Evelyne Deceur, Maria Bouverne-De Bie & Angelo Van Gorp

3 The Social Question as an Urban Question. A Social-Pedagogical Analysis of Participatory Initiatives in Rabot (Ghent) during the Nineteenth Century

Throughout the past few decades, urban development programmes for so-called disadvantaged neighbourhoods have gained considerable attention. In recent European history, in the wake of a growing political recognition that exclusion threatens social stability, economic prosperity and democratic legitimacy,¹ the focus of these programmes gradually shifted from mainly physical projects towards more broader and integrated strategies that take local community participation into account.² Today, participation is considered a general trend as it carries the promise of connecting (policy) rationality to perception,³ obtaining efficient and effective decisions and outcomes,⁴ and fostering processes of empowerment and individual and social wellbeing.⁵

1 Pascal De Decker et al., eds., *On the Origins of Urban Development Programmes in Nine European Countries* (Antwerp/Apeldoorn: Garant, 2003).

2 See, for example: Robert Furbey, "Urban 'Regeneration': Reflections on a Metaphor," *Critical Social Policy* 19, no. 4 (1999): 419–445; Marc Parés, Jordi Bonet-Martí and Marc Martí-Costa, "Does Participation Really Matter in Urban Regeneration Policies? Exploring Governance Networks in Catalonia (Spain)," *Urban Affairs Review* 48, no. 2 (2012): 238–271; Venda Louise Pollock and Joanne Sharp, "Real Participation or the Tyranny of Participatory Practice? Public Art and Community Involvement in the Regeneration of the Raploch, Scotland," *Urban Studies* 49, no. 14 (2012): 3063–3079; Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes, eds., *Urban Regeneration. A Handbook* (London: Sage, 2000); Federico Savini, "The Endowment of Community Participation: Institutional Settings in Two Urban Regeneration Projects," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 5 (2011): 949–968.

3 See, for example: Nico de Boer and Jos van der Lans, *Burgerkracht in de wijk. Sociale wijkteams en de lokalisering van de verzorgingsstaat* (Rotterdam: Platform 31, 2013); Filip De Rynck and Karolien Dezeure, *Burgerparticipatie in Vlaamse steden. Naar een innoverend participatiebeleid* (Bruges: Vanden Broele, 2009).

4 See, for example: Frances Cleaver, "Institutions, Agency and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development," in *Participation: The New Tyranny*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 36–55; Ruth McAlister, "Putting the 'Community' into Community Planning: Assessing Community Inclusion in Northern Ireland," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 3 (2010): 533–547.

5 See, for example: Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

However, in parallel to this rise in participatory belief and interventions, critics have suggested that the claims made for participation conceal far more than they reveal. Questions are raised about who is participating, why, where, when, at what level and what for.⁶ Peris S. Jones, for instance, notes that there is no such thing as ‘the people’ or ‘the community’,⁷ nor does sharing through participation necessarily means sharing in power.⁸ Participation can, according to Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, even lead to ‘tyranny’, understood as “the illegitimate and/or unjust uses of power” which, at its worst, “can obscure, and [...] sustain, [...] macro-level inequalities and injustice”⁹ and limit innovative planning and policies.

Yet remarkably, while citizen participation is constantly challenged and subverted in practice,¹⁰ most discussions only tend to deal with the promotion of participatory practices and barely question *what* participation really stands for. Overall, participation appears as a vague ‘catch-all term’, linked up to both problems of social inequality, differences and exclusions, and topics of order and cohesion.¹¹

In this chapter, we assert that participative efforts have a long and varied history and periodically regenerated around new schools of thought, institutional

6 See, for example: Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, eds., *Participation: The New Tyranny* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan, eds., *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development* (London/New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2004); Jan Masschelein and Kerlijn Quaghebeur, “Participation for Better or for Worse?,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 39, no. 1 (2005): 51–65; Robert Lawy and Gert Biesta, “Citizenship-as-Practice: The Educational Implications of an Inclusive and Relational Understanding of Citizenship,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 54, no. 1 (2006): 34–50; Maria Bouverne-De Bie and Sven De Visscher, “Participatie: een sleutelbegrip in de samenlevingsopbouw,” in *Handboek samenlevingsopbouw in Vlaanderen*, ed. André Desmet et al. (Bruges: Die Keure, 2008), 41–53; Hilary Silver, Alan Scott and Yuri Kazepov, “Participation in Urban Contention and Deliberation,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 3 (2010): 453–477; Rudi Roose, Griet Roets and Maria Bouverne-De Bie, “Irony and Social Work: In Search of the Happy Sisyphus,” *British Journal of Social Work* 42, no. 8 (2012): 1592–1607.

7 Peris S. Jones, “Urban Regeneration’s Poisoned Chalice: Is There an Impasse in (Community) Participation-based Policy?,” *Urban Studies* 40, no. 3 (2003): 581–601.

8 Sarah C. White, “Depoliticising Development: The Uses and Abuses of Participation,” in *Development, NGOs, and Civil Society*, ed. Oxfam GB (London: Oxfam GB, 2000), 142–174.

9 Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, “The Case for Participation as Tyranny,” 14.

10 Margo Huxley, “Historicizing Planning, Problematising Participation,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (2013): 1541

11 Lesley Hustinx, “Participatie: een sociologische benadering,” in *Participatie: what’s in a name? Een multidisciplinaire kijk op maatschappelijke participatie*, eds. Jan Van Damme, Frankie Schram and Marleen Brans (Bruges: Vanden Broele Academics, 2012), 63–64.

agendas and changing political circumstances “from which we cannot detach ourselves at will”.¹² Therefore, we call for a thorough critical understanding of the rhetoric and the practice of participation itself. Regarding the specific topic of this volume, we analyse what participation meant within an urban reality in the course of the 19th century. How was participation conceived and realised in the interplay between the individual, the institutional and the policy-level,¹³ and what were the underlying logics, agendas and views of the initiatives developed?

To scrutinise the meaning and shaping of these 19th-century participatory convictions and practices, we adopt a genealogical angle that traces “the erratic and discontinuous process whereby the past became present.”¹⁴ With Michel Foucault we believe that such an angle can show that “the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history”.¹⁵ More concretely, we use a “history of the present”-approach, which is “a method for understanding change through exploring how the objects of thought and action are assembled, connected and disconnected over time and space”.¹⁶ While exposing the underlying, heterogeneous, sometimes forgotten contexts and views of social-cultural initiatives, we thus indicate which constructions were possible in the past and may still be present today. The search for such constructions and patterns of change clearly goes beyond simply describing how it used to be. Rather, it is looking back from a certain perspective, next to other possible perspectives. After all, historical research is by definition non-neutral, incomplete and subjective.¹⁷

12 John Harris, “State Social Work: Constructing the Present from Moments of the Past,” *British Journal of Social Work* 38, no. 4 (2008): 665; Walter Lorenz, “Practicising History. Memory and Contemporary Professional Practice,” *International Social Work* 50, no. 5 (2007): 601.

13 Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York, Harper and Row, 1972).

14 David Garland, “What is a ‘History of the Present’? On Foucault’s Genealogies and their Critical Preconditions,” *Punishment & Society*, 16, no. 4 (2014): 372.

15 Foucault cited in Michael Kelly, ed., *Critique and Power. Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1994), 127.

16 Thomas S. Popkewitz, “Curriculum History, Schooling and the History of the Present,” *History of Education* 40, no. 1 (2011): 18.

17 Marc Depaepe, “Geen ambacht zonder werktuigen. Reflecties over de conceptuele omgang met het pedagogische verleden,” in *Pedagogische historiografie. Een socio-culturele lezing van de geschiedenis van opvoeding en onderwijs*, eds. Angelo Van Gorp et al. (Leuven/Den Haag: Acco, 2011), 15–62; Christoff Lorenz, *De constructie van het verleden. Een inleiding in de theorie van de geschiedenis* (Amsterdam/Meppel: Boom, 1994); Klaus Mollenhauer, *Vergeten samenhang*.

In the following sections, we draw on the intriguing case of Rabot, a working-class neighbourhood, part of the semi-periphery of Ghent, a medium-sized city in Belgium. The quarter, for over a century an important segregated habitat for textile labourers, was recently appointed for urban regeneration and can be seen as an example of a socio-economic context marked by deindustrialisation, explosive poverty problems and a growing diversity. Though Rabot is barely one square kilometre, today the district accommodates over 10,000 inhabitants and an ever-growing number of ‘users’, such as students, illegal immigrants, shoppers and visitors to the nearby courthouse.¹⁸ Moreover, in Ghent, the quarter has the reputation of being the youngest neighbourhood (27 per cent of the inhabitants is younger than 20) with the biggest number of unemployed and non-professionals (66.7 per cent) and people coming from abroad (68.5 per cent).¹⁹

We briefly outline how Ghent became a local exemplar of the Industrial Revolution and discuss the position of Rabot within this context by analysing a range of socio-historical and urban studies on the quarter. We show how in the course of the late 19th century, Rabot became a self-sufficient but also impoverished ‘island’, where Catholics, liberals and socialists installed a ‘pillarised’ network and a social-cultural infrastructure that created a sense of community and supported the residents ‘from the cradle to the grave’.²⁰ By doing so however, we state that the idea of socio-spatial class segregation was strengthened and participation, seen as ‘consuming’ and ‘taking part’ in the activities offered, grew to be the norm.

The working class as a dangerous class

At present, Ghent is the third largest city in Belgium with over 260,000 inhabitants. Its thriving textile business played a decisive role in the city’s history. In the Middle Ages for instance, Ghent, famous for its expensive woollen fabrics, was one of the biggest and wealthiest cities north of the Alps. During the 19th

Over cultuur en opvoeding (Amsterdam/Meppel: Boom, 1986), 11–13; Michel Vandenbroeck, *In verzekerde bewaring. Honderdvijftig jaar kinderen, ouders en kinderopvang* (Amsterdam: SWP, 2009), 317–318.

18 Luc De Droogh, Jolijn De Haene and Griet Verschelden, “Community Building as Forum and Arena,” in *Perspectives on Community Practices: Living and Learning in Community. Conference Proceedings, ESREA 2015*, eds. Sabina Jelenc Krašovec and Damijan Štefanc (Ljubljana: ESREA, 2015), 64–75.

19 Stad Gent, *Buurtmonitor* (Ghent: Stad Gent, 2016).

20 For the phenomenon of pillarisation in Belgium, see: chapter 1/introduction to this volume.

century, after some turbulent years and the relocation of (most of) the artisanal production to the countryside, the introduction of the mechanical spinning frame (1800), the steam engine (1805) and the power loom (1820) made the city's cotton, linen and flax industry rapidly boom.²¹ Ghent became known as the 'Manchester of the continent'.²²

Together with this industrialisation, the view of Ghent changed tremendously.²³ The population doubled (from 50,827 in 1793 to 100,810 in 1842)²⁴, medieval buildings like the 'Augustijnenklooster' ('Augustinian Monastery') and the 'Gravensteen' ('Castle of the Counts') were converted into spinning and weaving mills, and the surface area of the built-up part of the town, that until then had been hardly expanded, got covered by narrow dead-end alleys within housing blocks and courtyards. The houses in these so-called "*cités*" were composed of one single room per floor, they shared three walls with the neighbours, had no private sanitary facilities and were scarcely visible from the street.²⁵ The *Batavia-cité* was probably the most horrible 'ghetto':

One 100 meters long, 30 meters wide, with 117 houses around 4 corridors, 6 communal closets, 2 pumps and an open sewer in which the gutters and toilets flowed. [...] [Here] 117 families, 585 people lived closely together [...] despised by the law and the rich, excluded from society, just like the lepers in the Middle Ages.²⁶

In 1845, two professors of Ghent University, Daniel Mareska (1803–1858) and J. Heyman, condemned the proliferation of these narrow, hidden streets where misery, disease and crime reigned. According to them, the high population density – around 1850, one third of Ghent's inhabitants lived on 3 percent of the city's sur-

21 Dominique Vanneste, "The Preservation of Nineteenth-century Industrial Buildings near Historical City Centres: The Case of Ghent," *Acta Academica* 36, no. 1 (2004): 157–185.

22 Cedric Goossens and Angelo Van Gorp, "The Myth of the Phoenix: Progressive Education, Migration and the Shaping of the Welfare-state, 1985–2015," *Paedagogica Historica* 52, no. 5 (2016): 467–484; Frank Simon and Dirk Van Damme, "Education and Moral Improvement in a Belgian Industrial Town (1860–90). François Laurent (1810–87) and the Working Classes in Ghent," *History of Education* 22, no. 1 (1993): 63–84.

23 Frank Andriaensen, "Breken en bouwen in een industriële stad," in *Bouwen voor de industrie*, eds. Guido Deseyn, Frank Adriaensen and Johan Van de Wiele (Ghent: Museum voor Industriële Archeologie en Textiel, 1989), 39–84.

24 Maurice Dumont, *Gent. Een stedenaardrijkskundige studie. I Tekst. II Atlas* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1951), 120.

25 Willy Steensels, "De tussenkomst van de overheid in de arbeidershuisvesting. Gent, 1850–1904," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 3–4 (1977): 447–500.

26 Karel Van Isacker, *Mijn land in de kering. 1830–1980. Deel 1: een ouderwetse wereld 1830–1914* (Antwerp/Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1978), 75.

face²⁷ –, the lack of basic sanitation as well as the poor hygienic conditions seriously endangered the health of the labourers. Nonetheless, it was not this permanent undernourishment, physical exhaustion and the low life expectancy of the working class that worried the industrial elites the most. Rather they feared the disorder, immorality, putrefaction and the outbreak of riots among the increasing number of proletarians.²⁸ As a result of this ‘social question’, understood as both the fear of revolts and concern for the grinding living and working conditions of the labourers, Ghent’s bourgeoisie encouraged the idea of socio-spatial segregation to minimise encounters between the social classes. In this respect, Kobe Boussauw and Guido Deseyn have delineated how during the second half of the 19th century, inspired by the work of urbanist Georges-Eugène Haussmann in Paris (1852), countless slums and small working-class districts in Ghent’s city centre were demolished and new parks, squares and wide avenues were constructed in order to display the ‘natural superiority’ of the elites.²⁹ By 1860, the city walls and gates were torn down and the patent law, a tax on in- and outgoing goods, was abolished to make room to parcel out the waterlogged grounds that surrounded Ghent.

Gradually, a dichotomy arose between the bourgeois south, where among others a prestigious station, a zoo and theatres were raised, and the north of Ghent, where the labourers who had been expelled from the centre settled in new houses in cul-de-sacs between the factory chimneys.³⁰ Through its position, at the north-western outskirts of the city and close to the two important canals to Bruges and Ostend (the North Sea) and Terneuzen (the Netherlands), Rabot was one of the first new neighbourhoods to arise. The district itself owes its name to the fortified lock (1489) on the old river *De Lieve* that once separated the quarter from the centre. From the 16th century onwards, Rabot had been nothing more than a muddy territory used to dump everything that could be harmful within

27 Jan De Maeyer and Leen Van Molle, eds., *Joris Helleputte. Architect en politicus. 1852–1925* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers/KADOC Artes 1, 1998), 22.

28 Jaak Brepoels, *Wat zoudt zij zonder 't werkvolk zijn? De geschiedenis van de Belgische arbeidersbeweging. 1830–2015* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Van Halewyck, 2015), 30–31; Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Armoede en kapitalisme in pre-industrieel Europa* (Antwerpen/Amsterdam: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij, 1980), 198–199.

29 Kobe Boussauw, “City Profile: Ghent, Belgium,” *Cities* 40 (2014): 32–43; Guido Deseyn, “Rechtstreekse invloeden der Gentse textielindustriëlen op de 19^{de}-eeuwse stadsontwikkeling: bedrijfsinplantingen, arbeidershuisvesting en openbare werken,” in *Vijfde Nationaal Kongres voor Industriële Archeologie Textiel*, ed. Werkgroep voor Industriële Archeologie der Rijksuniversiteit Gent (Ghent: Jan Dhondt Stichting, 1979), 171–199.

30 Gita Deneckere, “Stad van industrie en arbeid,” in *Gent, stad van alle tijden*, eds. Marc Boone and Gita Deneckere (Brussels/Ghent: Mercatorfonds/STAM, 2010), 163–164.

Ghent itself, such as a cemetery and a place for the victims of the bubonic plague.³¹

Dictated by the rhythm of the looms

Already in the decades prior to 1860, when the patent law was annulled, numerous textile factories had been built within Ghent's fortifications, close to the old Rabot lock. In the 'Molenaarsstraat' for example, cotton printers *De Graeve* (founded at the end of the 18th century) and *Lousbergs* (1785) had installed their companies. Respectively in 1843 and in 1827, both were taken over by *de Hemptinne* (1816, in 1873 renamed *NV Florida*), an enterprise located within the same street. Just around the corner, in the 'Vogelenzang', there was the cotton mill *Voortman* (1790, in 1876 renamed *NV Texas*) and the flax firm *La Linière Gantoise* (1838). Just outside the old medieval walls, textile industrialists Charles De Buck-Van der Waerden (1827) and François Liévin De Smet (1802, in 1876 his company was renamed *NV La Louisiana*) owned two major plants. There was the metal workshop *Atelier du Vulcain* (1838) and the textile factory *Parmentier-Van Hoegaerden* (1860, in 1898 renamed *Usines Cotonnières de Gand-Zele-Tubize*).³²

Right after the city gates were removed, Ghent's (liberal) city government, in which a small group of industrialists was strongly represented, made up plans to rapidly convert the area according to their own ideas of a bourgeois, segregated society. During the 1860s, they constructed the public boulevards 'Begijnhoflaan' and 'Plezante Vest' (now: 'Blaisantvest'), between the district and the city centre. An extra canal, the 'Verbindingskanaal' ('Junction Canal') (1863) was dug to connect the two waterways to Ostend and Terneuzen. The Rabot-station (1872), part of the big Ghent ring railroad, opened to process the textile goods.³³ The triangular area between the station, the canals and the wide boulevards, part of

31 Paul Blondeel, "Reading and (Re)writing the City: The Use of the Habitus Concept in Urban Research and Development", Paper for the International Conference 'Doing, Thinking, Feeling Home: The Mental Geography of Residential Environments', Delft, 2005, 5, <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid:4ae199c3-a9af-4a10-a9de-fa9dc11dae7a/datastream/OBJ>.

32 Robin Debo, "Spinnen en weven in de stad. Een chronologische en geografische reconstructie van de Gentse textielindustrie 1900–2000" (Master's thesis, University Ghent, 2014); Peter Wezenbeek, "De urbanisatie van de Wondelgemmeersen (Rabotwijk)," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis van Techniek en Industriële Cultuur* 4 (1986): 89–165.

33 Erik Dekeukeleire, *Trein, tram en trolley in de regio 'Rabot'. 1864–2008* (Ghent: Lokaal Dienstencentrum Ten Hove, 2008), 11–12.

the wetland 'Wondelgemse Meersen', was drained and raised with the remains of the former ramparts and the soil of the new canal.

In the following years, Rabot thus evolved from a swampy no-man's-land into a small company town.³⁴ New large-scale firms were installed: Ghent's Gas Company *Stadsgasfabriek* (1891), the mills *De Nieuwe Molens van Gent en Brugge* (1897) and the textile processing factory *De Backer-De Rudder* (1899). In the meantime, the previously worthless grounds that were bought up by industrialists, especially members of the De Smet and de Hemptinne families, were developed methodically in a draught board pattern (see figure 3.1). While the (more) wealthy citizens and the senior executives settled at the borders of Rabot, the vast majority of the labourers were packed away in the small, poorly equipped houses in the heart of the district.³⁵

This urge to create as many (very modest) houses as possible within this already very cramped neighbourhood was later on referred to as cold blooded philanthropy. The urbanisation of Ghent's periphery was, according to André Coene and Martine De Raedt, utilitarian; "the greed for maximum profit was primary".³⁶ For the 'textile barons' the development of the quarter was interesting from three perspectives: "housing the labourers who from then on could be expelled from the city centre where the bourgeoisie had now constructed their own 'ideal image of a town'; attracting enough (future) workforce for their factories; and an important return on investment of what used to be unprofitable grounds".³⁷

"The rhythm of the looms"³⁸ completely regulated everyday life in Rabot. In the streets hundreds of labourers went to work in the morning and returned home together; in the streets, large public clocks indicated the time, barrows with bales of cotton drove on and off, new sheds and ware- and stock-houses emerged, and small traders started a grocery or a bar. In the factories, a production logic took the upper hand. The working conditions were often horrendous. The hot machines regularly caught fire, there were many accidents, and children, women and men who worked long hours for a pittance, were indecently treated or even threatened. In this vein, Bart De Wilde has argued that the housing and

34 Paul Blondeel, *Waar ik woon, wil ik niet leven. Omgangsvormen van een kansarm genoemde wijk met een veranderende stad* (Heverlee: Onderzoeksgroep stad en architectuur, 1999), 19.

35 André Capiteyn et al., *Gentse torens achter rook van schoorstenen. Gent in de periode 1860–1895* (Ghent: Dienst voor Kulturele Zaken, 1983); Johan Van de Wiele, *De Rabotwijk. Ontstaan en evolutie van een wijk in de negentiende-eeuwse gordel* (Ghent: CERA, 1990), 6–10.

36 André Coene and Martine De Raedt, *Kaarten van Gent. Plannen voor Gent. 1534–2011* (Ghent: Snoeck Publishers, 2012), 168.

37 Deseyn, "Rechtstreekse invloeden," 171–172.

38 Bart De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot. De teloorgang van de textielnijverheid* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2007), 49.

Fig. 3.1: Approved urbanisation plan for the East Side of Rabot (1889) (Ghent University Library). Catalogue number: BIB.VLBL.HFII.PGR.001.01. This image is licensed under a Creative Commons license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

supply funds provided by (some) industrialists were not so much expressions of charity, but formed attempts to supervise and discipline the labourers.³⁹ Dirk Van Damme and Frank Simon even suggested that the textile patrons considered the private and public poor relief as complimentary to the wages, which relieved them of every social responsibility regarding the miserable living situations of the working class. Moreover, this possibility to appeal to the poor care provided the labourers with the vague promise that they would be helped when needed, which in turn contributed to the acceptance of their own inferior position.⁴⁰

³⁹ Bart De Wilde, “Een sociografisch onderzoek van de Belgische textielpatroons in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw,” *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 74, no. 3–4 (1996): 839–884.

⁴⁰ Frank Simon and Dirk Van Damme, “François Laurent en de sociale kwestie: een offensief beschavingsdefensief,” in *Liber Memorialis François Laurent 1810–1887*, ed. Johan Erauw et al. (Brussels: Story-Scientia, 1989), 113–114.

A pillarised social-cultural infrastructure

Together with the urbanisation of Rabot, the 19th-century textile elites also started setting up a rich organisational life from which they could further control and manage their workers, raise their moral level and keep them on the right track. After all, the misery of the working class that extended to every realm of life – cultural, ethical, intellectual, as much as material – was believed to be primarily due to their own ignorance, neglect of duty and their misbehaviour.⁴¹ These new organisations were charged with the socialisation and civilisation of the labourers; they had to teach them to act sober, fair and diligent, to be aware of their duties, and act as ‘responsible citizens’. The individual and social problems of the proletariat were thus translated into educational issues,⁴² which was in fact considered both a problem and a solution since the labourers on the one hand lacked education, and education on the other hand served to meet this ‘lack’. The underlying educational perspective was neither made explicit nor questioned; it was obvious that the working class needed to be ‘instructed’, which implied that one told “them what to think, how to act and, perhaps most importantly, what to be”.⁴³ Against this background, two different educational ideologies originated in order to make the unformed labourers ready to serve the progress of society⁴⁴: a conservative ideology intended to discipline the lower classes and adjust them to the dominant civic values, and a more progressive ideology focused on supporting the labourers to emancipate from their marginalised position by offering them possibilities to acquire knowledge, dispositions, and skills that could contribute to their chances of social mobility.⁴⁵

In 1872, a new parish called ‘Sint-Jozef’ (‘Saint Joseph’) was founded for the inhabitants of Rabot. The industrial family of de Hemptinne offered land to build

41 Marc Depaepe, *De pedagogisering achterna. Aanzet tot een genealogie van de pedagogische mentaliteit in de voorbije 250 jaar* (Leuven/Amersfoort: Acco, 1999), 146–158.

42 Maria Bouverne-De Bie, “De pedagogisering van sociale problemen. Historische ontwikkelingen in de jeugdwelzijnszorg in Vlaanderen,” *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Wetenschappen* 36 (1991): 1–15.

43 Gert Biesta, “Becoming Public: Public Pedagogy, Citizenship and the Public Sphere,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 13, no. 7 (2012): 690.

44 Evelyne Deceur, “Sociaal-cultureel werk als democratische arena. De inzet van participatieve praktijken in stedelijke contexten” (PhD. diss, University Ghent, 2017), 40–42.

45 Maria Bouverne-De Bie et al., “Learning Democracy in Social Work,” in *Civic Learning, Democratic Citizenship and the Public Sphere*, eds. Gert Biesta, Maria De Bie and Danny Wildemeersch (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer, 2014), 43–54; Simon and Van Damme, “François Laurent,” 109–164.

a new parish church.⁴⁶ In anticipation of the construction of this church in the central 'Wondelgemstraat', priest Aloïs Joos (1830 – 1891) was appointed to gather his new parishioners in initiatives and associations. Therefore, during the 1870s, he opened – for boys and girls separately – a Sunday school and succeeded in financing a Catholic primary school, where lessons in morality and religiosity were linked to alms. He founded several congregations, such as the *Confrerie van de Heilige Jozef* ('Brotherhood of Saint-Joseph', 1872), the *Confrerie van het Heilige Sakrament* ('Brotherhood of the Holy Sacrament', 1873), and the *Confrerie van de Heilige Aloysius* ('Brotherhood of Saint-Aloysius', 1874). Around 1876, a workmen's circle and a *patronage* (a sort of 'youth club') for boys followed. In 1877, a building complex with a chapel, meeting rooms and a celebration hall arose in the 'Vlotstraat' to house the boys' patronage and the workmen's circle.⁴⁷ Once the Saint Joseph Church was officially inaugurated (1883), the parish offered new recreational activities and associations, like the choir *Broederbond* ('Union of Brothers', 1896), part of the Catholic workmen's circle, and excursions led by the parish priest to Holland, Luxemburg and Wallonia (1890 – 1898). During these trips, the members of the workmen's circle could enjoy nature or visit steel factories and coal mines while tightening their mutual Christian friendship bonds.⁴⁸

The growth of the Catholic organisations and parochial initiatives set up by Joos in Rabot was part of a broader movement in Ghent.⁴⁹ For example, Catholic ultramontane-minded patronages for the youth flourished in Ghent from the middle of the century onwards. Members of the *Sint-Vincentius a Paulogenootschap* ('Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul'), in which the Catholic textile manufacturer Joseph de Hemptinne (1822 – 1909) played an important role, had already set up a patronage in 1850. The parochial clergy, monks and well-to-do women followed their example. All these patronages aimed at enhancing the morals of the working classes by offering activities for children and young members of working-class families on Sundays and Mondays. Careful attention was given to the fulfilment of religious duties. The full day programmes with games and courses in elementary subjects had to keep the working-class chil-

⁴⁶ Roger Van Hamme, 1872 – 1972. *Honderd jaar gemeenschapsleven op de St.-Jozefsparochie te Gent* (Ghent: Parochieraad Sint-Jozef, 1972), 17; Wezenbeek, "De urbanisatie van de Wondelgemeersen," 123.

⁴⁷ De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot*, 62; Van Hamme, 1872 – 1972. *Honderd jaar gemeenschapsleven*, 25, 35 – 36.

⁴⁸ De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot*, 68; Van Hamme, 1872 – 1972. *Honderd jaar gemeenschapsleven*, 44 – 45.

⁴⁹ Jan Art, *Kerkelijke structuur en pastorale werking in het bisdom Gent tussen 1830 en 1914* (Kortrijk: UGA, 1977), 296 – 297.

dren off the streets. In 1867, the boys' patronage of the parish of 'Sint-Jan Baptist'" ('Saint John the Baptist'), which covered the quarters of Rabot and the Brugse Poort, before the parish of Saint Joseph was founded, reached 403 apprentices between 11 and 25 years old.⁵⁰

Parallel to these parochial initiatives that wanted "to conserve the Catholic faith and its morality within the people by spreading good advice"⁵¹ on alcohol consumption, obedience and morality,⁵² liberal patronages were also established. In April 1868, the first liberal societies for young male and female workers in the Rabot neighbourhood were launched under the impulse of the liberal politician François Laurent (1810–1887) (see Figure 3.2): *Vrijheidsliefde* ('Love of Freedom') for boys and *Vreugd in Deugd* ('Joy through Virtue') for girls. In 1875, *Vrijheidsliefde* opened its own building in the quarter, at the corner of the 'Gasmeterlaan' and the 'Spaarstraat' (the former 'Laurentstraat'). Laurent financed the construction of the building with the prize money he had received years earlier for his *Conférence sur l'Épargne* (1872) and the proceeds from his *Principles de Droit Civil*.⁵³ The membership of *Vrijheidsliefde* consisted of two categories: next to male workers, older than 16, who could participate in a whole range of educational and recreational activities (gymnastics, music, trips, etc), there were also young protégés ("beschermelingen"). Until 1897, the daily leadership of *Vrijheidsliefde* was in the hands of Jacob Wiemer, the headmaster of a municipal boys' school.⁵⁴ Forty-two pupils of an adult school co-founded the society in 1868. The liberal industrial Camille Joseph de Bast (1807–1872) became honorary president of the society. In January 1877, *Vrijheidsliefde* already counted 555 full members and 358 protégés.⁵⁵ The members' fees were used for the creation of a library, two theatrical sections (one for the older members and one for

50 An Hertmans, "Negentiende-eeuwse patronaten: 'beschermplaatsen' voor volkskinderen," in *Vijftig Jaar Chiroleven 1934–1984. Aspecten uit heden en verleden van een jeugdbeweging*, eds. Maurits De Vroede and An Hertmans (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1985), 17–19; De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot*, 61.

51 't Rabot. *Katholiek orgaan der wijk van S. Jozef* 1 (1906), 1.

52 De Wilde, "Een sociografisch onderzoek".

53 Doreen Gaubomme, *François Laurent (1810–1887). De ongelukkige liefde van een liberaal vechttas voor de kinderen van het volk* (Ghent: Stadsarchief, 1987), 45; Letter 'Werkmansgenootschap De Vrijheidsliefde', 27 October 1875 (copy from University Library Ghent), 4.1 (1/4), Archives *Vrijheidsliefde*, Liberas/Liberaal Archief, Ghent; François Laurent, *De werklieden-genootschappen van Gent* (Ghent: Drukkerij C. Annoot-Braeckman, 1878), 28–29.

54 Laurent's *genootschap De Vrijheidsliefde, Jubeljaar 1868–1894* (Ghent: E. De Laere, 1894), 8; Laurent, *De werklieden-genootschappen*, 22–24.

55 Laurent, *De werklieden-genootschappen*, 23, 30.

the protégés) and the organisation of evening courses in French, English, Dutch, Economics and History.⁵⁶

Attracting young children and protégés to the educational and recreational activities of *Vrijheidsliefde* on Sundays and Mondays was seen as essential by the board in order to moralise them, elevate their sense of self-esteem, help them in self-government⁵⁷ and keep them out of the hands of the Catholic patronages:

To enlighten these small beings, to take them away from the hands of a party who is hostile to us, to give them an education independent from the clergy, to raise them and to make them walk the road towards progress; that is our goal.⁵⁸

Laurent was convinced that, under the watchful eye and leadership of the upper classes, thrift, self-reliance and precaution (the idea of “*Épargne et Prévoyance*”) could be encouraged. He stated that the working class needed to be taught

to improve their own conditions, not by violating the laws of production and not by changing the society, but by reforming themselves, by giving up their wasteful and harmful expenses, by living a family life instead of becoming blunt by drunkenness, and by developing their intellectual and moral possibilities instead of being ignorant and wallowing in debauchery.⁵⁹

Consequently, only “the ‘deserving’ poor – those who were victims of circumstance and those who had the moral character to use assistance to restore themselves to self-help” could benefit.⁶⁰ In this respect, Hendrik Michielse has pointed out that this progressive ideology manifestly had a tricky double nature: people were promised that they could socially and culturally emancipate by participating in the activities offered, and at the same time the initiatives were also deployed to maintain and safeguard the existing socio-economic order and to

56 Laurent, *De werklieden-genootschappen*, 62–63; Gaublonne, *François Laurent*, 45; Simon and Van Damme, “Education and Moral Improvement,” 77; Bart D’hondt, *Van Andriesschool tot Zondernaamstraat. Gids door 150 jaar liberaal leven te Gent* (Ghent: Liberaal Archief-Snoeck, 2015), 121; Wezenbeek, “De urbanisatie van de Wondelgemmeersen,” 127; Oscar Langerock, *Koninklijke Laurentkring Vrijheidsliefde-eeuwfeest* (Ghent: Vrijheidsliefde, 1968), 12.

57 Simon and Van Damme, “Education and Moral Improvement,” 76–82.

58 Letter ‘Beschermelingen der maatschappij De Vrijheidsliefde’, 25 January 1877 (copy from University Library Ghent), 4.1/ 1(4), Archives *Vrijheidsliefde*, Liberas/Liberaal Archief, Ghent, Belgium.

59 François Laurent, *Le livre de l’épargne par un membre de la Société Callier* (Ghent: Imprimerie C. Annoot Braeckman, 1868), 119.

60 John Harris, “State Social Work,” 665.

Fig. 3.2: Portrait of François Laurent (1909) (Liberas/liberaal Archief)

(re)produce the stable progress of the (industrial) system.⁶¹ The ‘civilising offensive’ aimed at adapting the behaviour of the working class to the bourgeois virtues and norms thus came with a ‘civilising defensive’, confirming the dominant position of the bourgeoisie and the existing social classes, instead of overthrowing them.⁶² Furthermore, the support and protection measures were made conditional and irrespective of the concrete problems of the labourers: only those who obeyed the normative values could get help and assistance, and only those who took care of the poor and the needy could achieve salvation.⁶³

Not only did the battle against the Catholics and their initiatives constitute an important motive for Laurent and the liberals, they also wanted to preserve young workers from the emerging socialist ideas of class struggle.⁶⁴ In the early 1870s, *Vrijheidsliefde* expelled members of the Ghent section of the *International Workingmen’s Association* who tried to turn society in a socialist direction.⁶⁵ Liberal workers’ societies such as *Vrijheidsliefde* focused on preparing labourers for their political integration and the gradual extension of the franchise through courses and lectures, whether the liberal reformers agreed with expanding suffrage or not.⁶⁶ The introduction of general multiple male suffrage in 1893 more than ever made it necessary for the Liberal Party to integrate the new mass electorate in the liberal pillar.⁶⁷ In 1894, the *Liberale Kring – Wijk Rabot* (‘Liberal Club – Rabot Quarter’) was founded, two weeks before the elections of 14 October. This local liberal club in the ‘Maria-Theresiastraat’ aimed to stimulate fraternal ties between liberals and to distribute propaganda in favour of the Liberal Party. The *Liberale Kring Rabot* grew fast and did not limit itself to political mo-

61 Frieda Heyting, “Opvoeden tot samenleven. Afscheid van moraal en deugd als voorwaarden voor maatschappelijke integratie,” *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Opvoeding, Vorming en Onderwijs*, 14, no. 1–2 (1998): 35–49; Hendrik Cornelis Marie Michielse, *De burger als andragoog. Een geschiedenis van 125 jaar welzijnswerk* (Amsterdam/Meppel: Boom, 1977), 35.

62 Bernard Kruithof, “De deugdzame natie. Het burgerlijk beschavingsoffensief van de Maatschappij tot Nut van ‘t Algemeen tussen 1784 en 1860,” in *Geschiedenis van opvoeding en onderwijs. Inleiding, bronnen, onderzoek*, eds. Bernard Kruithof, Jan Noordman and Piet de Rooy (Nijmegen: SUN, 1983), 371–385; Simon and Van Damme, “François Laurent”. See also: chapter 1/ introduction to this volume.

63 Maria De Bie, *Sociale agogiek: een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2015), 50–52.

64 Gaublonne, *François Laurent*, 7; Michel Steels, *Geschiedenis van het stedelijk onderwijs te Gent 1828–1914* (Ghent: Gemeentebestuur Gent, 1978), 195.

65 *Laurent’s genootschap De Vrijheidsliefde, Jubeljaar 1868–1894*, 13; Laurent, *De werklieden-genootschappen*, 24, 400–401.

66 Simon and Van Damme, “Education and Moral Improvement,” 82; *Laurent’s genootschap De Vrijheidsliefde, Jubeljaar 1868–1894*, 22, 26–27.

67 Gaublonne, *François Laurent*, 47.

bilisation and propaganda.⁶⁸ Soon sub-branches for women, art lovers, gymnasts, travellers, etc saw the light.⁶⁹ Different members of *Vrijheidsliefde* were also members of the *Liberale Kring Rabot*, but the President of *Vrijheidsliefde*, Jacob Wiemer, feared the attraction of the growing socialist movement for the members of the workers' society.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, in 1885, socialist leaders had taken the initiative to centralise forces in the *Belgische Werkliedenpartij* ('Belgian Workers' Party'), formed from the collaboration between different cooperatives, syndicates, unions and study circles throughout Belgium.⁷¹ In their first programme, the labour party immediately demanded the extension from tributary to universal suffrage (for men). Furthermore, they called for compulsory and free neutral education, the separation between church and state, the abolition of child labour (for those under 12 years of age), health and safety committees in the factories and the transformation from public beneficence to a social security system so "the State was responsible to ensure the fate of all workmen during work, sickness, old age"⁷². Before the First World War, Ghent became widely known as the capital of Belgian socialism. In fact, between the mid 1880s and the late 1890s the socialists in Ghent vastly extended their influence and created a sort of socialist 'state within a state', a network of intertwined organisations based on consumer cooperatives which funded all other activities: unions, political groups, mutual aid societies and leisure clubs.⁷³ For example, around 1900 the cooperative company *Vooruit* ('Forward') owned stores, bakeries, coffee houses, a brewery, a weaving mill, a sugar factory and even a complete arts and recreation centre.⁷⁴

68 "In den Liberalen kring van 't Rabot," *Het Volksbelang*, November 3, 1906, 2; *Reglement van de Liberale Kring Wijk Rabot* (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1905).

69 De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot*, 69; D'Hondt, *Van Andriesschool tot Zonderaamstraat*, 46–48.

70 *Laurent's genootschap De Vrijheidsliefde, Jubeljaar 1868–1894*, 22, 27–30.

71 Els Witte, Jan Craeybeckx and Alain Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 onwards* (Brussels: ASP Editions, 2009), 103.

72 Brepoels, *Wat zoudt gij*, 63.

73 Carl Strikwerda, *A House Dived. Catholics, Socialists and Flemish Nationalists in Nineteenth-Century Belgium* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 113–115. See also: Hendrik Defoort, *Werklieden bemint uw profijt! De Belgische sociaaldemocratie in Europa* (Leuven: Lannoo-campus, 2006); Guy Vanschoenbeek, *Novecento in Gent. De wortels van de sociaal-democratie in Vlaanderen* (Antwerp: Uitgeverij Hadewijch, 1995).

74 Liesbet Nys, *Vooruit Gent 1913–2013. Feestlokaal – Kunstencentrum* (Ghent: Amsab/UGent/STAM/Uitgeverij Hannibal/Kunstencentrum Vooruit/Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen, 2013); Carl Strikwerda, "The Divided Class: Catholics vs. Socialists in Belgium, 1880–1914," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 2 (1988): 333–359.

In Rabot, the first socialist club was erected in 1889 in the pub ‘Cosmorama’ in the ‘Rietstraat’, only a block away from the church of Saint Joseph and the liberal club in the ‘Maria-Theresiastraat’.⁷⁵ The aspirations of the socialist militants were made clear in the first issue of the periodical of various socialist community clubs, including the Rabot club: “It is our goal to defend the working classes [...]. By joining the threefold socialist battle – politics, collaboration and corporation – [...] fortune and prosperity will come”.⁷⁶ Unlike the Catholic initiatives and their progressive counterparts though, they were not able to benefit the support of the textile patrons. Only by relying on the profits of self-organised lotteries and the sale of coupons could the socialist club *Rabot* buy their first red flag. Karel Vercauter (1849–1921) and Alfons Drapier (1846–1898) were early pioneers. In the early 20th century, the club had its own women’s branch, gymnastics club and theatre group. The socialist club arranged fairs, meetings and lectures, similar to those set up earlier by Joos and Laurent in the same quarter, but now with the intention of preparing the labourers and raising their awareness regarding their emancipation and the class struggle. The presence of a pharmacy, a grocery store and a shoemaker of the cooperative company *Vooruit* in the ‘Wondelgemstraat’ was very important for the development of the socialist club. Behind the shops of *Vooruit*, for decades a celebration hall was used by the club.⁷⁷ As a reaction to the socialist success in Ghent, the Catholic and liberal working-class movements copied the socialist model. In 1896 the Catholics founded the cooperative society *Het Volk* (‘The People’), part of the *Antisocialistische Werkliedenbond* (‘Anti-Socialist Workers’ League’), which opened a shop in Rabot.⁷⁸ The enormous success of the socialist cooperative movement made the liberal workers’ society *Vrijheidsliefde* decide to start a cooperative society in 1910, leading to the integration of a bakery and a coal warehouse in its building in the ‘Spaarstraat’.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot*, 74.

⁷⁶ “Allen in ’t gelid voor ‘De Volksstrijd’,” *De Volksstrijd*, October 24, 1909, 1.

⁷⁷ De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot*, 74.

⁷⁸ Paul De Baere, *Van broodkar tot tankwagen. Coöperatieve Het Volk in Gent 1896–1996* (Ghent: C.V. Het Volk, 1996), 20; Strikwerda, *A House Divided*, 241; De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot*, 69.

⁷⁹ Letter ‘Laurent’s Vereeniging De Vrijheidsliefde’, 5 September 1910 (copy from University Library Ghent), 7.11.2, Archives *Vrijheidsliefde*, Liberas/Liberaal Archief; Programma van het feest ter gelegenheid van het 30-jarig bestaan van de samenwerkende maatschappij, 1940, 7.11.3, Archives *Vrijheidsliefde*, Liberas/Liberaal Archief.

Living apart together

By the turn of the 19th century, Catholics, liberals and socialists organised almost identical activities, next to each other in the small district of Rabot. By doing so, on the one hand, they created a certain sense of belonging, collective interest and purpose. Their numerous activities made Rabot into an almost ‘totally self-sufficient island’, from which the inhabitants had no reason to leave and where people not living in the quarter had no reason to go. A neighbourhood identity arose and it was this shared “*Rabotiengevoel*” (‘Rabot feeling’) that was based on a particular mix of shared pride and a notion of deprivation, that made the different ideological groups strive for improvements in their quarter: more street lights, less dirt, public bathing facilities, tram shelters, etc.⁸⁰ Most important, however, was better housing:

Our labourers are not only stuck all day in smelly and unhealthy workshops where the air is polluted, in the evening, when they have finished their tasks as useful members of the society, they again arrive in miserable and sloppy caverns and houses, where every man, who has some understanding of health doctrine, hesitates to breathe [...]. Here, the working class slowly dies because they lack fresh air and sunlight.⁸¹

On the other hand, this sense of cohesion and belonging was very ambiguous. In the end, even though the accelerated urbanisation had caused employers and their labourers to live together in the city, their worlds, interests and experiences mainly remained divided. The moral leadership of the textile barons was constantly stressed. The working class in turn was made to believe that the only way to escape from their miserable situation was by following the example of the already powerful actors and by participating in ideologically, socially, spatially and culturally separate projects.

In this respect, we could argue that Catholics, liberals, as well as socialists, were convinced that engagement in their social-cultural organisations served a ‘better’ society. The social question was thus translated into a participation issue: solely by participating in the categorical practices and by accepting the dominant values, norms and rules, the already marginalised labourers could abolish their individual and social shortcomings and realise social (and political) recognition within the models and ambitions proposed. Within such a functional approach, the three ideological parties reduced their members to ‘objects of in-

⁸⁰ De Wilde, *Gent/Rabot*, 84–87.

⁸¹ “Ook eene bron van inkomsten voor kapitalisten,” *Vooruit*, January 13, 1891, 1. For the importance of the housing issue in the social question, see chapter 7 of this volume.

tervention' and their initiatives to their 'scope'. Rather than questioning *why* their activities were formed and *if* these activities really improved the conditions of the labourers, participation was seen as a methodical-technical instrument and far less as having a political and emancipatory quality.

As such, although the agendas held by the various organisations differed, a certain 'learning regime' was installed. As Gert Biesta has argued, this meant that "a particular conception of political agency in which (political) action follows from (political) [...] right, correct or true understanding" was put forward; in other words: labourers "need[ed] to learn and [...] [had to] learn in order to become (better) political actors".⁸² Such a 'learning regime' tends to control rather than support people in analysing and addressing social problems. By emphasising that one had to learn the 'right' civic and moral duties and virtues, the concerns of the labourers themselves were hardly thematised. Besides, in the (seemingly) homogeneous communities formed by the ideological societies, individual differences were neglected and decontextualised. The participants were seen as passive consumers, not as active co-designers. In this way, they were attributed a kind of 'not yet-status': they had to be supported by the organisations that had set out the right instruments and methods in order to socialise them into being citizens and teach them uprightness and dedication to the law.

Concluding reflections

Currently, this instrumental-methodical point of view is very vital. Many participatory initiatives fail to think critically about their own role and their link with broader social-political developments. They have evolved into "sedimentary and self-referential practices": practices that have lost their initial orientation towards the problems and the people at stake, and have become self-evident.⁸³ Encouraged by subsidising governments that increasingly ask for demonstrations of the effects of participation and/in social-cultural work by means of measurable targets, participatory organisations want to prove *that* they have impact, but they rarely discuss *why* they do *what* they do and "by whom, with and for whom, what problems are formulated, on what grounds."⁸⁴ In this sense, we could argue

⁸² Biesta, "Becoming Public," 692.

⁸³ Chantal Mouffe, *Over het politieke* (Kapellen: Pelckmans, 2005), 24; Roose, Roets and Bouverne-De Bie, "Irony and Social Work: In Search of the Happy Sisypheus".

⁸⁴ Maria Bouverne-De Bie, "Participatie: een kenmerkend perspectief op samenlevingsopbouw," in *Handboek Samenlevingsopbouw in Vlaanderen*, ed. Herman Baert et al. (Bruges: die Keure, 2003), 53.

that participation has become a form of ‘social engineering’: a technical intervention based on methods that have proven their effectiveness, regardless of the social and political context.⁸⁵ The connection with the underlying logic, views and contradictions of social-cultural work, which go far back into history and which continue to influence participation issues and initiatives today, has faded. Participation is not (or no longer) a reflection of or an answer to social problems, and social-cultural work is not (or no longer) a place where these social problems are put into interaction.

In this chapter we have shown, from a combined socio-pedagogical and historical perspective, how participatory strategies arose in the 19th century as an answer to the social and urban question. The case of Rabot served here as a prototype. We analysed how a pillarised network of schools, labour unions, study circles, youth and sports clubs, etc. emerged that reinforced class segregation and constantly oscillated between pacification and politicisation, that is, between consolidating the existing order on the one hand, and offering levers for social integration and political inclusion on the other hand. Their respective, extensive social-cultural infrastructures and networks created a sense of belonging and launched the image of participation as a strong societal norm to overcome individual and social deficits. As little room was left for difference and discussion on structural unequal socio-economic and political factors, the participatory initiatives unintentionally contributed to their own instrumentalisation.

This historically developed ‘functional approach’ is undeniably limited. Today, as the demand for effectiveness expands, the questions relating to the meaning and range of participation are further translated into apolitical, technical answers. Social-cultural organisations struggle with this. If they fail or refuse to indicate their ‘unique effectiveness’, they run the risk of throwing out the good with the bad: their present qualities of community development, then, become misunderstood and social-cultural work will be marginalised in terms of merely leisure time.

We contend that such an evolution urgently calls for critical reflection. In this, historical research is essential in order to keep comparing present, past and future to prevent so-called ‘emancipatory practices’ leading again to new forms of discipline and repression. If we want participatory initiatives to be more than procedures and techniques, if we want them to be grounded in the

⁸⁵ Walter Lorenz, Filip Coussée and Griet Verschelden, “Sociaal-cultureel werk en historisch bewustzijn,” in *Wissels. Handboek sociaal-cultureel werk met volwassenen*, ed. Frank Cockx et al. (Ghent: Academia Press, 2011), 126–151.

commitment of a society to realise equal opportunities for every individual to be recognised as a social and political actor, social-cultural work has to (re)focus itself on shared concerns and shared responsibilities regarding contemporary social and urban questions.