



A keet during New Year's Eve 2022. Photo by Keet Bierewiede.

From Streets to Safety: How *Keten* Diminish Vandalism and Unite Youth

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Introduction

In the rural landscapes of the Netherlands, mainly in the north and east of the country, a phenomenon known as *keet* has been a longstanding tradition among local youth. These informal gathering places, often set up in old barns, garages or built with locally provided materials, serve as vital social hubs for teenagers and young adults living in the rural areas of the Netherlands. *Keten* are communal spaces where rural youth gather to dance, converse, and enjoy drinks and build new connections. They play a large role in promoting social cohesion within rural communities. In these areas, where social opportunities may be limited, *keten* offer an important venue for interaction and community engagement. The sense of belonging and community fostered within these spaces is valuable, as they contribute

to the overall well-being of the youth and the community's social dynamics. Especially between Christmas and New Year's Eve, these *keten* host a different themed evening each night, fostering a vibrant social atmosphere, which makes *keten* accessible for people of all ages.

Keten have historically been self-sufficient entities, with young people taking the lead in their management and upkeep. The sale of drinks and simple snacks has typically been sufficient to sustain these spaces. Due to the rise of issues such as vandalism and youth disturbances, some local governments have started to see the potential in supporting youth-driven initiatives like *keten* (Rijksoverheid, 2021). By providing subsidies under certain conditions, such as adherence to safety standards and not serving alcohol to minors, municipalities aim to foster safer and more structured environments for young people to socialize and engage with their peers. Municipal support for *keten* can enhance the social fabric of rural communities, creating a more inclusive environment for all residents. This support can include funding, guidance on safety standards, and assistance in organizing community events within *keten*. Such backing ensures the sustainability of these spaces and reinforces their role as community assets.



Interior of a *keet* in 2022. Photo by Keet Bierewiede.

The notion that the structured and supervised nature of *keten* can positively impact youth behavior is supported by McNeal Jr. et al. (2004), which shows that engagement in structured activities is associated with reduced levels of delinquency and substance abuse among young people. *Keten* provide a controlled environment where positive social interactions can occur under the guidance of responsible adults, offering alternatives to unsupervised gatherings that may be prone to negative behaviors. Research by the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken & Koninkrijksrelaties, 2010) has indicated that a key factor in reducing youth nuisance is the lack of public familiarity, a concept that *keten* inherently embody. Additionally, data from the Dutch police force (Nationale Politie, 2024) highlight a yearly decline in reports of youth-related nuisances, underscoring the positive impact of the community-centric approach facilitated by *keten*.



People partying in a keet. Photo by the author.

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Youth participation is essential in the success and sustainability of *keten*. Involvement in the creation, management, and evolution of these spaces empowers young people and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. As highlighted by Jo Kirby and Sara Bryson in their report “Measuring the Magic? Evaluating and Researching Young People’s Participation in Public Decision Making”, meaningful engagement of youth in community projects can lead to improved outcomes (Kirby & Bryson, 2002). In Blokzijl, located in the northern part of the province of Overijssel, local youth annually come together to construct their own *keet*, leveraging the diverse skills each person brings from their profession, be it an electrician, barista, builder, or farmer. This collaborative effort, where everyone contributes their unique expertise, results in the successful creation and management of the *keet*, embodying a truly community-driven project. Active participation in the operation of *keten* allows young people to develop important life skills such as leadership, teamwork, and decision-making. These skills are valuable within the context of *keten* and transferable to other areas of life, contributing to the personal and social development of the youth. Involving young people in decision-making processes related to *keten* encourages responsible use and longevity of the space.

Conclusion

The Dutch *keet* presents a distinctive approach to youth engagement and community development. Traditionally independent, these spaces are increasingly included into the communal space, due to support of local municipalities in order to enhance their positive impact by addressing social challenges. By adopting principles of social learning and fostering collaboration between young people and adults, *keten* can continue to serve as essential spaces for socialization, learning, and community cohesion. As rural communities evolve, the *keet* symbolizes the resilience of youth and the significance of nurturing connections in an increasingly segmented society. The collaboration between young individuals and local authorities ensures that *keten* remain vibrant and safe spaces that contribute to the social fabric of rural communities.

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About the author

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