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Governing the right to build

The institutional dynamics of self-build housing in Brazil and the Netherlands

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Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Low- and middle-income households in urban areas face growing difficulties in accessing adequate and affordable housing. People are reliant upon housing provided by large market and state providers, but these fail to live up the promise of guaranteeing the right to adequate and affordable housing. This has given way to a renewed interest to forms of housing provision characterized by a high degree of resident involvement. This dissertation sets out to explore how residents become active in housing provision through self-building activities. It explores the relationship between self-build housing and the institutional dynamics of spatial governance. It does this through an explorative comparative case-study of self-build housing governance in the Amsterdam and São Paulo metropolitan areas.

Even though self-building is one of the most prevalent forms of housing across the world, it remains largely underexplored in the urban studies and planning literature. The academic neglect contrasts starkly with just how deeply self-building has captured our popular imagination. A quick glance at Netflix' catalogue reveals titles such as 'The World's Most Extraordinary Homes', 'Million Dollar Beach House', 'Tiny House Nation' or the long-running British tv-show 'Grand Designs'. Such tv-programs generally deal with European and North-American middle-class households who realize their dream home as an expression of taste and lifestyle.

The Netflix image contrasts starkly with an analogous image that sees self-building as a phenomenon exclusive to the favelas, barrios and 'slums' of the global south. Self-builders in rapidly urbanizing cities resort to building their own homes because there are simply no alternatives at offer by state or market. These people may express taste and identity, but foremostly they build to attain shelter under ambiguous legal conditions, as has been detailed more extensively in academic research. Consequently, researchers associate self-building primarily in relation to informality and underdevelopment.

The binary fiction of taste and necessity obscures the complexity and diversity of self-building practices. It overlooks both the role professionalized self-building activities plays in the south, as well as the way self-building in Europe may deviate from legal standards or cater to urgent housing needs

(Duncan and Rowe 1993, Salet *et al.* 2020). Inspired by methodological calls for urban comparativism (Robinson 2006, Nijman 2007), this dissertation seeks to bring together cases from contexts considered vastly different: Brazil and the Netherlands. When committed to comparison, past studies on self-building have largely juxtaposed the ‘first world’ and ‘industrialized’ vis-à-vis ‘developing’ and ‘third world’ situations (Bredenoord and van Lindert 2010). Drawing on an ontology of ordinary cities (Robinson 2006), this dissertation brings these contexts onto the same comparative plane, thus illuminating the diversity in experiences and processes involved in self-building.

The self-building images from north and south seemingly speak to separate practices and contexts. Still, they share an implicit understanding of the self-builder as a heroic entrepreneur who carves out a place in the city (Turner 1991). Self-building is explained as an expression of personal creativity in the context of rapid urbanization. As for the state, its role tends to be defined by oppressive authority or inept absence. In the Netflix picture, planners stifle self-building through unnecessary red tape and incessant regulations (Wallace *et al.* 2013). In the view from the south, state actors may threaten with eviction, preferring to house self-builders into neatly ordered modernist housing blocks (Scott 2012, Kuyucu 2014). By understanding self-building as an act of self-sufficiency, we obscure the mediating role of spatial governance and institutions. The dissertation sets out to explore how states actively interact with self-building activities across different contexts. It considers the role of spatial governance and institutions essential for understanding self-building activities in process and form.

The research acknowledges the premise that self-building speaks to an autonomous impulse to appropriate housing in the face of state and market hierarchies. However, rather than explaining self-build as an isolated act of self-reliance or through the overdue discursive dichotomy of formal/informal, the research sets to explore how spatial governance and planning interact *with* self-building practices. Analyzing state programs and policies developed in relation to self-build housing, the dissertation scrutinizes the conditioning role of property in these practices.

1.2 What is self-build housing?

Before spelling out the analytical framework, research questions and structure of this dissertation, it is necessary to establish what self-build housing entails. There is a wide variety of terms referring to residents who build their own home. These terms vary depending upon national, regional or even local context. In the anglophone academic literature self-organized, self-help, self-provided or informal housing are used, among others (Clapham *et al.* 1993, Duncan and Rowe 1993). Collective forms are referred to as cohousing, community-led, cooperative or collaborative housing (Jarvis 2015). Collaborative housing in particular has gained a high degree of salience in the European context recently, referring specifically to varieties of participatory and community-oriented housing characterized by collaboration between residents and other stakeholders (Lang *et al.* 2018). In the Dutch policy discourse, self-building may be referred to as *zelfbouw*, *particulier opdrachtgeverschap* or *collectief particulier opdrachtgeverschap* (Expertteam Eigenbouw 2014). Commonplace terms in Brazil include *autoconstrução*, *mutirão* or *autogestão habitacional* (Lago 2012). Terms emphasize different aspects, such as who is involved or the legal status of the activity.

In this dissertation I use self-build housing to refer to a wide array of activities in which people commission the production of housing for their own use. It emphasizes the role of the resident(s) as commissioning actor, who exerts control over the different stages of self-building. The end-user controls key investment, design and construction decisions. The label self-building is deliberately chosen because of its high resonance, even though if residents may not necessarily *physically* build themselves. This resonance works across language barriers and translates to Portuguese (*autoconstrução*) and Dutch (*zelfbouw*). In this respect my definition overlaps with the broader definition adopted by Benson & Hamiduddin (2017). Opting for a broader definition around production and provisioning includes for a variety of housing practices. Some of these are excluded if one focuses on legality (informal housing) or living practices (cohousing).

It goes without saying that the precise form self-building assumes varies depending on place and time. Three dimensions are specified as relevant here: resident involvement, actors involved and tenure. First, the degree of resident

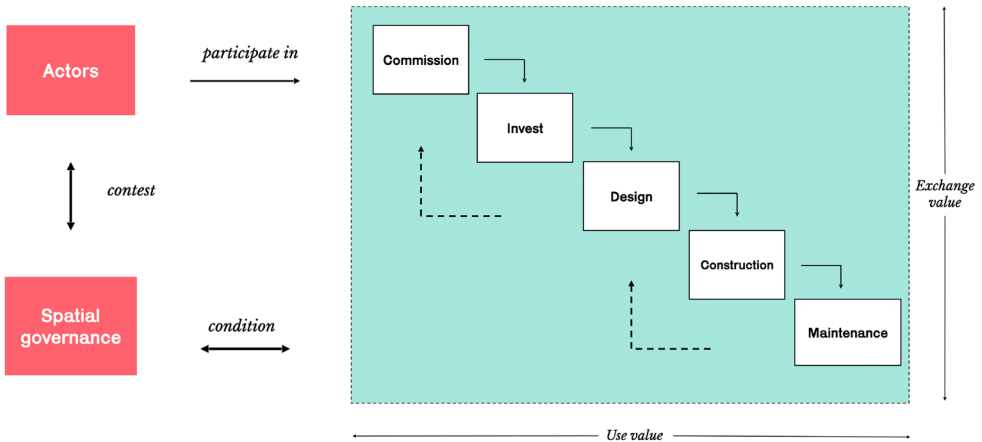
involvement varies. The idea of self-building evokes the image of one person building a house from the ground up but this is rarely the case. People receive help from their own social networks or contract professionals to undertake the work. The building may not be entirely new, it may also entail retrofit or renovation, demanding more complex expertise at times. Second, the subject of self-building may be a single person, family or multiple households. Third, self-building may involve various property relations. This counters the idea it is typically associated with the normative ideal of a homeowner who holds absolute and exclusive control (Singer 2000a). The dissertation demonstrates that, particularly in the case of various forms of collective self-building, tenure labels do not always capture the complexity of property relations. This equally applies to the land on which residents build.

The work on informal housing has highlighted the diversity in terms of property, possession and the relationship to public and private legal frameworks (Soaita 2013, Roy 2005). While informal and self-build housing may overlap in some contexts, it is important to note their analytical distinctiveness. Where self-building refers to a mode of provisioning, informality refers to a relational status vis-à-vis what is considered legal, formal or sanctioned by the state. Equally, residents may build on land that has been provided for by the state. By focusing on commissioning, the dissertation challenges the equation of self-building and absolute individual property ownership. Recognition of the diversity of property relations is necessary both from an analytical and normative imperative (Schlager and Ostrom 1992, Blomley 2004).

By focusing on commissioning and provisioning, this dissertation moves beyond the singular focus on housing consumption to involve questions of production, investment and need. It draws attention to the constellation of actors involved of self-building. Self-building cannot be easily reduced to housebuilding undertaken by 'civil society' or 'private actors' (Guy and Henneberry 2002a). The property development literature has tended to impart rationales of actors by virtue of such labels (Ambrose 1994). Because self-builders combine classic roles of producer and consumer it is difficult to categorize their motives accordingly. Instead it may be fruitful to focus on the actors that are drawn into self-building activities at each stage. An event-sequence model can be useful to heuristically map the different stages in self-build, including commissioning, investment, construction, design and maintenance (Healey

1998, Ball 2003). Diagram 1 conceptualizes the different steps in self-building. The arrows indicate that actions need not follow sequentially, but may also go back and forth.

Diagram 1. Conceptualizing self-build housing as action



1.3 A critical comparative perspective on self-build

There is a renewed interest to self-building at a time of rapidly growing housing constraints across the world. The conjunction between a housing crisis and increased focus on self-building directs attention to the structural premise that self-building fulfills a potential gap uncatered for by state and market housing provisioning.

In the Netherlands, attention to self-building has emerged at a moment when housing construction slumps and the legacy of social housing withers away, following waves of marketization and liberalization. Under the Fordist regime following World War-II, housing construction peaked. Heavily subsidized construction ensured that low- and middle-incomes could access a decent quality of dwelling either through ownership or rental housing (Harloe 1995, Aalbers 2015, Salet and Bossuyt 2020). This mass-building regime resulted in a certain degree of alienation and standardization. State-sanctioned developers

and semi-public organizations grasped the prerogative over housing provision from the hands of residents, who were left as passive consumers.

Brazil has not had a mass housing regime in the same capacity as the Netherlands had. Federal housing programmes during the 20th century were characterized by a similar modernist logic, yet never wanted or could accommodate the entire population. A neglect of the housing needs generated by rapid urbanization has resulted in widespread deficiencies in terms of quality, tenure security, and infrastructure. Large parts of the population have arranged their own housing solutions, only to secure support posteriorly through social mobilization (Pasternak and D'Ottaviano 2018).

Both contexts are marked by growing housing constraints as a result of the growing dominance of private investors and developers. Housing is increasingly commodified, valued as a market good and appreciated as an object of real estate investment. Rolnik (2019) traces this process to the hegemony of one particular model, namely homeownership funded via credit loans. The hegemony of this model is supported through an ideology of homeownership and valuation of housing as an asset (Ronald & Elsinga 2012). An underexplored aspect of this model concerns the way in which it builds on hierarchical mechanisms of provisioning, privileging construction by large private actors. This illustrates how self-organized housing solutions can be an alternative to mainstream modes of housing provision. Still, whether self-building effectively substitutes, supplements or opposes mainstream modes of housing is also contested (Hodkinson 2012).

The global housing crisis calls into mind the premise that self-building fills a gap left by deficient state and market provisioning. Development scholars have often claimed that self-building caters to unmet needs in terms of costs, quality or location in the context of rapid urbanization (Turner 1968, Harms 1982). Drawing upon their own labor or working without profit motives, residents are able to realize housing at lower costs. When suitable land is unavailable, land invasions or occupations can be a solution to realize decent locations, as famously demonstrated by the favelas of Rio de Janeiro (Lago 2012).

Self-building is linked to the rapid growth of cities and exclusion of population from state housing solutions. The literature on self-building in 'developing'

contexts also highlights the rich legacy of state aid to self-building (Harris 1999). The popularization of state-aid to self-building is often traced to the influence of John Turner on the World Bank. His work addressed the vital agency of self-builders in meeting housing needs. Similarly, Janice Perlman has pointed out that informal settlements should be appreciated for their ‘creativity and freedom from the norm’ (2017, p. 11). State aid to self-building has primarily come to be associated with underdeveloped countries where it substitutes proper modernist systems of provisioning (Harris 1998).

Drawing on the work of Robinson (Robinson 2006, 2014), the perspective above can be criticized for exemplifying an urban ontology that separates between the formal, affluent and developed vis-à-vis the informal, poor and underdeveloped. By ignoring the diverse histories of state support to self-building, scholars tend to reproduce a particular urban ontology which holds these worlds to be incommensurable. Harris (1999) engages with the ignored legacy of self-build in Europe, noting that the theme is nowhere to be found in the classic comparative histories of European housing policy (Harloe 1995, Whitehead and Scanlon 2007). This equally applies to the Netherlands, where the focus has primarily been on the evolution of the social housing sector, rather than resident-led provisioning (Gerrichhauzen 1987, Van der Schaar 1987). Beekers (2012) slightly deviates from this norm, discussing the emergence and suppression of collective self-help in the early 20th century. Still, scholarship has largely neglected the European legacy of state support for self-building by governments of all political stripes in regions as diverse of the Soviet Union, Red Vienna and fascist Germany (Harris 1999, Wakeman 1999). The geographical limitations of self-building scholarship largely mirror the binary characterization of housing informality as exclusive to the south (Durst and Wegmann 2017)

Given this historical ignorance it does not come as a surprise that the rediscovery of self-building and the celebration of vernacular, tactical and DIY urbanism has primarily drawn on examples from the global south. A visit to Lima, Peru in the early nineties prompted a shift in thinking for Adri Duivesteijn, the alderman who would later initiate the Homeruskwartier in Almere. He was astounded by the disparities between the Netherlands and Peru in terms of residents’ control over their housing situation (1999). Self-building has subsequently captured architectural and planning discourses in the Netherlands, tying into the

popularization of incremental development strategies and citizen involvement in urban development (van Karnenbeek 2021, Stapper 2020). It aligns with a dissatisfaction with rational-comprehensive planning and a post-structuralist critique of public governance (Savini 2017a). Policy-makers pushing for self-building frequently cite benefits in terms of spatial quality or affordability (Duivesteijn 1999, Tellinga 2002, 2018, Moore 2014).

National governments in the UK and the Netherlands have actively prioritized self-building (Wallace *et al.* 2013, Benson and Hamiduddin 2018, Salet *et al.* 2020). Municipalities also play a strong part in the formulation of plans to support self-building, as demonstrated by experiences in Hamburg, Gothenburg or Zürich (Balmer and Gerber 2018, Hagbert 2020). Still, these views tend to depart from a normative assumption that self-building leads to positive outcomes. Scholars interested in alternative housing models hypothesize that putting the developer's profit margin into better design and sustainability allows for better spatial outcomes and can offer a counterpoint to the speculation and commodification of housing (Bower 2017). Others urge for a more cautious reading of the positive benefits attributed to self-building (Scheller and Thörn 2018). This dissertation sides with this premise, arguing it is necessary to first understand how spatial governance dynamics interact with self-building activities at an empirical level.

1.4 Analytical framework

The dissertation connects the micro-level of self-building activities to an analysis of governance by adopting an institutionalist conceptual lens. Of particular interest is the role of property as a mediating variable, structuring self-building activities. This section spells out the general analytical approach, which departs from the insights on Henri Lefebvre. Building on the notion of autogestion, self-building can be understood as a concretization of the social production of urban space (Lefebvre 1991, Purcell 2014). The way this process unfolds is contingent upon the dynamics of spatial governance.

At one level, self-building can be understood as autogestion in the domain of housing and an actualization of the right to the city. The Lefebvrian perspective sheds light on the material and normative dimensions of self-building as a way

of participating and appropriating the production of urban space. It exposes the dialectical tension between use and exchange value. Under capitalist urbanization, state and market may favor the abstraction and universalization of housing, resulting in the alienation and expropriation of residents from the process of housing provision. Residents, or inhabitants in Lefebvre's words, may counter this process through autogestion, which is an instrumental affirmation and moral claim over production of urban space. The conceptual lens sheds light on the tension between different values in housing provision, the way in which residents claim rights and how this challenges state and corporate modes of housing production. At the other level, the dissertation draws on the notion of spatial governance, by which it refers to the organization of social action by an array of actors for public benefit (Healey 2004). This lens directs attention to the ways in which public authorities may administrate and coordinate self-building activities. The contested governance of self-building activities may run up against claims articulated by residents.

By drawing on new institutionalism, the dissertation emphasizes the creation of institutional arrangements and their interaction with urban governance practices (Verma 2007). Institutionalism shifts attention towards the socio-legal parameters that determine who is involved in planning activity and under what conditions these actors are engaged (Healey 1998, Salet 2018). This dissertation understands institutions as frameworks of norms, rules and practices that structure action in social contexts (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). It combines elements of an institutional-actor approach with a value-critical institutionalism. It focuses on how institutions distribute and create opportunities for actors in urban development, while viewing these institutions as politically contestable, as they distribute constraints and opportunities unevenly. Actors mobilize and contest the institutional arrangements in housing provision (Lowndes and Roberts 2013).

1.5 Actualizing the right to the city through self-build

The typology of tower and slab stands for modernist post-war housing at its best. The combination of prefabricated parts and rationalized construction processes is what enabled large-scale production in the post-war years (Urban 2013). Writing in the late sixties in Paris, Lefebvre deplored the emergence of

such buildings as example of industrialized housing construction all around him. For Lefebvre, these buildings signify the rationalization of urban space by state bureaucracies to pave the way for capital accumulation (Lefebvre 1991, Harvey 2012, p. ix). These buildings exhibit the structural political-economic tension between use and exchange value. As a consequence of modernization and industrialization, housing had become the exclusive predicament of private companies and state bureaucracies, causing alienation, exclusion, and exploitation (Lefebvre 2003). These hierarchies value housing, and urban space more broadly, principally as a commodity, contradicting with the value of housing in social or affective terms. Lefebvre's insights in housing are important as they show how commercially driven housing development engenders a valuation of exchange value over use value. High modernist housing illustrates the increasing control of state and market over human life and transforms residents into passive, alienated consumers (Scott 2020).

The antidote offered by Lefebvre lies in the notion of the right to the city, which has become a central rallying cry for people interested in promoting resident empowerment and democratization in urban space. Lefebvre had a fundamental interest in imagining a new social contract between citizens and the state. People become a member of this political community not by virtue of their blood or place or birth, but rather by where they live: *inhabitation*. The right to the city is concretized through two rights. This concept is actualized through two rights: the right to appropriate urban space and the right to participate in decision-making (Purcell 2014). These rights are not granted to individual citizens by the liberal state, but must be actively claimed as collective rights

The reappropriation of urban space occurs through autogestion. This is a process by which inhabitants seize control over society from hierarchical state and market structures. Autogestion occurs every time social groups refuse to passively accept its conditions of existence, but chooses to focus on mastering its own condition (Lago 2012). Autogestion enables residents to reorient the city towards their own needs (Lefebvre 1996, pp. 67–68). Residents contest and appropriate urban space in the face of state and market structures. There is a pedagogical element to the process of appropriation. As residents claim space in the city and assert use over exchange value, they also actively develop the capacity to manage the city for themselves (Purcell 2014, p. 151).

Autogestion is an instrument through which the primacy of use value can be restored. It is also the key to the right to the city. (Bower 2016). Inhabitants should claim the production of urban space through appropriation, countering alienation. Seen as autogestion, self-building can offer an antidote to the homogenizing effects of housing provided for by state or commercial providers who prioritize exclusively exchange values (Scott 2020). Effective autogestion causes the regime of corporate and state managers to wither away (Purcell and Tyman 2015). The framework highlights how residents value the idea of the urban on their own terms, counter to dominant ideas that reduce space to private property or as a valuable commodity.

The analytic strength of Lefebvre's viewpoint for this dissertation lies in the way it exposes the tension between use and exchange value in housing. It also highlights how capitalist and bureaucratic housing structures create alienation and exclusion and how residents may actively counter these through autogestion and social mobilization (Arıcan 2020). At the normative level, it offers a framework for strengthening resident control over housing. This is reflected in its prominence in the discursive repertoire of housing movements and activists, in Brazil but also elsewhere (Lago 2012; Fisker et al. 2018). It also speaks to the right to self-determination and participation, both of which are recognized as necessary elements of the right to adequate and affordable housing by the UN (Rolnik 2019). Still, the abstract nature of the framework means it may not be directly applicable to understanding the activities and experiences of self-builders in specific contexts.

1.6 Spatial governance

The concept of spatial governance is used to understand the relations between self-builders, different levels of state and other actors, such as housebuilders or political movements. Governance denotes the organization of social action for a form of public benefit. Following Savini et al. (2014) we may understand spatial governance and planning as coordinating various resources across different dimensions. Applied to urban development, planning conditions the distribution and allocation of activities and resources.

Public institutions and the state condition housing provision. European planning literature has tended to assume regulations negatively impede residents' capacity to produce housing. This is expressed by work adopting post-structuralist ontologies, arguing states' insensitivity to 'bottom-up' initiatives results in disappointment (Boonstra and Boelens 2011). The self-building advocacy literature expresses similar complaints over institutional impediments and red tape (Wallace *et al.* 2013a). Research on informal modes of self-building in non-European contexts offers a more nuanced vision of the relationship between state and resident involvement in housing production (Roy 2005, Durst and Wegmann 2017).

The work on urban informalities provides a starting point for understanding the dynamic relationship between spatial governance, institutions and resident-led urban development. This work acknowledges the various ways in which housing provision may be unauthorized or transgress private or public laws. Rather than understanding informal housing as opposite to 'formal' planning regimes, it is necessary to note that they are patterned by the state, both implicitly and explicitly. Crucial here is the insight that state powers may use informality as a governance mechanism. It is a discursive label used to classify settlements (Roy 2005, Mcfarlane 2010). This directs attention to the question of how the state classifies what forms of urban development are authorized and legitimate. This is essentially a power-laden process of institutional contestation. Caldeira (2017) dubbed the notion of peripheral urbanization to classify such modes of urbanization in the global south, arguing it consists out of interrelated processes following a distinct mode of agency and temporality and according to a transversal logic amidst political contestation. Still, this research is not explicitly interested in the discursive classification of housing practices, but does center in on the mechanism through which the state interacts with self-building practices. It helps conceptualize the diversity in state responses to self-building practices, which may vary from support, tolerance, acquiescence or repression. The focus of this research is specifically on the ways in which public parties in spatial governance actively interact, condition or support self-building activities.

1.7 Action in self-building

Understanding self-building activities necessitates an ontology of human agency. The dissertation draws on an actor-based institutionalism, emphasizing the multi-dimensional nature of housing. A house is multiple things at once, it a good that satisfies the need for shelter and warmth. To its owner, it is also an economic good that stores value or can be exchanged (Mallett 2004, Ronald 2008). As homeownership has become increasingly important in industrialized market economies, so have the economic dimensions of housing become increasingly relevant. Conceptions of housing as commodity or asset may conflict with the meaning it has in terms of providing home and dwelling. Such meanings may be shaped by contingencies in terms of space, time and culture (Ronald 2008). The few accounts of the experiences of European self-builders have tended to focus on distinction and taste, reflecting the consumptive turn (Mackay and Perkins 2017). Meanwhile, studies of informal self-builders focus primarily on economic or legal dimensions, seeing self-building as an act of creative agency, legal mismatch, or rapid urbanization (Bredenoord and van Lindert 2010, Dekel 2020)

The central contradiction between economic and social meanings of housing has been captured by the political-economic contradiction of use and exchange value. Use value refers to what one gains by using a good, while exchange value refers to the monetary gain that can be realized with a good. Housing occupies the uneasy middle-ground between exchange and use value. Self-building provides an interesting entry point to provide the contradiction between use and exchange value in housing. Depending on the property relation that it is adopted, residents may not only relate to the self-built house as commodity or home, but they also influence and decide upon material characteristics which has ramifications for its potential future value.

In order to conceptualize the actions of self-builders the dissertation draws upon the concept of an action situation (Ostrom 1990). This conceptual unit summarizes different courses of action within self-building. Actors interact at each of the early defined stages: commisioning, investment, design, construction and maintenance. Note that for the definition of self-build housing here it is necessary that residents fulfill the commisioning role. However, they may interact with other actors in different phases of self-building understood as an activity. The diagram highlights that self-building can be both processual

and iterative. Institutions shape action not by simply defining actors' calculus, but rather by shaping their norms and beliefs.

The actor-institutionalism adopted by Ostrom understands agents as acting strategically, intentionally and utility-maximizing. This dissertation acknowledges an actor-centered approach and the premise of strategic intentionality. Self-builders can intend to achieve their goals, individually or collectively, in a manner defined by them. However, it objects to the central element of rational actor theory by asserting that actors can impossibly know all possible courses of action (Joas 1996). It thus moves to a more relational understanding of use and exchange value as causative of action. The dissertation understands actors as intending to behave rationally, but emphasizes that epistemological limitations render it difficult, if not impossible, to calculate the best course of action in a given action situation. Of relevance then becomes how actors understand possible courses of action, rather than explaining their behavior with respect to a pre-given scenario of utility-maximization.

The dissertation draws on a more interpretivist approach of actor-based institutionalism, paying attention to the interpretive frames that structure action situations and actors' imaginaries (Beckert 2016). In this respect it emphasizes how institutional conditions do not simply define actors' calculus, but rather shape norms and beliefs (March and Olsen 2006). At an analytical level the question arises how residents are activated in self-building and on what grounds. Value, in terms of use and exchange value, is not intrinsic to the materiality of self-building, but rather lies in the meaning ascribed to it by parties (Beckert and Aspers 2011).

1.8 Property

Special attention must be paid to the uneasy relationship between the right to the city and property. According to Lefebvre private property represents a form of expropriation for private use. Capitalist production of urban space parcelizes the city into isolated segments of private property. The needs of property owners tend to dominate other claims, by alienating and excluding inhabitants from urban space. Private property as a legal category is essential

for the transformation of housing into an exchangeable market commodity (Madden and Marcuse 2016). Lefebvre was quite insistent on distinguishing the right to the city from the right to private property. The appropriation foreseen through autogestion refuses the computability of a property rights of ownership, rather focusing on belonging and inhabitance (Purcell 2014, p. 149). Seen in this light, the right to the city is a struggle to augment inhabitants' rights vis-à-vis property rights. The right to the city is defined by use and appropriation, rather than property rights and expropriation (Aalbers and Gibb 2014, p. 208). The incommensurability of the right to the city and property statement has been challenged by alternative theorizations of property. Blomley (2004) for example argues that property is more politically and empirically diverse than suggested by Lefebvre. He imagines property as a set of "practices, claims and legal relations" that do not stand synonymous with the classic liberal ownership of private property alone (Singer 2000). For Blomley (2004, p. 153), the right to the city may be realized through property when defined more expansionary terms. He advocates focusing on how such property claims are put to work and with what effects (Blomley 2004, p. 346). In a similar vein, Dawkins (2020) argues that the right to the city and property are not as incompatible as proposed if we understand that rights may be effectively dispersed, advocating a focus on those incidents of property that engender security of tenure and control.

The uneasy relationship between property and the right to the city presents a dilemma for self-building as a mode of autogestion. On the one hand self-building can claim to actualize use values over exchange values through processes of appropriation. On the other hand, when this is done through the creation of exclusionary socio-legal arrangements, it may run counter to the right to the city as a collective claim. The way in which property is imagined matters for the consequences of autogestion.

1.9 Research question

There is increased interest to self-build housing as a means of enabling residents in the production of urban space. However, existing research on self-build housing has explored it largely as an isolated phenomenon or structural rapid urbanization. In particular, the relationship between the spatial governance and

self-building activities remains underexplored. While some planning studies have underlined the epistemological ineptness of planners, little work has investigated how spatial governance dynamics relate to self-building activities in practice. Thus, this research starts from the premise that understanding the progressive capacity of self-building poses not so much an individualist or economic challenge, but rather a question that should be understood from an institutionalist angle. It aims to juxtapose a qualitative analysis of self-building activities with the way in which self-building is embedded into urban development processes.

The dissertation aims to explore the capacity of self-build housing to address growing housing constraints for low- and middle-incomes in urban areas and understand it an opportunity for the participation and appropriation of the production of urban space. It situates the experiences of self-builders in relation to the structuring logic of property. It explores in particular the governance arrangements catering to resident-led modes of housing provision and the mechanisms of interaction between these two dimensions. The research is guided by the following main and sub-questions, these are addressed by the specific research papers.

Main Question

How does self-build housing for low- and middle-incomes interact with the institutional dynamics of spatial governance in Brazil and the Netherlands?

Subquestion

How and why do state actors interact with self-buildings as a mode of housing provision?

Chapter

2 & 5

How do actors experience self-build housing?

3 & 5

How can property relations in self-build housing be conceptualized and how do these condition self-building activities?

4 & 5

1.10 Methodology and case selection

The dissertation is based on two empirical case-studies of self-build housing developments that are supported by urban planning and housing policy frameworks. The case-study approach is used to enable an in-depth exploration of how spatial governance interacts with self-building for low- and middle-incomes in urban city-regions and to understand the drivers and mechanisms of this process. The research design adopts an exploratory and explanatory approach. The study is aimed at understanding the mechanisms by which spatial governance and planning interacts with resident-led modes of housing, such as self-build housing. In order to understand this the research adopts a qualitative research strategy. We are particularly interested in the meanings actors ascribe to social reality. It imputes actors with a capacity for intentional action but recognizes this is not solely dependent upon utility calculus and conditioned by norms such as property relations.

To investigate the interactive relationship between self-building practices and spatial governance in different contexts this study adopts a case-study approach. The research uses an instrumental view of a case-study as an intense study used to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena (Gerring 2004). Of central concern is how self-build housing practices are governed in a real-life context and how these relate to different conditions. The aim is not to generate general laws about self-building and urban governance, but rather to understand how these processes unfold in particular contexts.

The dissertation draws primarily on qualitative data including semi-structured interviews and policy documents conducted between September 2016 and December 2019. The primary source of data were collected in semi-structured interviews (Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of different actors, including policy-makers, public officials, politicians, social movement members and residents. The secondary data used included an extensive analysis of policy documents, legal documents, bylaws, statutes and newspaper articles.

1.1.1 Comparative strategy

Comparing urban contexts such as the São Paulo and Amsterdam metropolitan areas runs counter to the common practice in research on self-building. The cases were deliberately accentuated as they ostensibly represent the typical images of highly formalized planning system versus rampant informality. The comparative strategy responds to calls made for more multipolar modes of urban theory-making (Peck 2015). It responds directly to the dominant view which aided self-building to be a phenomenon exclusive to the global south. One of the key controversies entails the unquestioned separation of concepts to be held exclusive to the European or non-European experience. Authors warn against such exclusive ways of knowing the urban and urged for a deconstruction of global models of urban theory (McFarlane 2010; Robinson 2016). The postcolonial critique in urban studies has primarily addressed the question of what is the urban and how we come to understand it (Robinson & Roy 2016). At its core it is not only a methodological, but also an ontological and analytical critique. The postcolonial urban critique has addressed the point that seemingly ostensible global urban transformations are based on particular western epistemologies (MacFarlane 2010). This warrants a recognition of divergent contexts and local contiguity (Nijman 2015).

The research thus subscribes to the ontological call for understanding cities as ordinary cities (Robinson 2006). Instead of categorizing cities according to labels such as formal/informal, developed/underdeveloped, this view sees cities as 'dynamic and diverse, if conflicted arenas for social and economic life' (Robinson 2016, p.1). Cities are sites of political contestation, economic activity and political redistribution. The research explicitly does not depart from understanding globalizing processes and their impact on local practices. Instead it engages with self-building across different contexts, pluralizing the production of urban theory. It aims to dismantle the dominant frame of self-building as a marginal phenomenon and reject the incommensurability of urban experiences of self-building in the north and south.

The point of Robinson is to advocate for a comparative urban approach that goes beyond a comparison of most different cases. It considers cities that are traditionally considered as ontologically distinct on the same plane of investigation. The investigation in this respect does not address matching

criteria in terms of GDP, welfare context or social structure, but rather by centering on similar analytical dimensions. The aim is not to rank urban contexts or to put them into order, but rather to recognize and explore the diversity of social processes with respect to the governance of self-build housing from the bottom-up. The comparison within this dissertation thus works through juxtaposition, emphasizing the qualitative logic grounding this research.

1.12 Structure

This dissertation is structured according to four scientific research articles that have been published by, or submitted for publication to peer-reviewed scientific journals. These articles each represent a chapter of the dissertation. Each chapter can be understood as resulting from stand-alone research, putting emphasis on a different dimension of the spatial governance and institutional dynamics of self-build housing.

Chapter 2, published in *Land Use Policy*, investigates the interaction between the planning and housing regime and self-build housing practices in the Netherlands. The chapter demonstrates how low- and middle-income residents over time have become strongly dependent on densely organized consortia of municipalities, housing associations and market developers. The article indicates that land development conditions appear to be at odds with the logics presupposed by self-building. The paper uses a pilot study of the Homeruskwartier in Almere, one of the largest state-led self-building schemes in the 21st century in Europe. The study indicates that making self-building the cornerstone of a resident-led development strategy for low- and middle-incomes entails a reconfiguration of actors' positions in housing provision. This involves a commisioning role of residents within the established social and commercial domains.

Chapter 3, published in *Housing Studies*, investigates the aspirations and strategies of self-builders of owner-occupied homes in the Homeruskwartier. Further exploring the case introduced in the first chapter, the chapter explores why people have resorted to the self-building of their own homes, and how they have done so. It interrogates the premise that self-building necessarily leads to

the pursuit of use over exchange values. The aspirations of self-builders are not only framed by social and material conditions, but are also being reframed in the action process. This questions not only the positive benefits practitioners attribute to self-building, it also stresses the contingent nature of aspirations and strategies, emphasizing the experimental character of the building process.

Chapter 4, published in *Housing, Theory & Society*, conceptualizes collaborative housing, involving different forms collective self-building. It unpacks the concept of collaborative housing and develops an ideal-typical typology through property regimes. These are social arrangements concerning the allocation of rights, rules and roles with respect to a resource. The chapter draws on my own empirical research and international examples from the academic literature to develop a conceptual argument. The chapter notes that collaborative housing is generally based on limited common property, self-governance and sets of internal rules. While sharing these characteristics with other residential communities, collaborative housing can be differentiated by virtue of collectively held management and commissioning rights. Property regimes are a mediating variable for both positive and negative effects attributed to collaborative housing.

Chapter 5, currently under review, turns to collective self-building practices in a radically different context, that of São Paulo, Brazil. The chapter analyzes the consolidation of occupied vacant real-estate into low-income housing in central São Paulo. Using the lens of the commons, the chapter explores specifically what conditions contribute to their robustness as a decommodified, collectively managed and produced good. It draws on a combined methodology of participatory action research and semi-structured interviews. The chapter presents two housing occupations in central São Paulo that have been consolidated into low-income housing with public funds. The chapter shows how housing movements mobilize state-funds in order to contest and consolidate low-income housing in central São Paulo, challenging class-based residence patterns. At the same time, federal housing programs bear seeds of new enclosures by imposing ownership leases, individualized financing and compartmentalized spatial form, thus inducing proprietary individualism.