

State-Community Collaborative Strategies to Enable the Right to the City in
Argentina

By

Adam Cutts

Supervisor: Prof. Sarah Moser (Department of Geography)

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree B.A.
Honours in Urban Systems.

Department of Geography
McGill University
Montreal (Quebec) Canada

April 2015

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Sarah Moser, for her incredible enthusiasm, encouragement, and thorough guidance throughout the research and writing of this thesis.

I am very appreciative of her support and the passion she instills in her students for understanding and challenging contemporary urbanism. I am also extremely grateful to the organization Vivienda Social y Ciudad in Santa Fe, Argentina, and specifically to Paola Bagnera for her generosity and patience, inviting a foreign student to participate and learn from a very exciting group of people

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, and especially in the wake of the 2002 social and economic crisis, there has been significant growth in the number of Argentinean grass-roots movements, NGOs, and cooperatives that focus on providing affordable housing for the urban poor. In response, the current federal government has advanced uniquely progressive housing policies that aim to address the housing deficit in concert with social and neighborhood organizations. This paper examines the strategies of the National Land Commission for Social Housing and investigates various participatory processes for meeting housing needs employed in the mid-sized city of Santa Fe. The National Land Commission's notion of active participation will be discussed both in terms of how it affirms 'right to the city' principles and as a more progressive form of 'assisted self-help' housing, and how it better embodies the ideals of self-help than previous efforts to address the housing deficit. This paper highlights a recent collaborative effort between the state and community groups to introduce nationally owned vacant land for cooperative/community-based housing production in the city of Santa Fe. We explore this initiative in terms of the institutional, financial, and technical support it provides for communities and the direct provision of urban land as a potential way forward for engaging with communities to address housing shortages.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Situating the study: Housing deficit in Argentina

Argentina is one of the world's most urbanized countries, with 93% of its population living in cities, up from 88% in 1994 (WorldBank, 2014). Cities across Argentina have struggled to keep up with housing and infrastructure needs, as do many underdeveloped countries with increasingly large and poor urban populations (Monkkonen & Ronconi, 2013) The housing deficit in Argentina can be observed both quantitatively and qualitatively by increasing homelessness, overcrowding, irregular tenancy and by a lack of infrastructure services. Both sides of this housing deficit has grown over the past decades, with the percentage of the total national population living in deficient dwellings rising to a peak of roughly 36% after the 2001/2002 economic crisis (INDEC, 2001)¹. This deficit, however, has been improving with recent censuses indicating a decline to around 21.6%, in absolute terms of deficient dwellings, and further categorizing only 18% of this deficit as 'irrecoverable housing' as opposed to upwards of 40% 'irrecoverable' in previous decades (Gazzoli 2007, Maldonado 2009, INDEC 2010). This trend, as well as the distinction between recoverable and irrecoverable housing in the national census, demonstrates both the political will and the need to implement housing programs that engage with prevailing forms of settlement among urban poor in the development of housing solutions (Gazzoli 2007). Now, more than a decade after the economic disaster and the failure of neo-liberal policies (Arceo, 2006; Manzetti, 2009), a

¹ This deficit, however, appears to be changing in nature, largely attributed to economic recovery since the crisis, with the 2010 census indicating a decline to around 21.6%, in absolute terms, of deficient dwellings, and further categorizing only 18% of this deficit as 'irrecoverable housing' as opposed to upwards of 40% of the deficit categorized as irrecoverable in previous decades (Gazzoli, 2007; INDEC, 2010; Maldonado, 2009).

strong political shift towards a more active state and growing broad-based support for progressive, community-driven solutions have created unique conditions for Argentina to set a precedent for state involvement in addressing affordable housing shortages.

This thesis situates a recent focus of the Argentine government supporting the social production of habitat and community-based modes of housing within the context of previous approaches in the country and across the continent. More specifically, this thesis explores the approach of the *Comisión Nacional de Tierras para el Hábitat Social* (CNTH) – the National Land Commission for Social Housing² – and how it is working with networks of social organizations to engage them in participatory design, the production of ‘habitat’, and the improvement of informal settlements. These initiatives to encourage alternative forms of housing development with community participation present an important but overlooked example of collaboration between design professionals, the state, and community social organizations, thus providing a counterpoint to widespread neoliberal urban policies and development. Through projects such as the one I examine in this paper, the Argentinean state is attempting to employ the ‘right to the city’ concept to practice-based housing programs. The examination of this experimentation with progressive policies and their implementation responds to recent calls for further empirical studies on the ‘right to the city’ movement as an important material and theoretical phenomenon in the Global South beyond neoliberalism (Parnell & Robinson, 2012).

² In the months following the research for this paper, the CNTH was absorbed into a newly created National Secretariat for Access to Habitat (Secretaría Nacional de Acceso al Hábitat), to be headed by the current president of the CNTH. As a secretariat, the commission will be allocated a larger budget and stronger authority for projects in collaboration with provincial and municipal governments across the country (Secretaría Nacional de Comunicación Pública, 2014)

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The idea of a ‘rights based city’ and the ‘right to the city’ is at the core of many social movements for land and housing in Argentina. Originally conceptualized by Henri Lefebvre in 1968, the ‘right to the city’ encompasses many different rights, broadly based on equitable access to the benefits, services, and opportunities that cities have to offer. Most importantly, this concept includes the right to *equal access* to the power to collectively shape and have a say over the process of urbanization and life in the city. The right to the city concept has gained significant traction in Latin America, engaging with the recent surge in populist governments and where cities are increasingly exclusionary due to ‘property speculation, widespread vacant urban land, environmental degradation, widespread gated communities, and above all the proliferation of precarious informal settlements’ (Fernandes, 2007, p. 210). Lefebvre, in discussing the implications of the right to the city, takes a Marxist approach, suggesting that this right will only be realized with a radical change – dismantling currently dominant (urban) structures. According to Lefebvre, this social action and reformulation of the city necessarily involves, and is led by, the oppressed social classes.

Some scholars and organizations also interpret the right to the city with specific regards to equal access to housing, social security, and public goods and services (Harvey, 2003). Recent interest in this concept in Argentina and elsewhere has applied the right to the city in this sense as a critique of neoliberal urban development, with social organizations, activists and academics employing it as a framework for better empowering urban dwellers. Similarly, Brenner, Marcuse, and Myer (2012) introduce the right to the city as a useful theoretical tool, in conjunction with ‘critical urban theory’, to

analyze the volatile capital accumulation in the city and the resulting unsustainable forms of urban development which pushes certain ‘types’ of people out of the city.

Contemporary urban issues that have arisen under the auspices of neoliberal urbanization in Argentina and around the world, such as the ‘hypercommodification’ of land, housing, public space, etc. relate directly to the exclusion, inequality, and un-equal power relations of the current capitalist process of urban development that right to the city movements seek to confront.

In Argentina, as is explored in this thesis, social organizations and a recent government housing program have used the right to the city as a ‘rallying cry’ to work towards forming alternative, just, and radically democratic form of urban development and decision making in the shaping of cities. Primarily, these movements seek to confront land speculation, and the alienation and precarious housing situations experienced by certain urban populations excluded by the formal market and current forms of urban development. There is, however, some debate over the recent popularity and subsequent distortion and trivialization of the radicalism in Lefebvre’s concept. De Souza (2010) highlights this with the example of striving to correct or supplement representative democracy with public participation, “while the *democracy* [in current city management], and its premises – state apparatus, free mandate – remain unquestioned” (De Souza, 2010, p. 316). As such, the concept of the right to the city and debate surrounding it are useful conceptual handles with which to examine the ongoing progressive housing program under the CNTH in Argentina and the process of collaboration between design professionals and social organizations.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis investigates a current national housing program and how it is being implemented in the context of Santa Fe, a city of nearly 500,000 residents in northeastern Argentina. The next chapter outlines the evolution of approaches to housing in Argentina over the past five decades, followed by an overview of the scholarly work on progressive approaches to the housing deficit in the Global South, identifying lessons learned and the multiple approaches present in Argentinean policy. The third chapter describes the research methodology employed during two months of fieldwork, researching this thesis' case study in Santa Fe, Argentina. The fourth chapter presents the unique conditions under which the rationale and political climate for the establishment of the current National Land Commission for Social Housing (CNTH) was created, and discusses the relationships formed between the state, grassroots associations, and social and professional organizations, while chapter five describes the various approaches the CNTH employs in addressing Argentina's housing deficit. Following the previous chapters' introduction and discussion of the CNTH, chapter six analyzes the implementation of the policies and programs on the ground, using a case study to focus on a recent initiative aimed at allocating nationally-owned land in urban areas for the development of participatory social housing. The final section reflects upon the strengthened capacities of communities in Santa Fe involved in programs for collaborative low-income housing provision amongst the challenges of these new housing policies and programs within the broader housing policy landscape in Argentina.

Chapter 2: Context and literature review

2.1 Context: The evolution of Argentinean housing policy – 1946 to the 2002 crisis

Over the past several decades, Argentina's urban housing shortage has been addressed by the state through various approaches ranging from the large-scale provision of subsidized housing to private market-led policies aimed at expanding the formal housing sector. Since the government of Juan Perón (1946-1955) until the beginning of military rule in 1976, the Argentinean state provided subsidized housing units and long-term, low-interest loans as the main approach to the housing deficit (Aboy, 2007). During this period of heavy state intervention and wealth redistribution, the government had direct involvement in the planning, construction, allocation, and administration of social housing, building over 10, 000 homes in both single family homes and multi-family units. Further, Fondo Nacional de Vivienda (FONAVI) a mandatory savings fund and extensive credit system for housing through the National Mortgage Bank was established, distributing more than 300, 000 very low-interest loans, wittingly mitigated by inflation over their 30 year pay-back periods (Garro 1996, Aboy 2007)³.

Housing programs in the years following were mostly comprised of subsidized apartment complexes used as an instrument for the eradication of slums (Angel 2001). These policies and the projects were implemented following a modernist rationale, with planning and decision making in the hands of 'experts' providing large-scale, universal housing solutions directed at lower-income communities solely as recipients (Rodulfo 2006).

³ Rosa Aboy (2007) points out that during this same period (1946-1955), the Perón government passed two laws which froze rents and prohibited eviction – having the unintended effect of discouraging private construction of rental units, and deepening the housing deficit

Policies for slum eradication continued throughout the military regime that began in 1976⁴, and included massive evictions of informal settlements and the passing of land subdivision regulations that had the effect of limiting low-income families from accessing low-priced urban land⁵. With a considerably lower total spending on social housing during these years and a reduction of the role and portfolio of the National Mortgage Bank, this period marked the end of large-scale provision of social housing to low-income Argentines. Despite extensive evictions, the resulting sustained shortage of affordable housing and lack of developed land accessible to low-income groups led to a consolidation of illegal informal and squatter settlements in urban areas across the country (Rodulfo 2006, Rolnik 2011).

As democracy was re-instated in Argentina in 1983, the new government continued a process of decentralization and economic liberalization that had been initiated by the military regime. During the widespread neoliberal economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s, the role of the government in social housing went from that of provider of housing through ‘expert’-led modernist housing projects, to that of ‘housing market enabler’. At this time the World Bank and IMF took a sharp turn to promote a market enabling approach, pushing various forms of neo-liberal policies on ‘reluctant poor countries that often badly needed their loans and grants’ (Stiglitz, 2002, p. 13). The Argentinean state’s approach focused on the provision of complete ‘ready-for-move-in’ housing units for the middle and working classes and progressively blocked the

⁴ The last military regime in Argentina from 1976-83 is characterized by mass state violence and human rights abuses, state reorganization, ballooning national debt, as well as a growing inequality within the population (see Ferrer, 2012; Veigel, 2009).

⁵ Law 8912 prohibited the subdivision and sale of plots of land without basic infrastructure, thus cutting off a source of inexpensive land for self-built housing of the urban poor (Angel 2001).

diversification of housing programs (Angel, 2001; Rodulfo, 2006; Scheinsohn & Cabrera, 2009). Further, in the process of decentralization and neoliberal economic liberalization in Argentina, the responsibility for FONAVI housing programs was handed down to the provinces and restructured. Influenced by multi-lateral financial institutions and structural adjustment loans in the 1980s, state involvement in the housing sector was increasingly limited. These loans mandated an increased focus of the funds of both the National Mortgage Bank and FONAVI towards middle-income families able to contribute larger down payments in order to reduce government investment per unit. Through this process, the private sector was included in various stages of the financing, construction, and provision of housing, placing further importance on the private market.⁶

When policies were introduced in the late 1980s and 1990s, many observers touted the extensive application of neoliberal, free market policies in all sectors, including housing, as an example of structural adjustment bringing economic growth to countries in the Global South (Dowall, 1992; Malpezzi & Mayo, 1987; Mayo, Malpezzi, & Gross, 1986; WorldBank, 1993). As critics point out, however, this type of reform often had the effect of prioritizing large conglomerates and ‘shifting the balance of class political power’ rather than fostering widespread economic growth (Evans & Sewell, 2013, p. 57). This eventually led to the concentration of wealth and excessive speculation of urban land, compromising the ability of low-income groups to influence and benefit

⁶ Argentina is said to have had the most intensive experience with the ‘neoliberal experiment’ in Latin America (Azpiazu, 2002; Benwell, Haselip, & Borello, 2013). In terms of effects on the social housing sector, loans from multilateral financial institutions mandated extensive restructuring, including privatization of the National Mortgage Bank, the reduction of state spending per housing unit, and the refocusing of programs to beneficiaries who could contribute higher down payments. Reform of the ‘Federal Housing Systems Law’ did not allow for diversification of housing programs outside of introducing private sector intermediaries into the process of construction and financing of ‘turn-key’ housing units, which overall resulted in the reduced affordability of state-subsidized housing units (Angel, 2001).

from such policies (Baken & Van der Linden, 1993; Cohen, 1994; Jones, 1994; Keivani & Werna, 2001). The resulting 2002 economic crisis, characterized by unprecedented unemployment, urban poverty, and spatial and economic inequality, substantially transformed Argentina. The widespread experience of this crisis demonstrated the broad social and economic failings of neoliberal approaches and prompted a broad reassessment of the state's responsibility for providing basic needs (Benwell et al., 2013; Teubal, 2004). During this period, a variety of social organizations, cooperatives, and NGOs emerged as important actors in the provision of housing and formed a strong presence in urban centres across the country. The alternative approaches practiced by many of these organizations and community associations broadened the range of housing interventions in post-crisis housing policy and expanded the range of actors involved in the process (Scheinsohn & Cabrera, 2009, p. 110).

2.2 Influences on the Argentinean approach to 'pro-poor' housing programs

Prior to the 1980s, before neoliberal policies began to take root, the IMF and World Bank piloted housing policy projects across Latin America. The distinctive approach of the time followed the contrasting understanding of the functioning of the markets and the need to offset its shortcomings. During this period many nations adopted a variety of 'self-help' and 'sites and services' housing programs⁷ under the direction of the IMF and World Bank. These programs were partially inspired by the works of John Turner and other influential writers on housing in the Global South, who advocated for

⁷ 'Self-help' and 'sites and services' programs deliver a range of shelter-related services, such as connection to roads and infrastructure, or the implementation of 'slum upgrading' programs.

self-help programs, identifying ‘squatter settlements’ as solutions rather than problems⁸.

While progressive in their approach to the value and vitality of informal housing processes, the implementation of the World Bank programs during this era has been criticized for distorting the original ideals on which they were founded (Harris, 2003; Keivani & Werna, 2001; Maldonado, 2009). Scholars criticize self-help programs of this period for prioritizing market-led approaches and employing self-help programs to expand the formal housing market into informal settlements, rather than enabling and increasing the capacity of the informal self-build housing sector.

For this reason, the emergence of social organizations and NGOs engaging in a variety of innovative housing interventions during the economic crisis in Argentina is significant as it represented an important emergence of self-help programs outside of the World Bank’s influence. Under military rule in the 1970s, during which time international agencies mandated their versions of self-help housing programs elsewhere on the continent, Argentina had few experiences with nationally sanctioned, community-led approaches until the influence of Habitat International Coalition (HIC), and strategies put forth in the 1987 Limuru Declaration⁹. The concept of the ‘social production of habitat’, created and advanced by HIC, has been the leading influence on NGOs and social organizations in Argentina’s housing sector (Maldonado, 2009), and continues to inform the action plans of advocacy groups and neighborhood associations across the country. This concept embraced the value of communities collectively producing their

⁸ The extent to which these programs followed Turner and other experts’ advocacy for citizen control in the design and management of housing solutions was often quite minimal (see Harris, 2003; and Maldonado, 2009 for more on the incongruence between Turner’s input and the World Bank’s version of ‘assisted self-help housing’).

⁹ The Limuru Declaration, organized by HIC and other international non-profits in housing, used the HIC’s concept of the ‘social production of habitat’ to formulate strategies and programs for enabling ‘low income people as city builders’ in the Global South. Habitat in this concept refers to human shelter, surrounding environment, and interactions and relations among neighbors (HIC, 1990).

own housing and neighborhoods and also revived the work of urban theorists such as Charles Abrams (1966), John Turner (1967, 1972), and William Mangin (1967). Using a similar focus as these seminal works promoting the notion that informal settlements can manage their own housing needs, organizations in Argentina began to develop meaningful forms of community participation and collective action for land and housing outside of the influence of the international donors and the World Bank. Organizations such as the Territorial Liberation Movement (MTL), Federation for Land, Housing and Habitat (FTV), the Movement of Occupiers and Renters (MOI), and the Social Housing Foundation (FPVS) among others, emerged to increase low-income communities' access to organizational, material, and technical resources for the self-management of housing. These groups also lobbied politicians for public services and favourable policies, while opening some important avenues for the creation of laws for the expropriation of land for 'social utility'¹⁰ and forged some important relationships between social organizations and professional associations in the process (CNTH, 2014; Maldonado, 2009; Rolnik, 2011).

The rich ecosystem of social organizations that developed during the period of intense neoliberal reform, and the ways in which they continue to interact both cooperatively and confrontationally with the state deserve attention. As will be discussed in the next chapter, current programs that support housing production outside of the formal sector have arisen from this interaction and provide a compelling case for the renewal of 'self-help housing' ideals that better benefit the provision of low-income housing. Although the overall impact of these progressive programs in Argentina is still

¹⁰ Such as Act 21499 for the expropriation of land for 'public utility or social benefit' and Law 24.374 for the regularization of land tenure of long, and peacefully established informal settlements on vacant lands, used by CNTH.

unfolding, this case study provides insight into a progressive state initiative and illustrates an overlooked experience in contemporary Argentina with potential applications in other countries struggling with housing deficits.

2.3 Literature Review

2.3.1 Literature on urban poverty and housing deficit in the Global South

Urban studies literature on Latin America and elsewhere is in constant effort to keep up with the growing complexity of issues in urban poverty and the under-served, economically and socially excluded sectors of society often living in informal settlements. The political and economic context of the mid 20th Century responsible for the consolidation of widespread urban poverty and informal housing in the Global South differs greatly from the context in which these conditions are reproduced in contemporary cities (Maldonado, 2009). As such, more recent studies on urban poverty in Latin America have expanded dramatically from purely macro-economic analysis and measurement of poverty to a subject of research taken on by a wide variety of disciplines and theoretical approaches in order to provide a broader understanding of the complexities of this phenomenon.

Literature on urban poverty in Latin America and the Global South includes a large body of work in political economy assessing the impact of power, class, and structural causes of uneven development and the urbanization of poverty in the Global South (Kay, 1989; Gilbert & Gugler, 1992; Wratten, 1995). This macro level of study attempts to measure the material conditions of the urban poor, and situates it within larger political and social cycles both domestically and internationally. On a more local scale, scholars in fields such as anthropology, cultural geography, and social work have long

examined urban poverty through ethnography and other qualitative research techniques, seeking to portray the daily lives of residents of informal settlements around the world. This micro level of study has examined phenomena such as the resulting transformations of social and family life (Scheper-Hughes, 1993; Isla, Lacarrieu, & Selby, 1998), the shelter, livelihood, and survival strategies of the urban poor (Frías, 1989; Merklen, 1997), and has attempted representation of residents of informal settlements' own perceptions life in marginalized urban areas (Chambers, 1995; Bachiller, 2013; Lombard, 2014).

Furthermore, since the 1960s, the insights of the above-mentioned practitioners in architecture and development, Charles Abrams (1966), John Turner (1967, 1972), and William Mangin (1967), continues to inspire a broader understanding of urban poverty within the debate addressing urban housing shortages and informality. This body of work strives to overturn myths about the supposed chaotic, desperate, and criminal nature of informal settlements in Latin America. Turner and his contemporaries introduced the idea of valuing the process and product of self-constructed informal settlements in the face of neglect from the state and private markets, based on extensive research in Peru and other South American communities. This work called for programs encouraging 'self-help' and technical assistance to residents as users, managers, and producers of their own housing rather than as final consumers. In order to accomplish this, these models placed non-government associations and social organizations as the best equipped actors to articulate such programs. In Argentina, similar ideas were introduced by Pelli (1984) and Buthet et al. (1990), initiating several 'slum improvement' programs and housing-improvement NGOs in these decades. Recent decades, however, have introduced both challenges and opportunities within the low-income housing debate specific to Argentina;

Aggressive real-estate development and speculation, the growing population of second generation residents of informal settlements, emerging social movements such as the ‘right to the city’ movement, piqueteros (picketers) and other strong social organizations have little been studied in regards to the development of housing policy and programs, and their role in housing for the urban poor.

Since these above-mentioned early works on informal housing, scholars have studied a range of housing policies and programs affecting low-income settlements, from large-scale slum clearing and apartment block construction, to the multitude of programs for ‘formalization’ and ‘slum improvement’. This body of work includes a variety of frameworks for the evaluation of housing programs and reviews of housing policy and individual ‘self help’ programs in India (O’Hare, Abbott, & Barke, 1998; Bhan, 2009), Eastern and Southern Africa (Otiso, 2003; Majale, 2008; Patel, 2013) and across Latin America (Budds, Teixeira, & Sehab, 2005; Bredenoord & Verkoren, 2010; Fernández-Maldonado & Bredenoord, 2010). Both English and Spanish language scholarship on Argentina includes in-depth analysis of particular housing programs since the return of democracy (Herzer, Virgilio, Lanzetta, Martín, Redondo, & Rodríguez, 2005; Buthet, 2006; Martín-Motta, 2013) and a wider scale analysis of the role NGOs play as intermediaries in low-income housing between government, donors, and the urban poor (see Buthet, Maiztegui, & Simari, 2003; and Maldonado, 2009). Although research on housing in the Global South has concentrated on informal modes of housing provision and the emergence of cooperative and community based initiatives, few case studies exist for state programs engaging with these efforts. An analysis of the implementation of a program representing the intersection of these participatory informal modes of provision

and a revisiting of self-help ideals in state-sanctioned production of new housing has been called for by scholars such as Bredenoord & van Lindert (2010). The case study in this thesis will provide social insight on the process and an on-the-ground view of the role community organizations have taken on in Argentina, valuable to knowledge-production on the affordable housing issue in urban studies.

2.3.2 Literature on collaboration and community participation in housing programs

Within literature in architecture, urban geography and social work in Latin America and specifically in Argentina, an important and frequent theme is the concept of ‘hábitat popular’ (roughly translating to habitat of the majority, or working class). This concept, emerging after the 1976 Vancouver Habitat conference, which provided the foundation for the UN Habitat agency, merged housing and the physical need for adequate shelter, with the wider scale of social needs necessary for a basic healthy human environment (Pelli, 1994). Within this concept is the inextricable role of the individual and the community as part of the process and product of ‘habitat popular’. As such, literature on housing deficit and the policies and programs responding to it has often applied this concept - as a holistic understanding of housing needs - to the analysis of processes of participatory design, self-construction, and other forms of collaboration in housing provision.

Works, such as the (1998) book authored by the Argentinean group ‘Servicio Habitacional y de Acción Social’ (Services to Habitat and Social Action) provides various methodological guidelines for participation in and mobilization of communities in housing programs. This collection of case-studies and reflections contributes to literature on the subject by demonstrating the concrete benefits of including community

responses to housing deficit, in terms of mobilization, perception, and desires, in the design of housing programs and policies. Marzioni's 'Hábitat Popular: Encuentro de saberes' (2012) is another good example of this kind of research in Argentina, providing a detailed analysis and evaluation of the processes of specific NGO and state housing programs and their ability to engage with real world mechanisms of oppression. As attention to community participation and involvement in housing programs grows within the Latin America, there is still a shortage in the amount of work which analyzes implementation at the state level, especially in more recent years. The literature that does exist at this level, mostly analyzing Brazilian housing programs, highlights the substantial spin-off effects of community participation, including the educational process, political awareness and improved transparency in government spending (Denaldi 1995, 1997, 2013). The skills and knowledge base within communities that have long struggled with the formal housing market are identified by these authors as useful for direct involvement in housing production, but lack of political will and the growing influence of big developers has severely reduced the influence of participatory approaches to housing. In this thesis, the case study aims to revisit this type of analysis with a rare contemporary example of such a process.

2.3.3 Literature on new social movements in Latin America and Argentina

While neoliberalism, as a phenomenon and political force, dominates the theory and analysis of most phenomena in the Global South, scholars are increasingly highlighting the need to understand the importance of other social and political movements happening locally in these under-developed areas. Social movements for the

right to the city and the social production of habitat have gained a larger voice in both urban and rural areas across Argentina (Maldonado, 2009). This growing phenomenon of organized community-based groups pooling resources for self-help, advocacy and demands for improved state services has been identified by scholars as important forces in urban processes beyond neoliberal development and policy (Maldonado, 2009, Brenner, Marcuse, & Myer, 2012; Parenell & Robinson 2013).

Literature on these new social movements has often taken either a legal or political science standpoint in considering the implications related to growing social movements such as the right to the city. Authors like Fernandes (2007) and O'Meara (2010), discuss the formation of a new 'legal-urban order' that has emerged as a result of pressure from these organizations reacting to the exclusionary and segregated legal order of neoliberalism in South American cities. Research on this emerging 'legal order' points out the ways in which mass resistance to global capitalist policies and the local elites who facilitate them are becoming institutionalized, and have forged avenues for dialogue and negotiation between the state and civil society. The role of protest and organized resistance to neoliberal urban development has been a main focus within this literature and has received the most attention. The application of sociological analysis to this phenomenon is used to identify the various strategies employed by these groups (Benclowicz, 2011; Norden, 2011; Stahler-Sholk, & Vanden, 2011) as well as to analyze the nature of the political influence they were able to gain (Epstein, 2003; Garay, 2007). The significance of social movements such as the Right to the City movement and Piquetero groups (discussed in chapter 4) is generally summarized as having a strong influence in strengthening democratic participation and expanding social policy in

Argentina, while continuing to reinforce communities' capacity to mobilize for collective rights. The contribution of these authors has been identifying the strategies, challenges, and successes of grass roots and community-based social movements in their engagement with the emerging leftist government in post-crisis Argentina. Following this sociological approach, this body of work forms an important reference from which to analyze the recent collaboration between the state and social movements beyond protest and negotiation.

Finally, a phenomenon very much related to the growing interest in participation and capacity building housing programs in Argentina is the growing presence of self-management (*autogestión*) and what is being called 'new cooperativism'. These alternative social and economic models that have grown in force, out of rejection of neoliberal capitalist failure across Latin America, have become an area of study in geography, political science, and urban studies in the continent. Central to this discussion within the study of social movements is identifying the new democratic spaces, solidarity networks, and social economy initiatives they have begun to foster (Vieta, 2009; Atzeni & Vieta, 2014). With strong horizontal organization and direct democratic representation, for example in the cooperative management of housing and neighbourhood revitalization, several case studies have identified these models' capacity for urban and economic revitalization with deeper connections to surrounding communities (Larrabure, Vieta, & Schugurensky, 2011). The state and private market forces have been shown to be the primary challenges to these emerging movements, although social justice in urban regeneration has become more central to state policy in the region (Díaz Parra, & Rabasco Pozuelo, 2013). Understanding how an Argentinean housing program has

integrated cooperative ownership models and direct participation into national housing design and production provides an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of a social movements' ideals within institutional action and policy as a counterforce to neoliberal urban development. The intention in this thesis is to apply the framework of literature on holistic and process-based housing to guide an analysis of this contemporary example of state-community collaboration from the perspective of enablement of the right to the city in Argentina.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

The fieldwork for this thesis' case study was conducted over the summer of 2014 in both Santa Fe and Buenos Aires, Argentina. The opportunity to travel and become involved in the participatory design and planning process over a two-month period was a result of good luck in having made contact with an extremely welcoming architect involved in the project, and a fellowship awarded by the McGill Institute of Health and Social Policy. As a result, I was invited for a ten week opportunity to work (to the best of my abilities), observe, and participate in the process of community organizing, and participatory planning and design organized by a group of architects and planners called *Vivienda Social y Ciudad*, discussed in chapter 6. This research, descriptive in nature, is based on gaining an understanding of the various roles of the different actors in this participatory housing program, the tools used, and the personal insights and reflections of the people involved on all sides (government, professional, and community). The methodology for this research employed during this time draws upon a qualitative mixed-methods approach, which included participant observation, and semi-structured conversational interviews.

3.1 Participant observation

Before real participation in any activities, I began the process of familiarizing myself with some of the history, past projects, community organizations, and some local context of low income areas and housing the city of Santa Fe through research, discussions, and a few short presentations by local community organizations. Following this process, and for the nine weeks of my stay in Santa Fe, I was invited to participate in

a variety of meetings and workshops at various levels: within the organization of architects, between the organization and community/social organizations, and in meetings led by the CNTH government branch. During this time I was also included in the process of conducting and participating in the ongoing participatory design workshops for a set of new alternative social housing developments, described in detail chapter 6.

The venues for these meetings and workshops included community centres, union buildings, university studio classrooms, government building meeting rooms, and the homes of both architects and community members. Carrying out participatory observation in this variety of locations allowed for me to familiarize myself with the kinds of environments and processes involved in the implementation of this and gain a better understanding of what the state-community collaboration looked like ‘on the ground’. Furthermore, a key advantage to this kind of participant observation is the advantage of observing the various actors in different work environments, which offered insight into the nature of relationship and interactions between all parties of the study (Jaber & James, 2002; Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011). Notes were taken on the reactions, interactions, and participation of CNTH representatives, involved architects, and community members. Observation sessions took place during both intimate meetings and intensive participatory design workshops, as well as in larger groups and community organization-led discussions, providing a variety of kinds of interactions both within and between the parties involved.

3.2 Semi Structured Interviews

As an effort of methodological ‘triangulation’, qualitative data for this study’s analysis was also collected through semi-structured and one-on-one conversational interviews. By supplementing participatory observation with more detailed interviews with individuals, the data provides a more comprehensive account of the perceptions of the people involved (Jaber & James, 2002; Roulston, 2010). Furthermore, this also presented the opportunity for ‘member checking’, discussion and feedback with the interviewee to confirm the validity of my recorded data.

In total I carried out 17 conversational interviews with men and women involved in the participatory housing program in different ways. Two interviewees were representatives of the government branch that organized and funded the project, including Guillermo Marzioni, the national ‘director of habitat projects’ in the CNTH. Seven of the interviews were with architects involved in the organization ‘Vivienda Social y Ciudad’, who acted as a technical assistance team to the community groups for participatory design and building techniques. The individuals interviewed were also in charge of conducting the design workshops and helping local groups put together proposals for alternative social housing projects. Finally, eight interviews were done with various members of community organizations in the city of Santa Fe that are involved in advocacy, organization, and demands for social housing. Half of these interviewees were involved in the ongoing project that is subject of this thesis’ case study, while the remaining four interviewees were members of organizations with plans to propose similar projects to the CNTH in the near future.

While some interviews lasted longer than others, on average 30-40 minutes were spent in a conversation that followed a rough guide of topics and questions to be addressed. Open questions and a flexible structure allowed certain lines of inquiry to be discussed in more depth and enabled interviewees to consider the relevant issues most significant to their experience in state-community collaboration (Kitchin & Tate, 2000; Roulston, 2010). During these interviews I sought to understand individuals' perceptions and experiences (both positive and negative) of their roles in participation and collaboration, while also getting a sense of the different power relations and motivations within this process. To capture the information that was shared during each conversation, some interviews were recorded, while for others notes were taken and compiled directly following the conversation. An analysis of the data consisted of identifying broad themes within and between the kinds of actors involved in the process and making links to both broader literature and written material from the state and CNTH. During this stage it became important to consider my positionality as an outsider, less familiar with Argentinean society and politics. While certainly framing my interpretation of both participant observation and interview discussions, my position as neither community member nor professional likely also influenced the manner in which I was viewed and spoken to by participants.

Summarizing, the most challenging aspect of collecting field data in this way was building the trust of the various groups involved in the collaboration and design of this housing program. Once I had access to various networks within both community organizations and professionals involved in this field of work, in depth conversations and sharing of experiences occurred frequently and provided a wealth of information. I have

since translated this information in order to be included in the following sections of this thesis. It also should be mentioned that as a non-native Spanish speaker conversations may have been slower and less free flowing than otherwise, however it was not my impression that quality of content or understanding was significantly diminished. Finally, establishing an understanding of the current context and background of issues in low-income housing and state programs in the area was also an important part of ensuring more fruitful participant observation and interviews.

Chapter 4: Regaining state legitimacy: The co-option of urban social movements for land and housing

This section will introduce the history of the importance of social movements and community organizations in the provision of housing in Argentina, specifically in regards to the economic crisis of 2002. An understanding of these organizations and their co-option and incorporation into the national government's approach currently used for housing programs will help to frame the main analysis of the state-community collaboration in this thesis' case study.

Argentina's unemployment and poverty rates grew exponentially throughout the late 1990s until the 2002 economic crisis. Over this same period, a remarkable mobilization of the unemployed and informal working poor led to a wave of protests and a consolidation of strong social organizations that directly engaged with the state. These organizations eventually resulted in the formation of 'federations' of unemployed persons, composed of hundreds of community associations across the country and became powerful enough to mobilize protesters in targeted constituencies and exert influence on national public policy (Garay, 2007; Stahler-Sholk & Vanden, 2011; Svampa & Pereyra, 2003). Groups of *piqueteros*, organized demonstrators who used blockades of strategic roads and bridges as a main technique for forcing government concessions and discussion, were often also involved in a variety of other forms of mutual support in impoverished areas, such as food provision and the production of housing (Garay, 2007; Scheinsohn & Cabrera, 2009). As populist groups gained a stronger voice in the political arena, the Peronist party that came to power following the economic crisis sought to integrate some of these 'federations' and social organizations

into the national political structure. In an effort to restore state legitimacy and contain the threat of continued social disorder, the new administration co-opted groups of more pragmatic (politically and ideologically flexible) *piquetero* organizations, directly inviting them into the administration and appointing several leaders to various newly-created government positions (G. Marzioni, personal communication, 24/06/2014). The CNTH, the federal government branch whose programs we examine in this paper, was the product of one such co-option.

La Federación de Tierra y Vivienda (Federation of Land and Housing, FTV) is regarded as one of the strongest *piquetero* movements of this period and focused much of its demands on access to land for housing the poor (Garay, 2007; Norden, 2011). As a result of the FTV's strong presence, popular support, and ability to mobilize large numbers of protesters in the streets, the leader of the organization, Luis D'Elía, was appointed in 2006 to head the newly formed National Secretary for Lands for a Social Habitat. Later known as the Comisión Nacional de Tierras (CNTH), this government branch had the function of 'regularizing the situation of lands in the public domain throughout the country for the construction of housing for the poor, long a former goal of the FTV' (Epstein, 2003, p. 10). Having 'won more than the organization expected', this newly formed secretariat was organized following a rationale closely aligned with that of the FTV (G. Marzioni, personal communication, 24/06/ 2014). Several others from the FTV joined D'Elía in this department, and developed various interventions, ranging from social and organizational strengthening in communities, to land title regularization, to infrastructure and slum upgrading projects (CNTH, 2013a). The CNTH, which continues to implement all of its interventions in partnership with neighborhood organizations,

cooperatives, and social organizations across the country, remains regionally organized, with provincial representatives maintaining close ties with social organizations in their respective regions, provinces and municipalities. The significance of a national government branch with its roots in popular social movement and protest can be seen explicitly in its official documents describing the methodology for the commission's interventions and management of projects. 'Strengthening the weakest population's access to space and construction' (CNTH, 2013a, p. 4) and 'providing tools and resources in direct conjunction with the participation of those bearing the brunt of the housing deficiencies', are listed within the mission statement for the management of their various projects (G. Marzioni, personal communication, 24/06/2014).

This sustained engagement with community organizations to collaborate on alternative forms of social housing, beyond the provision of ready-made units, is an important and distinct approach to housing the urban poor in an emerging 'post-neoliberal' era. Considering the operation and implementation of these policies and programs on the ground today contributes to a reframing of contemporary 'post-neoliberal' theorization of urban processes centred on experiences in the Global South (Parnell, Pieterse, & Watson, 2009; Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Roy A, 2011; Watson, 2009). This neoliberal backlash, particularly in Latin America, has arisen from widespread social demands reacting to the underlying logic of neoliberal privatization, exploitation, and state roll-back, and the resulting social and economic inequality (Radcliffe, 2012). In Argentina this involves increased state involvement in refocusing the economy and development policies in pursuit of more equitable growth and social stability through regulation and social security programs (Benwell et al., 2013; Grugel &

Riggirozzi, 2007). The way in which right to the city movements employ concepts such as the social production of habitat has succeeded in influencing policy in Argentina and serves as a reminder that processes beyond neoliberal urban development are playing an important role in shaping Argentinean cities today.

Chapter 5: The National Land Commission for Social Housing: The social production of habitat and the right to the city

In the years following the 2002 economic crisis, the incoming government of Nestor Kirchner launched many social programs that sought to target specific social groups to combat high poverty levels in the country (Wylde, 2012). In addressing the large segment of the population living in informal housing, the newly established CNTH initiated several programs with the explicit intention of supporting the ‘social production of habitat and housing’, the concept advanced in the 1970s by HIC as a solution to the housing deficit. While programs supporting a market-led approach to the deficit still exist and are administered by other government bodies through the CNTH (see Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social, 2013; G20Brisbane, 2014; GEENAP, 2013), the Argentinean state claims to ‘not be equidistant between the poor and rich, but rather to employ a tool to resolve inequalities by strengthening and including vulnerable Argentines [in housing solutions]’ (CNTH, 2013a, p. 3). The CNTH identifies ten types of interventions that both explicitly and implicitly refer to supporting the social production of habitat, the right to the city, and popular education¹¹ as important elements of these various interventions.

These interventions include more conventional approaches in line with ‘sites and services’ and tenure regularization for informal settlements, such as projects that expand infrastructure, street networks, and public facilities into *villas*, or informal neighborhoods. However, the CNTH also administers programs with more collaboration

¹¹ ‘Popular Education’ is a concept in pedagogy popularized by Brazilian Paulo Freire in the 1970s, which is used to inform many educational endeavors with adults, grounding its approach in social transformation, identifying systems of oppression, and dialogue between the educator and student. In Argentina, this concept has been tied closely to social movements for housing and land rights as well as ‘slum upgrading’ programs (for more on this see Marzioni, 2012).

and involvement of the target communities by ‘encouraging resources to be focused on projects initiated in communities with less power and less participation in decision-making’ (G. Marzioni, personal communication, 24/06/2014). These initiatives, including capacity-building programs for self-construction techniques and programs to strengthen the organizational capacity of informal settlements, have the stated function of recovering ‘the knowledge and know-how of those living in and suffering problems in this type of housing’ (G. Marzioni, personal communication, 24/06/2014). An example of one such type of approach is the collaboration of a group of architects and a neighborhood association on a housing improvement project in an informal settlement in Santa Fe, which was funded by the CNTH. The project involved participatory design with community residents to develop the layout, shape, and design of ‘core sanitation’ (plumbing and toilet) units to act as a foundation for more permanent additions and housing improvements by the inhabitants. It also emphasizes strengthening the organizational and technical capacities of those living in the settlement by aiding in the formation and registration of a work cooperative to take on the construction of all 60 units in the neighborhood. Furthermore, this project also involves architects supervising the work sites and running building technique workshops to improve residents’ skill sets in building construction. The structure of CNTH-funded projects such as this one entrusts the local community with full control over the project, including ownership of tools and equipment, and structure of the organization. One architect involved explains, “Although the social production of habitat is considered a more organic process, these projects for housing improvement try to cultivate a similar process with residents collectively planning changes and often sourcing materials through connections and social networks”

(Personal communication, 28/05/2014). Guiding involved communities through the process of forming work cooperatives to carry out the construction work, and other efforts to strengthen the social organization of informal settlements are also identified as important to sustain the process over the long term (CNTH, 2013a). This type of approach more directly addresses the call for policy that supports the informal sector, including community-based organizations and cooperatives, in the formation of strategies for low-cost housing (see Denaldi, 1997; Keivani & Werna, 2001; Vakil, 1999). These efforts also directly engage with the idea of ‘recoverable housing’ as identified in the census data on deficient housing, not only addressing the informal nature of the majority of this housing, but also leveraging local community organizations and their capacities to improve the quality of their own housing stock.

The third set of housing interventions, further explored in the next section, is titled ‘*producción de suelo urbano*’ which roughly translates to ‘production of urban land’. This set of interventions involves the management of nationally-owned land that can be serviced and integrated into the urban fabric and the creation of an urban land bank to be allocated for ‘social purposes’ (CNTH, 2013a). In the participating provinces, the land managed by the CNTH is the subject of collaboration between a variety of social organizations in communities with housing needs and ‘technical assistance’ organizations (Denaldi, 2013) consisting of planners and architects. With direct conversations between state actors, technical assistance experts, and communities, these groups attempt to produce alternative forms of social housing through participatory design. Precedence and positive examples of the state management and provision of land for housing and other alternative approaches to housing deficits, although scarcely examined, do exist (see

Keivani, Mattingly, & Majedi, 2008 for a look at this experience in Iran). Additionally, as discussed in depth by Denaldi (1997), participative, community-managed slum improvement and housing construction programs employing similar models to that of the CNTH existed at a municipal level in Sao Paolo, Brazil from 1989-1992, however, neither survived neoliberal policy shifts.

Chapter 6: Case Study - The ‘production of urban land’ in Santa Fe

6.1 Project framework, actors and preliminary outcomes

The establishment of the CNTH and eventual formation of the program for the production of urban land represents a fundamental change in the intermediation of housing needs between the state and the urban poor (Garay, 2007). A sustained connection to grassroots social organizations, such as the Federación de Tierra y Vivienda (FTV) involved in the formation of the CNTH, led to the creation of avenues for direct access to the state when it came to citizen and community demands for land and housing, project proposals, and conflict resolution. To acquire approval for access to land from the CNTH land bank and ultimately manage the financial resources and project implementation of a social housing development, community associations and involved organizations of architects and other technical assistance must follow a series of steps (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Steps in formulation and approval of CNTH ‘production of urban land’ projects		
Regional branch of CNTH	Community/social organizations + technical assistance organizations	CNTH
<u>Stage 1</u> Offer of ‘urbanizeable’ land for social housing development	<u>Stage 2</u> Community association representing housing needs connects with technical assistance organization	<u>Stage 7</u> Approval of project and organization of associated financing, including relevant public works
<u>Stage 4</u> Assessment of initial proposals and commencement of negotiations for necessary rezoning of lands.	<u>Stage 3</u> Initial project design and proposal developed and submitted to CNTH	<u>Stage 8</u> Land surveying, subdivision, and orchestration of associated infrastructure projects servicing the land to be developed.
<u>Stage 6</u> Final proposal assessment and submission to the national CNTH body.	<u>Stage 5</u> Final project design, management, cost, and financing proposals are put together.	<u>Stage 10</u> Deed transfer of land to be developed.
	<u>Stage 9</u> Formation of community land trust for co-ownership of property	
	<u>Stage 11</u> Contract drawn between organizations and CNTH for the project implementation Ultimately resulting in community’s management of finances and construction of the project.	

With over 1159 hectares of land allocated for this style of project across the country since 2010, this process has proven effective, producing 26, 415 lots for the construction (self-construction or contracted) of housing for low-income groups (CNTH, 2013b).

6.2 Participatory design and community self-management in the city of Santa Fe

The city of Santa Fe is an intermediate sized city of roughly 525,000 people in the metropolitan area and is the capital of the province of Santa Fe. Recently, the CNTH has been involved in a number of projects across the province, including subdividing and servicing 17 hectares of land for the self-managed development of housing on 279 lots by a cooperative in Villa Constitución, Santa Fe. The participatory urban and housing design of the not-for-profit neighborhood development represents the largest such project in the province to date¹². This participatory design was orchestrated by an autonomous technical assistance organization, ‘Vivienda Social y Ciudad’, comprised of architects from Santa Fe (some working professionals, others faculty members of a local university) who generally shared the social and political values of the CNTH housing approach. Specifically identifying with the concept of the right to the city, the community participation in designing and producing accessible housing is highly valued by professionals in this organization. While emphasizing the need to involve communities that are excluded from the formal housing market, one architect and planner discussed the importance of participation in the structure of work and project development:

Having the right to housing and to the city with the potential real effects of participating in the process is the key; all of this has to do with the sustainability of how we develop our society. (personal communication, 26/05/2014)

¹² ‘Production of Urban Land’ projects elsewhere in Buenos Aires province, however, have organized the self-managed development of projects as large as 1520 lots.

Although there is insufficient funding provided for the direct involvement of architects and design professionals, several such technical assistance organizations have developed in cities around the country, engaging in these projects and doing a large part of the work on a volunteer basis.

This same technical assistance organization was also involved in a recent project between the CNTH and the community organization Nuestra Tierra, affiliates of the FTV, representing a low-income group in the north of the city of Santa Fe. A community leader within the organization highlighted the value of employing a ‘right to the city’ discourse in production of urban land projects, implying obligations on either side – for promoting and facilitating real participation in housing and city development, and for meaningful engagement and investment as communities (personal communication, 28/05/2014). Nuestra Tierra’s project received a transfer of lands from the CNTH for the self-managed development of 42 lots, representing one and a half city blocks on a long strip of nationally owned lands previously slated for the development of a ring-road highway that was never carried out. The technical assistance organization not only helped with technical tasks in engineering, architecture and support and guidance in continuing the ‘self-help’ construction process, but also led the processes of participatory design of the housing and neighborhood, while providing administrative and social support as well. An example of the successes of this type of assistance beyond purely technical support was identified by Nuestra Tierra community organization members who initially had difficulty knowing where to start the process, or what tools to use to properly articulate their needs as a community (personal communication, 29/05/2014). However, upon reflecting on the process, one member stated that the way in which support was given for

the management and organization of the housing project allowed the community to develop the necessary skills to lead it themselves.

With this project they [the CNTH] are basically saying to us, here is some land, now you manage it for your needs. As an organization we are used to representing families and making demands, but in this project we sometimes don't know what to do - and with this kind of new configuration of power and management, things get stuck a lot. We would go back and ask the CNTH what to do, but instead, they [the technical assistance organization] would show us some tools, and provide some information and different kinds of support, like establishing a good structure for the cooperative's meetings, so that we can keep going with the project ourselves. (personal communication, 06/26/2014)

This collaboration involved exchanges within and between community organizations and technical assistance organizations similar to what Denaldi (1997) describes as an 'exchange of information and negotiation where reality was the bargaining line'. As such, the process required flexibility from everyone involved, and while the process often involved several delays and drawn out decisions, it ensured the community organization maintained control.

The participatory design process employed by Vivienda Social y Ciudad followed roughly four phases organized as workshops, which took place in various meeting halls, syndicate headquarters, and community centres, and included visits to the site in question. The remaining vacant, nationally-owned land in the strip previously destined for highway development underwent this same process for further housing proposals to the CNTH. The process began with developing a clear idea, both for the community and technical assistance organization, of the parameters of the project, including number of families, how the group imagined the future development, public spaces and any other facilities required in the area. Next, photos, models, and discussion of precedents (brought by participants from both social and technical organizations) were

used to facilitate discussion and planning design of housing typologies, layouts, etc. Community participants were expected to discuss the functions that each type of space (residential, public, cooperative/commercial) would have in the community, the desired kinds of density and typology of housing, and the types of contributions the community could bring to the project, including construction materials, skills, and so on. In Santa Fe, community members identified the need to conceive of the construction as a gradual process that would take place over several years, allowing for flexibility in how housing may develop in the future. The process sometimes involved a compromise on the part of the architects of elements that may be more technically or aesthetically desirable in exchange for socially and economically suitable solutions. Similarly, participating members of the community were also introduced to alternatives unfamiliar to them, such as new building techniques or more efficient architectural layouts. As not-for-profit projects slated to be self-managed and implemented by communities themselves, this forum provided a unique approach to favouring and catering to the interests of those excluded from formal housing markets.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Discussion

Criticism of market-enabling approaches to housing deficits continues to gain momentum as critics highlight its failure to adapt to rapid urban growth, high inflation, and the shortage of investment opportunities outside of real estate (Baken & Van der Linden, 1993; Keivani et al., 2008; Keivani & Werna, 2001; Mukhija, 2004). The approach taken to address the housing deficit by the CNTH in Argentina attempts to provide land and enable the creation of self-managed housing by low-income groups, effectively bypassing formal housing markets and their inadequacies. By employing the right to the city and social production of habitat frameworks, the state – through the CNTH – directly strengthens and encourages communities’ capabilities to self-manage housing needs, while the participatory and collaborative process instills improved technical and organizational capacities.

The strong set of social movements and organizations in housing that emerged from the widespread effects of the ‘Neoliberal crisis’ of the 1990s and early 2000s may very well be a key element in the success of this type of approach. Nevertheless, the CNTH’s attempt at providing an effective alternative to the formal housing market deserves further analysis. The commitment to working directly with community organizations, encouraging cooperative and self-managed projects for the provision of low-income housing presents an experience different than that of many nations in the Global South. Although the number of projects implemented on a national scale demonstrates an extensive effort, further investigation is needed to quantitatively understand if these programs significantly expand the stock of low-income housing and at a rate that is able to mitigate the current housing deficit. However, the comprehensive

goal beyond the delivery of housing, such as the educational process and exchange during the participatory design and project implementation, the political awareness and access to direct engagement, and the improved organizational and managerial capacities of communities represent important by-products of the process itself, the value of which cannot be underestimated.

The intention of this thesis is not to paint an overly optimistic view of housing security and access for low income Argentines, but rather to examine the recent collaboration between various actors through a case study of participatory design and self-managed housing in Santa Fe. Despite state commitment at a national level, violent evictions of informal settlements continue to occur across the country, while stringent land-use regulations and land speculation continue to limit housing security for thousands of Argentines. Within limited and dissonant provincial and municipal implementation of housing programs and policies, it remains important, as highlighted by Monkkonen and Ronconi (2013), for housing policy and implementation to enable the way housing is actually accessed by a majority of lower-income Argentines. I have presented the national programs under the CNTH as a strategy that engages a broader range of actors, and includes stronger local involvement in housing solutions than preceding approaches. The employment of concepts such as the ‘right to the city’ to empower and house communities hints at a broader trend in Latin America, and is an important part of the CNTH’s strategy that requires further research to refine and develop the approach, and understand its potential.

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