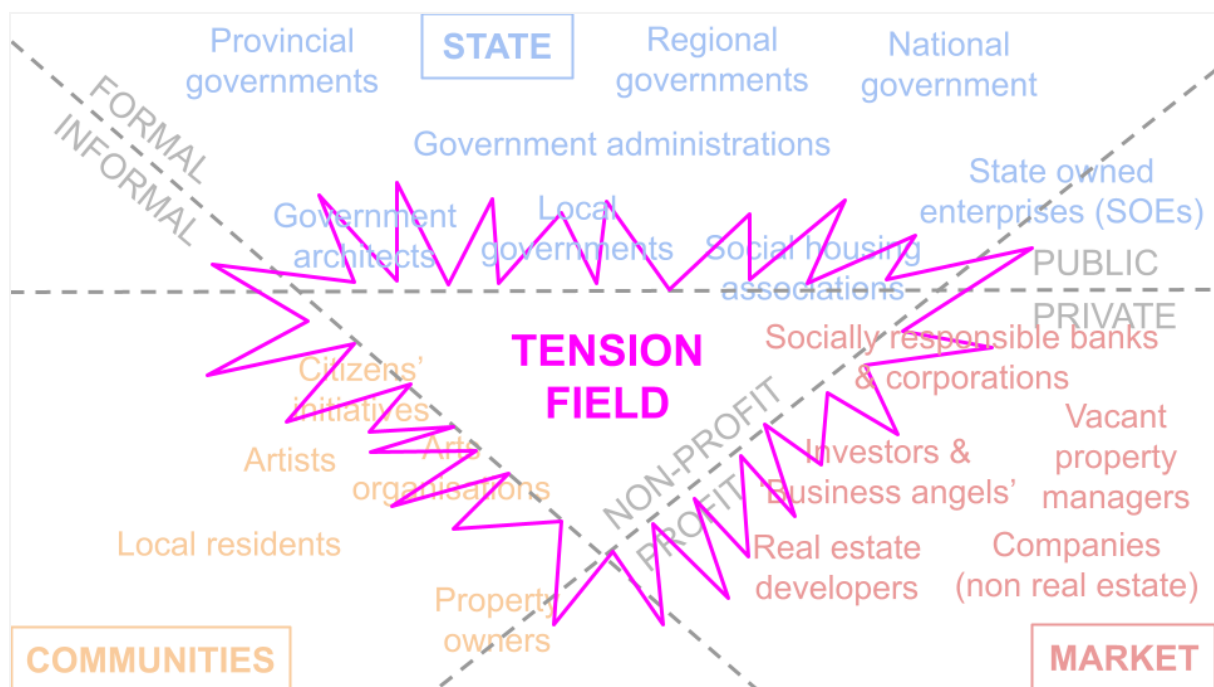
## Evers & Laville 2004



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I drew inspiration from the social sciences, from a scheme by Evers and Laville (2004).<sup>1</sup> This scheme was originally intended to theorise the development of civil society initiatives in Europe. Although the original theoretical model does not take into account artistic initiatives, it has proven to be a useful model for us to analyse the interactions between the different actors I described.

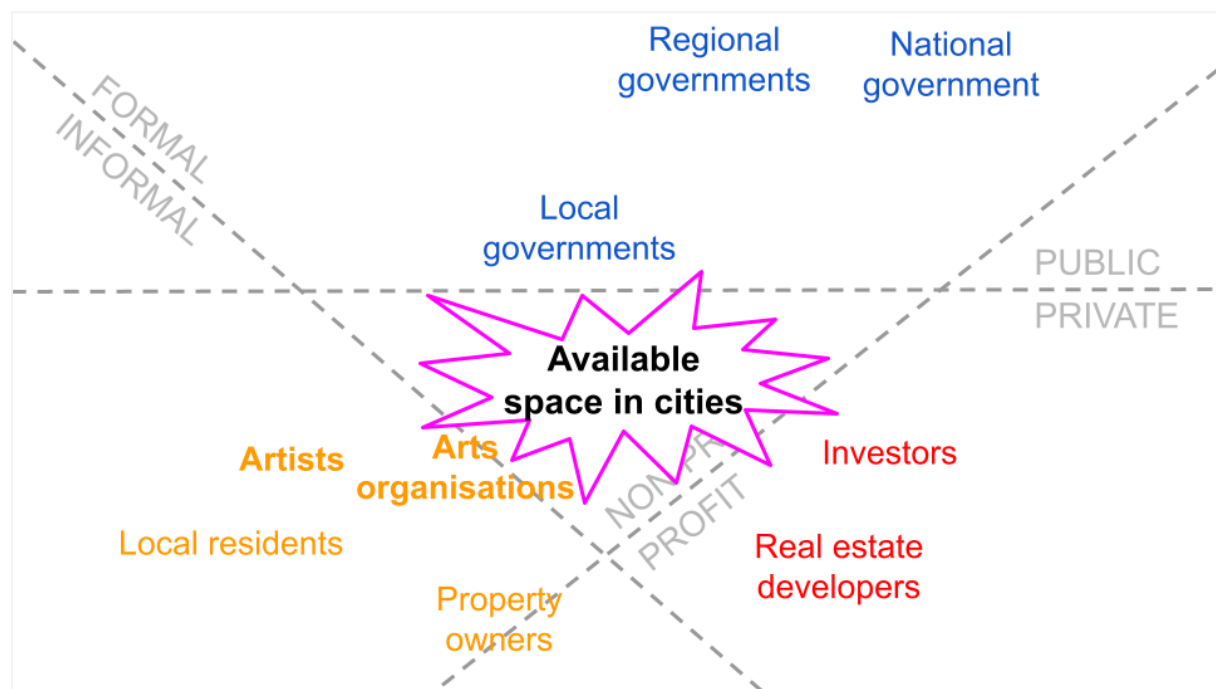
It is not a perfect model to categorise these actors. I do not wish to pigeonhole every actor mentioned. You might come up with some very valid arguments why one kind of actor does not belong in a certain category. But our primary goal is **to make sense of the dynamics between those different actors, with respect to their different norms and interests**. We hope this is a way to **facilitate the conversation between them**.



<sup>1</sup> Evers, Adalbert, and Jean-Louis Laville. 2004. 'Defining the Third Sector in Europe'. In *The Third Sector in Europe*, 11–42. Globalization and Welfare. Cheltenham/Northampton: Edward Elgar.

The most interesting part of the model by Evers and Laville is that they define the space in between state, community, and market as a **tension field**. Actors on all sides of the scheme interact with each other. And their actions, their goals, their needs can converge and align with each other. But they can create a process that, although beneficial for the parties involved, might be to the disadvantage of others. So you have **converging and diverging processes** in the tension-field.

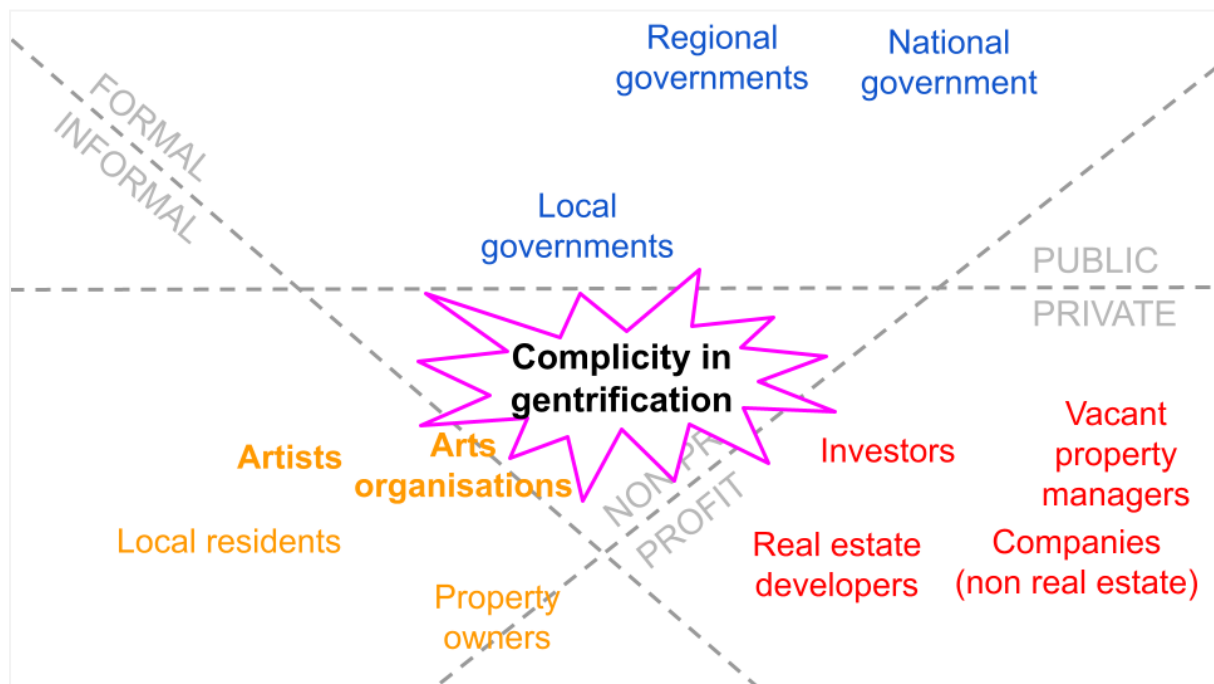
Let me illustrate this by taking the perspective of the artists and art-organisations in the cases we have analysed. The issue pervading all the cases discussed is the **need for space** to make art, to develop an artistic practice, to discuss one's artistic work with peers, where ideas, contacts, resources are exchanged. This space can take the shape of, for example, ateliers, rehearsal studios, workshops, residencies, or small spaces for exhibition projects. However, artists and arts organisations signal problems with this kind of space, especially in the urban environment.



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One obvious problem is that of **rising prices in renting or in buying real estate**. In this dynamic, property-owners in urban neighbourhoods sell their property with a surplus value, and real estate developers are driving forces in renovating infrastructure or erecting new buildings, which are to be sold or rented to make a profitable business. This, in turn, satisfies their shareholders and the involved investors. Neighbourhoods get a makeover and housing prices rise. Those who cannot afford to rent or buy infrastructure are exempted. This affects artists and art organisations that are living and working in these neighbourhoods. But it also affects the other residents lacking monetary wealth.

These processes of **gentrification** take place within the boundaries of existing legislation – on federal, regional, or local level. Gentrification might even be the intentional outcome of certain policies by government actors. Take for example policies that aim to attract middle-class families to urban neighbourhoods with tax incentives. The position of artists and art organisations in gentrification processes, is of course more complex than being mere victims.

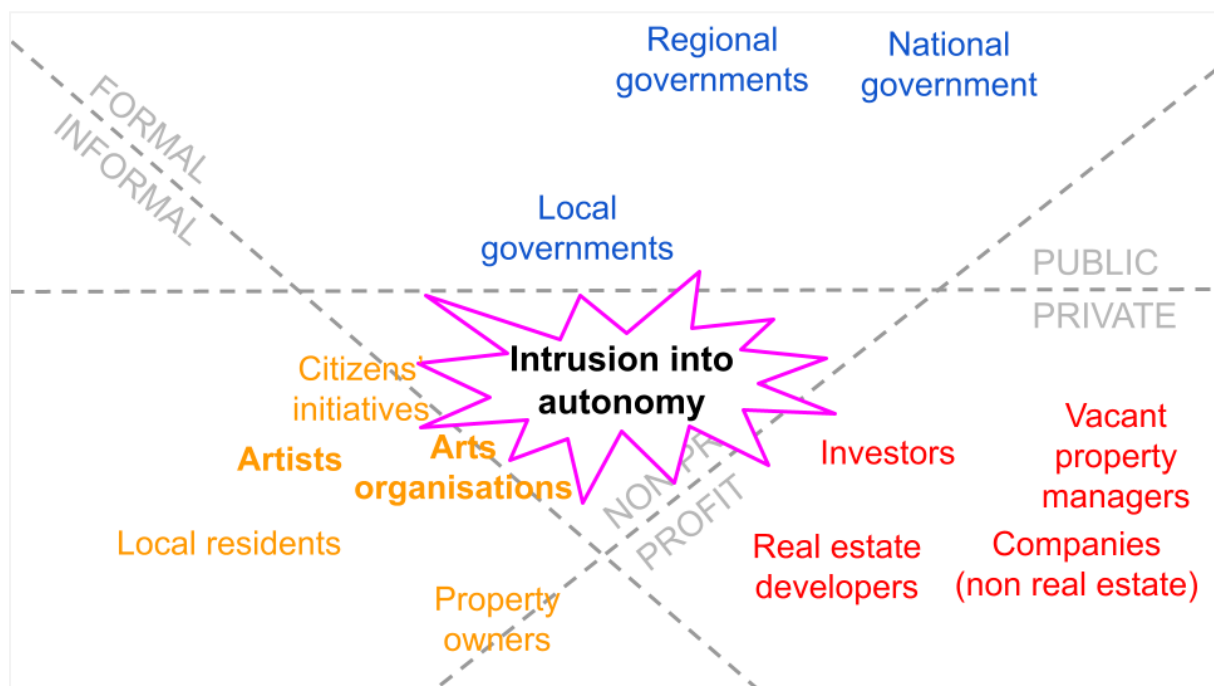




Their presence and activities can increase the perceived quality and symbolic value of the neighbourhoods they live and work in. In turn, this makes them more attractive to wealthier potential inhabitants. Many urban regeneration projects actively involve artists and arts organisations.

In the short term, this can encompass benefits for artists and art organisations. For example when vacant buildings are temporally designated as artist studios, with the help of vacant property managers. Or when commissions for art works or events are organised as part of urban regeneration projects. In the longer term, things might turn out less beneficial for artists, arts organisations, and local residents.

But even in the short term, matters have become more complicated. The exploitation of vacant infrastructure has itself become a profitable business. And artists and art organisations have become less attractive to vacant property managers and real estate managers to involve in the management of vacant property. Because you can generate more money from lucrative start-up or pop-up companies from other, economically less precarious sectors.



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One last locus of friction I want to describe here concerns **the autonomy of the artistic vision** of artists and arts organisations. When being involved in projects with the intention of regenerating neighbourhoods, artists and arts organisations are sometimes asked to do something with or for the people or organisations in the neighbourhood. The question might come from local governments, but it might as well come from citizens' initiatives, property owners, companies, etcetera. It might concern collaborating on an art project or an event, giving a workshop, organising studio visits, collaborating with a project of a local organisation or a local company, etcetera.

This might work out fine for certain artists or organisations. As long as their artistic vision is open to it. But it might well be the other way around: the requests of other parties might be considered as an intrusion into the artistic process, the artistic needs or the autonomy of the organisation or artist involved. During the process of artistic development and creation, many arts organisations and artists simply prefer to be left alone.

I would like to stress that I do not wish to portray artists and arts organisations as helpless victims of intricately evil dynamics. My goal is to get a grip on the complex interplay of diverging and converging needs.

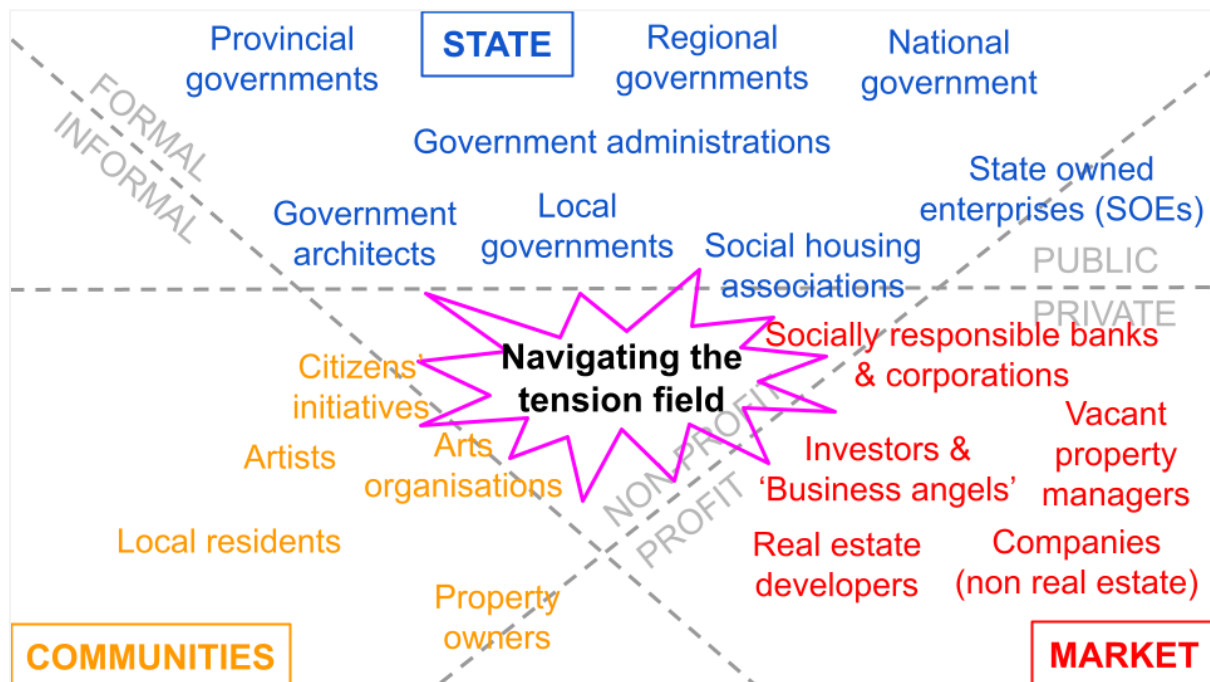
State actors, community actors, or market actors are not monolithic entities. **The same type of actor might behave very differently according to the situation.** One local government featured for example in two of the cases we analysed. In one case, a local government was crucial in preventing the proposed project from being realised. In the other case, that same government was actually a catalyst for realising the project.

This makes sense if you consider that governments need to relate themselves to all the different 'private' needs circulating in society. And moreover, different government levels act differently according to their competences and their policy views. Even different government administrations – or other executive government services for that matter – might behave very differently from one another.

Likewise, marketplayers such as banks or investors with socially responsible or non-profit goals and values have been crucial for some of the cases when it comes to providing funds, loans, or advice on how to do business or how to get financed.

Actors on one side of the tension field do not always have control over the dynamics happening between actors on the other side of the tension field. Even though they are affected by the outcome of those dynamics. That is important to realise when looking at the strategies that artists and arts organisations have used to navigate the tension field. Sometimes they are confronted with situations that they hardly have any grip on, but which are crucial for the success or failure of what they are doing. It is this **degree of contingency**

that puts their own responsibility and agency into perspective. However, it does not render them completely helpless.



To conclude with, I would like to discuss some of the strategies applied by artists and arts organisations. And one that pervades all the cases is that it is beneficial to make **alliances between artists and/or between arts organisations**. This offers possibilities for sharing in resources, or alliances between artistic actors and other community actors, such as citizens' initiatives, or with state or market actors.

Key to a fruitful alliance is making good agreements that take into account the different needs of the actors involved. For artists and art organisations that might include **compromises** that affect their initial artistic autonomy or their initial artistic vision. The point is: how far do they adjust their needs, visions, and expectations in relation to their alliances?

**Obtaining knowledge of how state and market function** is another strategy prevalent among the cases we have discussed. Knowledge on, for example, how state and market actors function. What legal rules on obtaining an infrastructure apply? What tax rules and tax

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exemptions apply? Who to contact for support? Who to talk to? (Enlarging your network is also enlarging your knowledge.) Which opportunities for funding are there? Which different types for obtaining infrastructure are possible?

It is, for example, interesting to see that selling and buying property are not the only options for that matter. We have discussed some cases in which types of ground leases, such as 'erfpacht' or 'recht van opstal', were applied. The initiators of projects often spend a great deal of time and study on exactly that. These things can even differ from city to city, and thus demand different knowledge to obtain.

More than once, **an external actor** – take for example 'business angels' – crosses their path and **brings into the project a great batch of knowledge** – for example on how the market works. They often also introduce a very useful network.

Once the knowledge is obtained on how state actors and market players function, it proves beneficial to **secure that knowledge**, to document, or to formalise it. Even if the current project stops at a certain moment, the knowledge and the network generated within these projects can be a crucial advantage for other, future projects – even projects by others. In one case, the original project stopped at a certain moment, and the people involved took their network and know-how on how local governments work into a very different project, which eventually got realised.

Different cases have experimented with different **organisational models**. The two models that appeared most often in the cases are the cooperative company – 'coöperatieve vennootschap' – and the community land trust model. Let me end my presentation with some of the advantages of these organisational models:

- one advantage is that they enable a collective ownership of infrastructure by **formalising the alliances** between community actors, or
- between community actors and market players, such as investors or business angels.
- These formal organisations can also function as **a vehicle to collect an income, to apply for funding and tax incentives, and to mitigate financial risks** – risks a collective might be less prone to than an individual.
- While at the same time they also **formalise the non-profit goals** of the initiatives, by creating barriers against profit maximisation.

I thank you for your attention.