

17 June 2026

Community contributions to societal challenges: Why they matter and how they work

Location: **Centraal Museum (Entrance: Nicolaasdwarsstraat 14, 3512 XH Utrecht)**

Organizers: Denise de Ridder, Marleen Gillebaart, Lars Tummers & John de Wit on behalf of the Behavior & Institutions platform at Utrecht University (<https://www.uu.nl/en/research/institutions-for-open-societies/behaviour-and-institutions>)

Community participation is vital for well-functioning societies. Both in academic circles and in societal institutions, there is lively debate and experimentation with various forms of community participation. These can range from community initiatives to citizen councils and other cooperative arrangements where people get together. Community engagement is crucial for creating support for societal transitions and for building trust between citizens and institutions. Importantly, it gives people the opportunity to take part in dialogue with politicians and policymakers and get involved in creating solutions for wicked problems. However, there is still much uncertainty about how communities become empowered to contribute in a way that allows for genuine involvement.

In this symposium, we will explore emerging ways for community voices to be heard. We will examine how communities can foster a lively democracy and build societies where everyone can flourish, while also investigating how (local) governments can effectively enable and engage their citizens. What are the most promising models for collective action? And do these citizen initiatives even need government support to succeed?

Please register using the [Registration form](#), seating is limited. If you have any questions, contact Amal Ng, t.t.ng@uu.nl.

PROGRAM

- 9.15 Opening by Prof. John de Wit (Utrecht University), Symposium Chair
- 9.30 Presentation '**From personal struggles to systemic change: Demand for structural policy as collectively consequential citizen engagement**' by Prof. Wilhelm Hofmann (Ruhr University Bochum)
- 10.15 Presentation '**What you see is not (always) what you'll get. On roles and expectations of citizens in societal transitions**' by Prof. Tine de Moor (Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- 11.00 Coffee break
- 11.15 Presentation: '**Behavioral public policy: Past, present, and future**' by Prof. Peter John (King's College London)
- 12.00 Lunch break
- 13.00 Interactive Workshop '**Building blocks for joint action as a catalyst for collective agency**' by Dr. Marleen Gillebaart (Utrecht University)
- 13.30 Interactive Workshop '**Us versus them no more: Experiencing how to bridge segregation**' by Prof. Lars Tummers (Utrecht University)
- 14.00 Coffee break
- 14.15 Interactive Workshop '**Deep democracy: Bridge-building and decision-taking within polarised communities**' by Dr. Lars Behrisch (Utrecht University)
- 15.00 Closing

