

Doctoral Thesis

POPULAR URBANIZATION AND PLANNING PRACTICES IN BUENOS AIRES

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Urban informality in the Global South is widely understood as an unofficial/illegal process exclusively driven by the urban poor, occurring beyond the State and solely enacted by the popular sector's agency. On the other hand, it is considered a diametrically opposed alternative to conventional conceptions of planning, representing a form of urbanization that is independent of formal frameworks and in violation of planning rules and regulations. Yet, although a fact generally neglected by planning theory, the local dwellers of what have been called "informal settlements" comply with regulatory frameworks and the spatial outcomes of their settlement actions are frequently from the beginning in accordance with planning norms. This phenomenon is crucial for understanding how local dwellers' rationality is often driven by their expectations in terms of accessing basic services and obtaining securing tenure. This thesis is aimed to theorize how and under what conditions various actors and their practices interact with the regulatory frameworks within the planning system to enable and sustain a mode of popular urbanisation in contemporary Buenos Aires. Therefore, this research centres the analysis on two spatial configurations of popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires – particularly Villa 20 and the toma de tierra of Guernica - and two corresponding positions assumed by policy makers and urban planners, starting from their relationships with local actors from a transversal perspective of governmentality on different focal points of encounter and disagreement. By adopting a relational and socio-material approach to the study of planning practices, the research provides a transversal reading across different actors and their rationalities at play observing their engagement with the regulatory frameworks. Through an ethnography of planning practices, the thesis provides a novel methodology for bringing into view the processes, practices, alliances, and agencies which are often invisible to policy makers. The thesis illustrates that popular urbanisation and planning need to be considered as urban assemblages that have numerous and unexpected ways of interlinking. Firstly, it recognizes the presence of conflicting, competing and conflating rationalities at play in popular urbanisation of Buenos Aires. Secondly, the thesis offers a novel insight into the strategies and tactics employed by planners in attempts to intervene in popular urbanization in Buenos Aires. Thirdly it proposes practices-centred recommendations for institutional change and social justice considering the technical as much as the political aspects of planning and interrogating the agency of materiality in urban processes. For policy makers and urban planners, a better understanding of the socio-technical configurations of popular urbanization can guide their actions to rearrange them toward coproducing urban governance.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- AABE** *Agencia de Administración de Bienes del Estado* = State Property Management Agency
- ACIJ** *Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia*
- AGBA** *Aglomeración Gran Buenos Aires* = Greater Buenos Aires Agglomeration
- AMBA** *Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires* = Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires
- ANSES** *Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social* = National Social Security Administration
- ANT** *Actor-Network Theory*
- BDP** *Barrios de Pie*
- CABA** *Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* = Autonomous City of Buenos Aires
- CBAS** *Corporación Buenos Aires Sur* = South Buenos Aires Corporation
- CCC** *Corriente Clasista y Combativa*
- CCP** *Comisión Coordinadora Participativa* = Participatory Coordinating Committee
- CELS** *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales*
- CMV** *Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda* = Municipal Housing Commission
- CNPHyV** *Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Viviendas* = National Population, Households and Housing Census
- CNTF-PA** *Comisión Nacional de Tierras Fiscales "Programa Arraigo"* = National Fiscal Land Commission
- COU** *Código de Ordenamiento Urbano* = Land Use and Zoning Code
- CTEP** *Confederación de Trabajadores de la Economía Popular* = Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy
- CURTG** *Comisión de Urbanismo de la Recuperación de Tierras de Guernica* = Guernica Land Reclamation Urban Planning Commission
- DPE** *Dirección Provincial de Estadística de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* = Provincial Directorate of Statistics of Buenos Aires Province
- EUT** *Equipo de Unidad Territorial* = Territorial Unit Team
- FADU** *Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo* = Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urbanism
- FEDEVI** *Federación de Villas y Barrios Carenciados* = Federation of slums and deprived neighbourhoods
- FOL** *Frente de Organizaciones en Lucha*
- FONAVI** *Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda* = National Housing Fund
- GBCA** *Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* = Buenos Aires City Government
- GPA** *Gobierno de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* = Buenos Aires Province Government
- IADB** *Interamerican Development Bank*

INDEC *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos Nacional* = Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina

IVC *Instituto de la Vivienda de la Ciudad* = Institute of Housing of the City of Buenos Aires

LAJH *Ley de Acceso Justo al Hábitat* = Law on Fair Access to Habitat

MDC *Ministerio de Desarrollo de la Comunidad de la Provincia* = Provincial Ministry of Community Development

MDS *Ministerio de Desarrollo Social de la Nación* = National Ministry of Social Development

MDU *Ministerio de Desarrollo Urbano* = National Ministry of Urban Development

MGP *Mesa de Gestión Participativa para la Reurbanización del Barrio Villa 20* = Participatory Management Roundtable of Villa 20 Neighbourhood

MIOPV *Ministerio del Interior, Obras Públicas y Vivienda de la Nación* = National Ministry of the Interior, Public Works and Housing

MIVSP *Ministerio de Infraestructura, Vivienda y Servicios Públicos de la Nación* = National Ministry of Infrastructure and Federal Planning and the Undersecretary of Urban Planning and Housing

MJyDH *Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Nación* = National Ministry of Justice and Human Rights

MMIT *Ministerio de Modernización, Innovación y Tecnología de la Nación* = National Ministry of Modernisation, Innovation and Technology

MMPGDS *Ministerio de las Mujeres, Políticas de Género y Diversidad Sexual de la Provincia* = Provincial Ministry of Women, Gender Policies and Sexual Diversity

MOSP *Ministerio de Obras y Servicios Públicos / Ministerio de Obras Públicas* = Ministry of Public Works

MPFIPyS *Ministerio de Planificación Federal, Inversión Pública y Servicios de la Nación* = National Ministry of Federal Planning, Public Investment and Services

MTGP *Mesa Técnica de Gestión Participativa para la Reurbanización del Barrio Villa 20* = Technical Participatory Management Roundtable

MVBC *Movimiento de Villas y Barrios de Emergencia de Capital Federal* = Movement of villas and Emergency Neighbourhoods of the Federal Capital

NBI *Necesidades Básicas insatisfechas* = Unsatisfied Basic Needs

NGO *Non-governmental Organisation*

NHT *Núcleos Habitaciones Transitorios* = Transitional Housing Units

ODC *Observatorio del Derecho a la Ciudad*

OFV *Organismo Federal de la Vivienda* = Federal Housing Organism

OLA *Observatorio Latinoamericano*

OPISU *Organismo Provincial de Integración Social y Urbana de la Provincia* = Provincial Agency for Social and Urban Integration

PBA *Provincia de Buenos Aires* = Province of Buenos Aires

PFEH *Programa Federal de Emergencia Habitacional* = Federal Housing Emergency Programme] (better known as “*Techo y Trabajo*”, “Home and Work”

PFMV *Programa Federal de Mejoramiento de Viviendas “Mejor Vivir”* = Federal Housing Improvement Programme “Better Living”

PFV *Plan Federal de Construcción de Viviendas* = Federal Housing Construction Plan

PIRU *Proyecto Integral de Reurbanización* = Integral Upgrading Project

PJ *Partido Justicialista*

PO *Polo Obrero*

PRIT *Programa de Radicación, Integración y Transformación de Villas y NHT* = Programme for the Settlement, Integration and Transformation of Villas and NHTs

PRO *Propuesta Republicana*

Pro.Cre.Ar *Programa de Crédito Argentino del Bicentenario para la Vivienda Única y Familiar* = Bicentenary Argentine Credit Programme for Single Family Housing

PROMEBA *Programa de Mejoramiento de Barrios* = Neighbourhoods Improvement Program

PROMHIB *Programa de Mejoramiento Habitacional e Infraestructura Básica* = Housing Improvement and Basic Infrastructure Programme

PROSUR Hábitat *Programa de Regularización y Ordenamiento del Suelo Urbano* = Urban Land Regularisation and Development Programme

PUA *Plan Urbano Ambiental* =

RELSE *Relevamiento socio Espacial Socio Spatial Survey* =

RENABAP *Relevamiento Nacional de Barrios Populares* = National Survey of Popular Neighbourhoods

RMBA *Región Metropolitana de Buenos Aires* = Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires

SCA *Sociedad de Arquitectos*

SECHI *Secretaría de Hábitat e Inclusión* = Secretary of Housing and Inclusion

SHDU *Secretaría de Hábitat y Desarrollo Humano de la Provincia* = Provincial Secretariat of Urban Development and Housing

SHYDH *Subsecretaría de Hábitat y Desarrollo Humano* = Sub-Secretariat of Habitat and Human Development

SISU *Secretaría de Integración Socio Urbana de la Nación* = National Secretariat of Socio-Urban Integration

SSDUV *Subsecretaría de Urbanismo y Vivienda de la Nación* = Undersecretariat of Urbanism and Housing

SSHC *Subsecretaría de Hábitat de la Comunidad de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* = Provincial Undersecretary of Community Habitat

SSHYDH *Subsecretaría de Hábitat y Desarrollo Humano de la Provincia* = Provincial Undersecretary of Habitat and Human Development

SSPC *Subsecretaría de Política Criminal de la Provincia* = Provincial Undersecretary of Criminal Policy

STU *Secretaría de Tierra y Urbanismo* = Land and Urban Planning Secretary

TPLS *Taller Libre de Proyecto Social*

UBA *Universidad de Buenos Aires*

UCIBA *Unidad de Coordinación de Infraestructura Barrial* = Neighbourhood Infrastructure Coordination Unit

UGIS *Unidad de Gestión de Intervención Social* = Social Intervention Management Unit

UNSAM *Universidad Nacional de San Martín*

WB *World Bank*



**CHAPTER 1.
INTRODUCTION**

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Urban informality in the Global South is widely understood as an unofficial/illegal process exclusively driven by the urban poor, occurring beyond the state and solely enacted by the popular sector's agency. On the other hand, it is considered a diametrically opposed alternative to conventional conceptions of planning, representing a form of urbanization that is independent of formal frameworks and in violation of planning rules and regulations. Yet, although a fact generally neglected by planning theory, the local dwellers of what have been called "informal settlements" comply, from the beginning, with regulatory frameworks and the spatial outcomes of their settlement actions are frequently in accordance with planning norms. This thesis aims to theorize the relationship between popular urbanization and planning by understanding how, under what conditions, various actors and their practices interact with the regulatory frameworks within the planning system to enable and sustain different modalities of popular urbanisation in contemporary Buenos Aires.

This research draws on the most relevant theoretical debates on informality, planning theory, ATN, and urban governance co-production bridging the gaps among them and seeking to put these theories into dialogue in a systematic and coherent manner. The main empirical referents of this investigation are two different types of popular urbanizations in Buenos Aires, a villa (Villa 20) and a toma de tierra (Guernica). In both cases, state-society interaction and governance co-production have unfolded as crucial, transformative processes, that shaped the selected case studies. As a consequence, I examined the trajectories of urban public policies addressing housing informality in Argentina. Methodologically, the research is built on semi-structured interviews, life histories, participant observation, research-action, and secondary qualitative and quantitative data collection within a case study research design that borrows from a relational and socio-material approach to study urban informality in Argentina.

Results are drawn from extensive fieldwork carried out in 2020-2022 and entailing 22 semi-structured interviews, with inhabitants, public officials, urban planners, movement spokespersons and other civil society actors, and experts.

The study aims to offer generalizable comparative insights that transcend the immediate contexts of analysis. Popular urbanizations are used as an entry point to pose broader questions on how studying informality and urban planning practices in the global South matter for the reconceptualization of a global urban theory.

This introductory chapter is structured as follows. The next section (Section 1.2) is aimed to highlight the relevance of this research. It reflects on how the phenomenon of popular urbanizations are one of the biggest challenges for urban planners in the 21st century both in theoretical and practical terms and briefly reviews different

current scholarly accounts regarding this crucial issue. In fact, as I will intend to show, popular urbanizations challenge the very idea of urban planners as reduced to experts coming from academia and governments and requires a new framework to understand planning in a more encompassing perspective, one that could cope with overcoming outdated and harmful dichotomic categories for understanding rapid urban growth, such as the “formal” and (or even *versus*) the “informal” city. Consequently, this important shift of paradigm in seeing how the current urban governance practices actually cut across the conceptual and juridical boundaries of the legal/illegal or the formal/informal demands a new theoretical toolkit for inquiring what planning issues are the most pressing in informal settlements, an important issue to which I will devote to in the following sub-section (Section 1.2.1). Subsequently, Section 1.3 presents the research questions guiding this study. Finally, Section 1.4 presents the outline of the manuscript.

1.2. Why does popular urbanization matter for planners?

Ever greater attention is being paid to housing informality in urban studies, research and public debate. Popular urbanizations account for the majority of habitat and affordable housing in cities in the global south. This type of urbanisation, in the last decades, is consolidating as the prevalent mode in the main metropolitan areas of the so-called Global South. Housing informality has become critical, given that a huge proportion of the urban population today lives in informal settlements. Although the situation prevails mainly in the so-called Global South, it continues to be present in the most developed countries. Furthermore, housing informality is currently understood as an antithetical alternative to traditional ideas of planning as it represents a production of the city that is independent of the formal frameworks and assistance that do not comply with official rules and regulations and that emerges as a different path of city construction. Moreover, the massive emergence of this phenomenon, questions the role of the planner with regard to what position the planner should take with respect to the conflicting rationalities between, on the one hand, organisations, institutions and individuals shaped by the rationality of government and, on the other hand, organisations, institutions and individuals shaped by the (rationality of) need and desire to survive and prosper (Watson 2009a).

In most countries experiencing rapid urban expansion, popular urbanization has seen the highest population growth and a significant increase in their urbanising trends. According to the latest estimates, precarious settlements account for some 40% of urban growth and, while indicating that today around one-quarter of urban dwellers live in informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2020, 26), projections suggest that such places will account for at least 30% of the total world population in 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2016). These phenomena occur as if this huge urban surge and its most visible phenomenon – expanding cities with many millions of inhabitants – had obliterated the capacity of decision-makers, urban planners, and sometimes even the academic community to grasp the historicity of this reality, leading them instead to see it as a transitory phenomenon. The massive presence of informal settlements is partly ignored or else discredited, if not treated in a catastrophist way (Valladares, 2006). Urban planning is called upon to cope with rapid population growth and informal urban sprawl. Yet it seems that Latin America has the tools to provide effective responses. Excluded from affordable land and housing by the market, and not provided by the instruments of formal planning, the urban poor has grabbed land and erected their own settlements wherever, and however, they have been able to. Informal settlements and ‘informal’ access to infrastructure and services have been

the main feature of the city in developing countries since the middle of the last century, but as many authors have highlighted, irregularity and informality can hardly be viewed from an insurgency perspective; rather, they represent a state in which the majority of those who live under such conditions simply seek to leave them behind (Hamdi, 1995; Navez-Bouchanine, 1997; Riofrio and Rodriguez, 1980).

The urbanisation of cities in the Global South¹ can be considered *inversa* (inverted) with respect to that of the Global North, considering the occupation-building-maintenance-planning sequence (Baross & Van der Linden 1990; Pérez, 1995). In terms of cost, the paradox resulting from this process is that the socio-urban integration of *ex-post* regularisation policies implies a very high financial effort for the public sector. By revealing the inversion that developing cities operate on patterns of thought and action, this sequence undermines conventional methods of intervening in the city: instead of being an *a priori* intervention that should lead to the creation of the urban fabric, planning turns out to be an *ex-post* process.

Although attention to informality has been growing in recent years, it has often been linked to ungovernable practices. Ungovernability, however, is never devoid of state intervention. In the literature on urban informality these themes are predominantly investigated in cities of the Global South and have long been related to a lack of state capacity in Latin America. As this assumption fails to account for how legal orders, administrative hierarchies or bureaucratic practices produce, enable or constrain informality, it impedes analysis of the phenomenon in regulatory regimes that are presumed to rely on functioning bureaucracies. Empirical research has recently investigated the formal-informal interface in governing and appropriating contested informal access to land and housing. However, less attention has been drawn to the interface between popular urbanization and planning practices. My thesis addresses this gap. An understanding of informality commonly derives from research undertaken in states perceived as lacking the capacity to regulate the phenomenon. Informality is a governed process that interacts in a negotiated and relational manner with the state. In these processes, the planner is a figure who, on the one hand, does not always coincide with the traditional state planner (city-producing non-state actors) and who, on the other hand, moves in a constellation of governance. Therefore, the thesis examines how and why different modalities of popular urbanizations are enabled and sustained in Buenos Aires. In doing so, it offers analytical and methodological insights into contemporary urbanisation processes across the Global South. Borrowing from ANT and ‘co-production in planning’ this research takes a relational and socio-material perspective. It focuses on the practices of different

¹ ‘Global South’ is a term and a concept that captures a range of debates. As Chettiparamb et al. (2020) recognize: “In critical circles, ‘Global South’ has almost never been a purely geographical concept; it intersects spatial, historical and political-economic dimensions and is often used as a metaphor for these sets of dimensions. The Global South is also used as an analytical category that denotes a particular set of conditions that draw scientific attention. In both instances, there is a conscious attempt therefore to move away from any sense of a linear uni-directional trajectory that might place the Global South in a lesser light in comparison with the Global North. In fact, it has been argued that the Global South may well exist within the cities of the geographical Global North and the Global North can also in turn exist within cities of the geographical Global South and that each may not be therefore quite so polarised (Mady and Chettiparamb, 2016)”. Due to these reasons, I employ the term ‘Global South’ in my thesis to capture the intellectual space of planning theories, practices, strengths and challenges in Argentina that share a particular set of conditions.

agents involved in the governance of informal settlements of RMBA² providing a transversal reading across black-boxed actors such as the state, communities, and planners, and observing the engagement with the regulatory frameworks.

The analysis takes root in two spatial configurations of popular urbanisation in RMBA - a *villa* and a *toma de tierra*³ - and two corresponding positions assumed by the state, starting from its relationship with local actors from a transversal perspective of governmentality⁴ (Caldeira, 2017; Osborne&Rose, 1999; Rose, O'Malley and Valverde, 2006) on different focal points of encounter and disagreement, according to local needs, demands and resources (i.e., infrastructure, services, housing, public space). In these two spatial configurations of popular urbanisation, the state, the local population, its civil organisations (networks of neighbours, popular assemblies, social movements, the church, etc.), and public and private companies providing services and infrastructure have acted according to autonomous rationalities that have varied in terms of agreements, disagreements and the overlapping of actions, responsibilities and interests, giving rise to a dissimilar assemblage that has had a heterogeneous impact on the territories.

1.3. What are the most pressing planning issues in informal settlements?

In most Latin American countries, informal settlements have existed for a long time and represent a significant portion of urban residential expansion. While informal land acquisition techniques have supplied housing to a huge number of urban poor, they are ultimately insufficient and inefficient in meeting the growing need for long-term development of safe and secure communities in Latin America. In most cases, illegal developers or new residents who occupy public, communal, or private land create new communities by demarcating plots and constructing incipient dwellings. Pavement, street lighting, water and sanitation are among the first public services. Buildings become larger over time, more durable construction materials replace temporary ones, and public services emerge. Construction is frequently stimulated by the provision of public services. Such physical consolidation might take years, resulting in settlements with multi-storey structures, paved streets and pavements, and commercial centres. (Abramo 2003, 2011, 2012; Abramo&Cravino 2012; Azuela de la Cueva, 1989; 1990, 1993; Connolly, 1990, 2009, 2013, 2017; Connolly&Wigle, 2017; Duhau, 2014, Jaramillo, 2012; Ortiz Flores, 2012; Riofrio and Rodriguez, 1980; Salazar, 2012; de Sousa Santos, 1984, 1987, 1995, Ziccardi 1983, 2001).

Tenure is typically precarious in the early stages of such settlements, especially if the settlement takes place on public, communal or private lands that have been illegally

² For a definition of different terminology used to describe the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, see Chapter 4.

³ For a definition of these terms, see also Chapter 4.

⁴ With a 'transversal perspective of governmentality' I refer to, on the one hand the Teresa Caldeira's (2017) call for 'transversal readings'. In her work, she refers to the need to set aside the notion of informality (and the dualist reasoning it usually implies) and think in terms of transversal logics to understand peripheral urbanization (Caldeira, 2017). On the other hand I refer to a "a new role of the political apparatus as merely a partner in governance, facilitating, enabling, stimulating, encouraging, incentivising and inciting the self-governing activities of a multitude of dispersed entities" (Osborne y Rose, 1999: 751).

acquired. In most private land settlements, there is no formal registration of ownership, but residents often illegally purchase defined lots from the owner or prior occupiers, and they may even have bills of sale. Tenure security may improve with time, although it is usually *de facto* rather than *de jure*. In many cases, informal settlements are considerably formalised later by public recognition, the provision or upgrading of public services, and the formal recognition of an individual or other kinds of plot ownership or legal possession. The persistent absence of legal recognition of tenure can obstruct service delivery, the availability of other urban infrastructure, and the legitimacy of urban habitation in general (Fernandes, 2011; Varley 2017; Van Gelder 2007, 2010). The majority of housing settlements in Latin America's popular urbanisation processes directly impact infrastructural and natural services and resources at a metropolitan level. In cities, in which centrally located land is extremely limited in supply, and hence highly cost-prohibitive, allowing households only a little area in which to expand outwards, informal dwellers typically expand upwards, adding extra storeys to their homes.

This vertical expansion is the case in many *villas* in CABA⁵. It places the structure of the buildings under stress, making them more vulnerable to disasters, particularly in earthquake-, flood- or hurricane-prone areas. In lower-density areas, often located in urban peripheries, households tend to expand outwards, sprawling into the surrounding areas, consuming natural or agricultural land and other resources, adding to the ecological footprint of cities and often damaging fragile ecosystems, and exposing settlements to risks. This horizontal expansion can be observed in many of the *asentamientos* and *tomas de tierras* in the first, second and third rings of Buenos Aires. As settlements densify, whether horizontally or vertically, infrastructure and services are further stressed on both a local and a regional scale, including roads, transit, water, sewage, gas, telephone, waste collection, security, etc. Hence, to ensure the provision of infrastructure and services and the protection of natural land, it is necessary for planning efforts in the region to see housing, transportation, service and infrastructure provision and management from at a regional level. Moreover, informal settlements are particularly vulnerable to the severe and often deadly effects of natural disasters.

According to Fernandes (2011), from a broader perspective, the combined burdens of informal development have been fundamentally harmful to cities, to the overall urban population, and to the residents of informal settlements themselves. The implications of this phenomenon are manifold. The author identifies four types of burdens: *legal burdens*, i.e., lack of full security of tenure, which exposes the residents in informal settlements to the ever-present risk of eviction by the public authorities or landowners; *social burdens*, because communities in informal settlements are excluded from regular access to the benefits of urban development, including public services, infrastructure, public spaces and collective facilities; *political burdens*, when the maintenance of ambiguous legal situations that are not fully recognised, and in which people do not have clearly defined rights, has long subjected the residents of informal settlements to political manipulation by parties from all sides of the political spectrum; and lastly economic and *fiscal burdens*, as informal development generates intrinsically inefficient cities and costly urban management. Regularisation programmes cost up to three times more than new, licensed urban development (Abiko et al. 2007).

⁵ See footnote 3.

1.4. Situating informality in Buenos Aires

The socio-spatial practices and institutions that organise urban life are crossed by formal and informal norms and procedures, both of which are constitutive and contribute to the production and reproduction of our cities. As an object of dispute, the definition of what may be considered or not as informal is crossed by spatio-temporal limits and socio-political arrangements enacted by the actors operating in each specific arena, which contributes to a relationship of unstable equilibrium and permanent negotiation (Davis, 2017).

In urban terms, informality originates when the tenure situation or urban conditions do not conform to the norms that regulate the relations of access to and occupation of land and housing. This dimension of the phenomenon refers to the legal order that regulates social relations and which is expressed territorially in the residential location patterns and the predominant housing situation among different social sectors (Di Virgilio et al, 2011).

In this regard, informality refers to a relationship of *apparent exteriority and/or conflict* with the norms and institutions of the state and/or the market. In this regard, the housing tenure situation reflects the relationship of certain habitat production processes with the urban regulations in force at a given historical moment. These are forms of access to land and/or housing that, in general, involve real estate agents who either do not adhere to the established institutional rules or do not fall under their protection (Feige, 1990: 90). In these cases, the price of land and housing is lower than in the allegedly 'formal' market, due to families finding it impossible to prove ownership of their property (lack of title deeds or equivalent documentation), the lack of services, and the progressive development and consolidation of the habitat at their own expense (self-construction) (Gilbert and Ward, 1985). In this way, informality is by the ways in which "the relationship with the land and housing market and the property system is resolved" (Herzer et al, 2008: 176).⁶ This concept

⁶ The Argentine Civil Code regulates the ownership of land and housing in the fourth book on 'real rights', but within the framework of the constitutional principles of the inviolability of property. During the discussion of the new code that came into force in 2016, it was again decided not to incorporate the principle of the social function of property, which continues to leave the door open to variable interpretations in jurisprudence. This generates major obstacles in the regularisation of informal neighbourhoods, because in general the unrestricted right to property tends to prevail over other considerations, such as the aforementioned social function of property, which would make it possible to question why a plot of land suitable for urbanisation is being retained by its owner, to give just one example (Paolinelli, Guevara and Oglietti, 2014). Since the first Civil Code (19th century), the instrument of usucapion or twenty-year prescription has existed as a way of regularising the occupation of real estate. It is one of the forms of acquisition of ownership provided for in articles 1897 and 2565 of the Civil and Commercial Code in force. It is based on the public, peaceful and uninterrupted occupation of a property that was abandoned. Possession implies the possession of a thing, in this case real estate, with the intention of being the owner. However, due to the long periods of time, the need to go through a judicial process, with the costs that this entails, the need to publicise and notify the registrants, regularisation becomes more an exception than the rule. In the same way, abandonment is a cause for the extinction of ownership set out in our Civil and Commercial Code that could allow the regularisation of real estate by the state due to the principle of 'eminent ownership'. Jurisprudence in general states that in order for abandonment to be con-

of informality does not imply adhering to a dualistic taxonomy of a formal vs informal land and housing market. Rather, I consider that informality is a component of the city's productive and territorial structure as a whole, and that it underlines the fragmented nature of a single piece of land and a housing market that represents the system's variability. I understand that there are couplings and interrelationships between the two (sub)markets: the formal market provides capital and inputs to the informal market, while the goods and services produced by the informal market are usually consumed by formal wage earners. It is impossible to ignore the fact that the socio-spatial structure of the city constitutes the material support in which (and through which) the social relations necessary for the development of capital are (re)created; and that, in turn, is the result of a multiplicity of complex political, economic, and cultural processes (Fernandes and Varley, 1998). In this framework, it is possible to observe that the idea of informality requires taking into account how the popular sectors handle the process of gaining access to habitat and its relationship to the property system - either because the good, such as land and housing, is produced informally or because it is traded as a good of exchange in an informal market. It also implies consideration of the restrictive role of the formal land and housing market, which remains out of reach for large sectors of the population in Argentinian cities.

Therefore, urban informality in the RMBA⁷ is marked by the means of access to land, the initial ownership situation, and the degree of adaptation to the norms of formal urban planning. In some of the production phases (access to land, construction) it is possible to fall into non-compliance with the regulations governing the production of physical facts and property relations. Every social action that takes

figured as a cause for extinguishment of ownership, its qualification by a court ruling is required. This interpretation is very restrictive and makes the principle of abandonment completely inoperative as a cause for extinguishment of ownership, but it is also a principle that could be operative to regularise informal popular neighbourhoods. In the same way, the administrative prescription established in Law 21477 of 1976 and its amendment 24320 establish the possibility of prescribing ownership in favour of provinces or municipalities in administrative proceedings, avoiding the cumbersome judicial process. Although this law was born to be used in cases of real estate affected to public use, it can also be used to regularise popular neighbourhoods, resorting to the principle of accession foreseen in article 1901 of the Civil and Commercial Code. The mechanism used involves the transfer of the possessory rights of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood to the Municipality, which subsequently registers the property in their name, subdivides it and awards the resulting plots to their final recipients. Another relevant regulation is the institute of expropriation (Art. 17 of Argentinian Constitution), which, although originally conceived to provide land for the construction of infrastructure and collective equipment, has been adapted for its implementation in informal urbanisations. Expropriation guarantees occupation and eliminates the risk of eviction, without necessarily contemplating actions aimed at regularising the development of the plot or transferring ownership.

⁷ As Varela & Cravino (2013) point out, 'Urban informality is not, however, exclusive to the popular sectors. Informal situations also include those of the middle and upper sectors that do not fall within an adequate legal framework, such as gated communities or country-houses that do not comply with the regulations for these categories, neighbourhoods that are closed without authorisation, that do not have the infrastructure or services stipulated by law, or that are declared as rural land despite being urban developments, etc.' (p. 46).

place outside of regulations is then qualified as illegal, irregular, or informal as it does not comply with the norms governing the production, the marketing, and the registration (formalised ownership) of real estate. The qualifier irregular or informal describes problematic and conflicting relations with the existing legal order regarding ownership and its forms of production of urban space (Duhau, 2002 cited in Relli, 2020).

At least three types of agents are involved in the different institutions that coexist in these urbanisations: resident families, intermediaries (real estate agents), and the state. Initially, the resident families are responsible for the production of urban land through the process of occupation, the opening of streets, the subdivision of plots, the definition of public spaces, the demands for the provision of urban services and even, in most cases, the collaboration in the laying of water and electricity networks and the provision of such services. Likewise, once the land available for occupation is exhausted, the inhabitants engage in commodified forms of access to land and housing. The state is an ever-present agent that, by action (through land or urban regularisation policies) or omission (by turning a deaf ear or even promoting occupations and real estate transactions), shapes the institutions and their dynamics. Moreover, intermediaries become involved in purchase and sale transactions only when the legality of land ownership is clearly established (Di Virgilio, 2015).

In analytical terms, four relevant aspects can be distinguished for the analysis of land and housing access strategies deployed by the urban poor, aspects that can be combined generating new mixed typologies and trajectories, typical of households in informal urbanisations. These strategies are part of the more general housing strategies developed in these households (Di Virgilio, 2007) and allow the different cases to be classified and analysed in a comparative perspective that takes into account:

- a) access to land: the mechanisms for access to land include direct occupation, informal sale-purchase or transfer, whether of whole lots or parts of lots resulting from subdivision;
- b) access to housing: mechanisms of access to housing include the complete self-construction of a dwelling, the informal purchase and sale of a dwelling and its subsequent adaptation and extension, or the informal renting of a dwelling or a part of it;
- c) lot evolution. In the subsequent evolution of a lot, it is essential to identify the cases in which modifications occur, whether by subdivision for sale or by transfer to third parties or family members, or - much less common - by the annexation of new plots;
- d) ownership situation: due to the characteristics of the urbanisation processes and the public policies implemented, most of the urbanisation in these neighbourhoods takes place in the absence of property titles or rental contracts. Land regularisation processes are occasionally started, either at the state's or the residents' initiative. These processes can take several years. In the course of the regularisation process, new modifications or transfers of plots and dwellings may take place. Once the land has been regularised, fresh transfers often take place without a matching transfer of title, thereby producing new informalities (Ward et al., 2011).

Policies aimed at “integrating” the population that cannot legally access the land and housing market have, for the most part, concentrated on improving ex-post conditions; that is, they have attempted to control informality through various types of programmes that are collectively referred to as “regularisation,” ranging from land

legalisation to improvements to the urban environment. *Ex-ante* policies to prevent informality have had much less weight and have been implemented in very few Latin American countries (Clichevsky, 2007).

However, urban integration cannot be separated from socio-spatial integration. This process must take into account the legal aspect, territorial redevelopment, the building of infrastructure and community facilities, citizen participation in decision-making processes, community strengthening, and the creation of employment and training opportunities for residents of the neighbourhoods in addition to creating the physical conditions for equal access to the city. Therefore, urban integration does not end with the recognition of the inhabitants' right to property, as Fernando De Soto's thesis claimed (2001). Nonetheless, access to property, both materially and symbolically, is a substantial part of urban integration, which grants various benefits to the inhabitants. It seems evident that, in addition to infrastructure and equipment, which make up the material scaffolding of this urban integration, there is an inter-subjective component, of a symbolic nature, which has to do with the sense of belonging to a community. It has to do with the existence of social ties that integrate this community (popular neighbourhood) with the rest of the city. In this regard, I firmly believe that this symbolic dimension must be measured to allow public policies to have a powerful impact on popular urbanizations.

According to Duhau (2002), integration means that poor neighbourhoods may be enabled to have access to the same public goods as the rest of the city. However, do neighbourhood improvement programmes integrate these neighbourhoods into the city, or do they simply 'improve' them? Do they cease to be perceived as marginal neighbourhoods after the implementation of these programmes? Is it possible to think of total integration in the context of the great differences inherent in the neo-liberal capitalist city? Furthermore, regularisation initiatives, as some writers contend, when institutionalised over time, rather than suggesting a conclusive answer, encourage the replication of informal urbanisation as the prevailing paradigm.

Thus, the informality linked to low-income housing raises several issues in the context of rapid urban growth, such as that of RMBA. On the one hand, a significant part of the population lacks the necessary income to afford the prices structured by the formal land and housing market. On the other hand, the implementation of long-term mortgage financing lines that facilitate access to land and housing through credit has historically not been encouraged. Finally, it can be seen that even though there has been a clear increase in social spending and responses to mitigate the impact of socio-economic fluctuations among lower-income sectors, the social protection system and urban policies (particularly those for the construction of social housing) are far from inclusive and show gaps that reproduce vulnerability and stratification in access to well-being.

These issues help to understand, in part, why low-income sectors rarely access housing through formal market mechanisms. Lower-income families do not resort to classified advertisements in order to rent a room or to access a small house or a plot of land in an informal settlement. Family members, neighbours, certain territorially based social organisations, and the government through social programmes for poverty assistance in general and housing access facilitators in particular are their main 'brokers' for housing access. (Di Virgilio, 2015).

1.5. Research questions and aims

The main research question I seek to answer is:

1. *How do various actors and their practices interact with regulatory frameworks within the planning system to enable and sustain different modalities of popular urbanisation in contemporary Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area between 1983 and 2020?*

The following sub-questions, related to the first research question, guide the research:

- 1.1 *What have the state's initiatives and responses been, as expressed in the creation of spatial planning and regulation instruments, to deal with the problem of popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires?*
- 1.2 *What interests and rationalities do different networks associated with popular urbanisation operate under, and which actors are enrolled in these networks?*

Three other research questions guided this research:

2. *What strategies, tactics and policy tools do the planners use in the processes of intervention in informal settlements?*
3. *What are the tangible and intangible outcomes of urban governance coproduction in popular urbanizations?*
4. *What can planning theory and practice learn from the governance of popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires?*

The hypothesis that lies behind the first question is that popular urbanizations in Buenos Aires are socio-technical assemblages in which local human and non-human actors not only compete and contest each other but conflate and converge co-producing larger urban governance processes. While most of the literature on informal settlements tends to read this phenomenon as an informal/illegal process driven exclusively by the urban poor and occurring beyond the state, close engagements with regulatory frameworks and spatial outcomes compliant with planning norms are central features since such practices shape the entitlement of local dwellers to basic services, as well as their expectations on securing tenure. Also, while the state and informal dwellers are commonly understood as two distinct and diverging polarities, I argue that in order to understand how informal settlements are governed we have to read the interaction, and how different rationalities not only diverge but sometimes conflate and converge. As a result, planning as a coherent institution and centralised practice is called into question. This demands us to examine the disaggregation of the social and material actors that make these assemblages up, and how they play a part in what may be considered separate planning sites.

There are three elements to consider, according to Payne & Majale (2004): administrative procedures, including institutional setup, planning standards, and planning regulations. Administrative procedures define the steps and institutions that public authorities and residents must follow to fulfil their goal of supplying or purchasing property and to recognise land occupiers as legal owners and developers of that land at the end of the process. Planning standards stipulate how the settlement should appear in terms of quality. They include minimum plot sizes, minimum frontages and minimum depths, road widths, and provisions for the public, social and economic uses. Planning regulations are rules that allow or disallow activities on the plot or in an area or prescribe the way the plot can be developed or used. They include land use/zoning controls, plot-use restrictions, and building setbacks.

When referring to “popular urbanisation”, a concept introduced by Duhau (1998), I

intend to focus to a kind of social production of habitat, which is widespread in Latin America and other developing countries. It is characterised by irregular urbanisation processes resulting from auto construction that usually occur in Latin America in the urban periphery where low land prices allow access to the popular sectors⁸, and also by the self-production of housing. More recently, Streule et al. (2020) proposed a reconceptualisation of the concept of popular urbanisation to describe ‘a specific urbanisation process based on collective initiatives, self-organisation, and the activities of the inhabitants’ (2). The authors understand popular urbanisation as an urban strategy in which an urban territory is produced, transformed and appropriated by the people. In an attempt to avoid the idealisation of collective efforts and projects, which are also pervaded by self-interest and power hierarchies (Simone, 2014), they suggest shifting the analytical perspective towards a dynamic understanding of the social production of urban space to shed light on how these spaces emerge, how they transform over time, and particularly, how they differ from spaces produced through other related but distinct urbanisation processes (Streule et al, 2020).

Behind my second research question - *“What strategies, tactics and policy tools does the planner use in the processes of intervention in informal settlements? What is or should be the role of the planner in the tension between, on the one hand, autonomy (individual, of citizens) and, on the other hand, institutionalisation (public, of collective interests) in the contexts of informal settlements in Buenos Aires?”* - stands the hypothesis that, along with the understanding of planning practices as interactive, in popular urbanisations in Argentina, the figure of planners is blurred. Planning practices of different agents constantly overlap, converge, and/or diverge in the production of informal urbanisation. In this case, I addressed the second question by exploring what kinds of strategies and tactics have been employed by planners in attempts to intervene in popular urbanisations in Buenos Aires.

Regarding my third question, e.g., *What are the tangible and intangible outcomes of urban governance coproduction in popular urbanizations?*, I consider that co-production is positioned as a mechanism that creates spaces of dialogue and negotiation on contested issues of access to land, housing and the distribution of basic services. The research will examine empirically, through the case studies of Villa 20 and Guernica, the significance of collaborative working on how actors understand and respond to the challenges of urban development and the meaning of this for the local communities and the state institutions. The research will provide a transversal reading (Caldeira, 2017) of the actors at play, opening the black boxes of normally predefined entities such as communities, the state and urban planners. It will show how the different rationalities and agencies overlap, conflate and conflict in the two settings. The research will aim to identify, in both case studies, the different cycles

⁸ In this thesis we will refer to inhabitants of informal settlements as popular sectors. Vitola (2016) analyses the theoretical references of the local Argentinian use of the notion of popular sectors, popular classes or subaltern sectors. The author recognises a series of works on popular sectors carried out at the beginning of the 21st century by sociologists and/or anthropologists who were interested in the politicisation of the unemployed and/or the poor in a specific territory. She refers particularly to the work of Auyero (2001), Merklen (2005), who focus on the forms of organisation of the inhabitants of informal settlements and poor neighbourhoods, using the concept of popular classes or popular sectors, although they do not provide a precise definition of this concept. These authors are influenced by work on Indian and Latin American subalternity, and understand the popular classes as excluded from the fundamental hegemonic relationship.

of governance co-production.

Finally, my fourth question reflects the intention of this thesis of bridging the gap between planning theory and practice and the invitation to theorise from the South (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Watson 2009a; Robinson, 2011, 2015; Roy, 2015; Robinson & Roy, 2016; De Satgé & Watson, 2018). The extant literature on informality can be split in two divergent approaches: while some scholars identify activities and spaces as informal, beyond the reach of the state, others argue that the state actively produces informality. In both of these formulations, the state remains a key reference point. I believe that these interpretations are insufficient to describe the functioning of the relationship between popular urbanisation and planning in practice. In this respect, I argue that *planning theory and practice can learn from the governance of popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires*.

The general aims of my research are:

- 1) To carry out a predominantly qualitative, critical, and comparative analysis of the most important local policies for the regularisation of popular urbanizations and the relations between institutions and informal habitat production in Argentina, with reference to the cases of Villa 20 and Guernica.
- 2) To contribute to the field of urban planning theory and practice by providing new theoretical and critical bases to reformulate the multidimensional empirical problem of popular urbanizations and to redefine regulation practices.

The specific objectives are:

- a) To reconstruct, analyse and compare regularisation policies for the informal city to show how they have historically conditioned and shaped the emergence and proliferation of informality in RMBA.
- b) To develop a historical reconstruction of the progression of housing informality in RMBA by identifying and characterising the different phases of its development.
- c) To recognise the network of actors at the national and local levels of the phenomenon in RMBA, and to analyse the interaction among planning instruments.
- d) To define and characterise the different types of popular urbanizations (*villas*, *asentamientos*, etc.) in RMBA.
- e) To reconstruct the outcomes of regularisation policies on the population targeted by these policies.

1.6. Thesis structure

In this chapter, I have outlined the problem this thesis addresses and the reasons why the case of Buenos Aires is a fertile ground for investigating the relationship between planning and popular urbanisation. In this sense, the case of Buenos Aires contributes to existing scholarship that considers the central role of planning in producing and regulating popular urbanisation. Given that the urbanisation of *villas* and *asentamientos* comes about through a transversal logic, this thesis takes a relational and socio-material perspective, to reveal the actors, relations, rationalities, practices, and processes that contribute to the continuous urbanisation of *popular habitat*. This thesis makes three contributions: a) *theoretical* one, by addressing how planning and popular urbanisation should be understood through relational frameworks; b) a *methodological* one, presenting a novel way of researching through the analysis of the networked interaction between professional and non-professional planners, materiality, planning instruments, laws, and technology; c) and, a last one, an *empirical*

one, bringing new data to light on a subject matter and geographical areas that have received little academic attention.

This chapter also describes the research aims, the research questions, the theoretical approach deployed, and which the selected case studies are and how they relate with my framework. The remaining chapters are organised as follows:

Chapter 2 is devoted to present, describe, and explain, the theoretical framework I selected to address popular urbanizations and their interactions with planning. There, I will briefly revisit the evolution of the term informality. Then, I will introduce the theoretical debates on popular urbanizations that I consider should be overcome in order to be able to read the interface between planning, informality, and urbanization. I will underline the need to move beyond the use of the term urban informality and engage with the literature that suggests a new vocabulary of urbanisation in the Global South. In order to do this, I will deepen in the existing range of concepts around the phenomenon of urban informality with the aim of analysing the urbanisation processes and engage specifically with three terms which I found very useful for framing my case studies: ‘popular urbanization’, ‘peripheral urbanization’, and ‘plotting urbanism’. Afterwards, I will finally introduce the theoretical framework that I consider adequate to address the interface between informality and planning. As my view builds on an interdisciplinary approach, I will aim to describe the possible relationships between informality, urbanisation, and planning by drawing on and coherently integrating literature from geography, urban planning, and urban studies. Consequently, from a relational and socio-material perspective, I will explain how ANT and co-production as planning, when taken together, can provide a valuable theoretical and methodological frame for this thesis. By understanding popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires (villas and asentamientos) as a product of diverse networks pursuing their interests, while still engaging with the planning system, I attempt to find a means to read transversally across how these networks take part in urban governance co-production. After explaining the theoretical relevance of merging ANT with coproduction, I will propose to look at practices in planning as they will allow me to encompass the set of interactions from which co-produced territories are built, maintained, and, ultimately, reshaped. Borrowing from ANT and co-production in planning and taking a relational perspective, popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires is conceptualised as an effect of a heterogeneous association of human and non-human actors which appears to form networks. There are diverse networks driven by different interests that not only come into conflict with each other but can also converge between the three black-boxed entities: the state, the community organisation and planners.

Lastly, I will summarize how these concepts have been interpreted in connection to one another, and how their interaction has been articulated in previous research in order to set up my theoretical points of departure.

This approach requires a methodology that is attuned to researching the different practices, frameworks and power relations that have been mentioned. To sketch its outlines is the task of Chapter 3, devoted to my methodological strategies. In designing the research methodology, I ensured that the thesis satisfies the key attributes of qualitative research. These include 1) covering the contextual conditions within which people live; 2) representing the perspectives of the people in a study; 3) contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behaviour; 4) striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone (Yin, 2011). In producing context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006), I deployed case study as the strategy of inquiry. I dwelt on the views of different players - government officials, professional planners, inhabitants, nongovernmental organizations, private sector groups, academics, and inter-

national experienced development consultants. As section this chapter will show, I also deployed various data collection methods. The techniques I have resorted to are semi-structured interviews, life histories, participant observation, research-action, and secondary qualitative and quantitative data collection. Therefore, I will briefly explain each of these research techniques and then move to some ethical considerations. Then, I will identify the research boundaries and discuss them as part of a self-reflective exercise which will allow me to later address the different crucial issues around the positionality of the researcher and the ethical and methodological challenges this research had to struggle with since fieldwork has been carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic in a context of high social vulnerability.

Chapter 4 has a conceptual and methodological scope: it aims to introduce important operative definitions to set the stage for my empirical case studies. I will start by pointing out the theoretical relevance of self-reflecting on the use of local terms for describing popular urbanizations in Argentina. In this regard, I firmly believe that keeping terms in their original language does not imply a way of evading the more abstract type of phenomenon one is trying to study but, on the contrary, an enormous possibility to analytically access the different connotations of its attributes and thus lead to more precise and comprehensive characterisations. This in-depth understanding of the properties concerning each modality of popular urbanisation, informed not only by physical, demographic, spatial, legal or geographical characteristics but also by cultural and semantic ones, has the advantage of providing a more thorough understanding of the processes of urban governance co-production, insofar as the processes of conflict and negotiation are crosscut by all the dimensions described above. Then, I will introduce popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires as a productive ground for calling into question urban planning. This will allow me to present later the mutual overlapping among key spatial notions that frame local normative and jurisdictional tensions between planning and popular urbanization. Once I will have considered the complex institutional, political, and geographical aspects of the Argentinian planning system, I will point out some key challenges of territorial planning in Argentina. Then, I will describe the two main typological concepts related to popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires: *villas* and *asentamientos*. In this chapter, I define these two concepts, embedding them in their own historical and socio-spatial context. I will proceed to a detailed characterization of the inhabitants, location, and urban extension of popular urbanisation in RMBA, with a focus on the demographic evolution departing from official figures provided by the REN-ABAP available data. This will enable to specifically address the socio-urban conditions of popular urbanizations and the importance of community networks within them. These community networks are complex not only because of their local particular features but also because of the key role played by whom we may call 'hidden figures of popular urbanization in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, e.g., unconventional actors who act as mediators between inhabitants and authorities and who are embedded in cut-crossing planning networks and coproduction practices: *punteros*, *referentes barriales*, *socio-territorial movements*, and *knowledge-brokers*. Finally, as consequence of my analysis, I will state that Latin American popular urbanisation has strong similarities to the generic production process and configured spatial planning actions characterised mostly by ex-post intervention. In this respect, policies aimed at integrating the population that cannot legally access the land and housing market have focused on improving conditions *ex-post*; that is, they have tried to regulate informality through different types of programmes generically called 'regularisation', ranging from land legalisation to urban-environmental improvements. *Ex-ante* policies to prevent informality have been implemented in very few Latin American countries and have had much less weight (Clichevsky, 2007). Informality,

in my view, is traversed by spatio-temporal limits and socio-political arrangements carried out by the actors operating in each specific arena, thus giving rise to a relationship of unstable equilibrium and permanent negotiation (Davis, 2017). In this regard, various types of agents are involved in the different institutions that coexist in these urbanisations. The state is an ever-present agent that, by action (through land or urban regularisation policies) or omission (by turning a deaf ear or even promoting occupations and real estate transactions), shapes the institutions and their dynamics. Moreover, intermediaries become involved in purchase and sales transactions only when the legality of land ownership is established (Di Virgilio, 2015). The case of Buenos Aires will reveal particularly useful to advance existing planning scholarship that explores the failures of planning because of the unique particularities it presents. Firstly, the engagement between *villas* and *asentamientos* and the planning system has a long history, and the two have a co-constructed relationship. Secondly, continuous occupation and urbanisation are enabled through dedicated planning processes, even though the national state has declared these areas illegal. Thirdly, particularly for *asentamientos*, the engagement with planning standards, regulations and procedures are continuous throughout the different stages of the urbanisation process. Therefore, popular urbanisation in Buenos Aires comes about as an effect of the practices of multiple actors, with different interests, and their interaction with planning professionals, instruments, procedures and regulations. In Chapter 5, I will trace in a historico-analytical way which were the main relationship between the planning system and popular urbanisations dating from their emergence in the 1940s to the present day. Thus, I will aim to show the different formulation of housing policies for popular sectors by national and municipal governments, and the changing political discourses regarding informality in Buenos Aires. The two case studies analysed in this thesis illustrate that in Argentina there are various ways of dealing with the phenomenon of informal housing. In particular, I have identified interventionist, tolerant and hostile approaches, that coexist in contemporary Buenos Aires. These can be explained as the result of institutional fragmentation, which means that the phenomenon is dealt with ad hoc and without an unambiguous strategy, and as the result of a historical process of successive *institutional crystallisations* (Oszlak & O'Donnell, 2007), which, read in their dynamic evolution, allow us to understand the current institutional complexity. To understand how the current policy relates to urban and housing informality it is necessary to analyse the historical evolution of public policies and policy instruments aimed at addressing urban informality through regularisation and urban integration, as well as eradication through evictions. In this chapter, we return to a periodisation proposed by Relli (2018; 2020), who analysed the regularisation policy of urban *popular habitat* in the PBA between 1983 and 2015, which we will complement with an additional section on the period 2015-2018. According to Relli (2018), these policies are responses by (provincial) governments based on a prior problematisation of the issue, as a result of the mobilisation of public actors and 'institutional crystallisations derived from the decisions of political actors and general outcomes' (53). The chapter is structured as follows: firstly, I will present how planning works in Argentina, identifying the main characteristic of territorial and political fragmentation through four main variables. Then, I will reconstruct the main policies deployed by the municipal, provincial, and national administrations between 1983 and 2018 to address urban informality in the RMBA. Finally, in the conclusions, I will focus on how legislation, policy and socioeconomic developments have not only led to the emergence of informal settlements but have also determined the particular shape they took and where they emerged. If anything, the sequence of developments described throughout the chapter reflects the complexity and multi-

faceted nature of the phenomenon. The production of new irregularities combines the long periods of implementation of regularisation procedures - in which there are changes in the composition of the inhabitants of the dwellings (due to family dynamics or the introduction of the properties into irregular commercial circuits), and the construction and delivery of social housing with urban planning problems and without approved plans. These actions are profoundly influenced by electoral times and their short-term political gains. At both the national and provincial levels, regularisation did not question the final solution of homeownership. But the renewed validity of the regularisation policy can by no means be attributed to its procedural drawbacks alone. The limitations of *ex-post* actions are restrictions of sectoral readings of the problem of popular urbanisation. Irregularity has been approached as a phenomenon to be corrected (as if it were a static situation) and not to address its structural relationship with the general functioning of the land, housing and rental sub-markets. There has been no proactive policy with tangible results to curb the production of irregular habitat by providing a sufficiently regulated and accessible supply of land, rent control, public housing for rent or other possibilities. Nor has there been any strategy in the sphere of the formal production of housing able to contrast speculative practices and the concentration of ownership, and able to allow access to lower-income sectors (Relli, 2020).

In general terms, it can be affirmed that in the *villas* the state seems to play an active role in terms of the improvement of urbanisation, even if the transfer of ownership remains incomplete. On the other hand, although in the *asentamientos* it is generally simpler to transfer ownership, neighbourhood improvement is an initiative that more often than not remains in the hands of the neighbours. However, the entry of massive state intervention in the housing problem was marked by the identification of the right to housing with the right to homeownership, and the latter with social justice. The orientation of the interventions (housing construction and regularisation) added important attributes to property: as an incentive to escape poverty; as indispensable for access to urbanisation; and the introduction of improvements and public services. The rhetoric that accompanies the actions - and which persists despite changes in policies and rhetoric - places the state in the role of guarantor of property rights by facilitating access to ownership of the property and access to justice by addressing the costs of title deeds. Throughout the period, there has been continuity in the expression of the state's responsibility to act in the face of irregularity, with more or less redistributive aspects, to achieve legalisation through ownership as the ultimate recognition. Securitisation, which allows land to be placed on the market, was a central objective of all the measures studied and was presented as the only way to safeguard the rights of the popular sectors, and even to support them in obtaining capital that they would not otherwise be able to obtain, either by improving macroeconomic conditions or by extending mortgage credit and/or extending the supply adapted to their payment conditions. Faced with different situations, the Buenos Aires province adopted different roles to facilitate the ultimate objective of individual title deeds: a) *The state as a seller* of state-owned private property; b) *The state as a mediator*, implementing mechanisms for the acquisition of occupied land for transfer to inhabitants for sale without affecting the interests of those who hold the title, regardless of their absenteeism, carelessness or speculative expectations; and c) *The state as a deed-holder* in cases of interruption of the formal mercantile or registration circuit, in sales between individuals and irregular transactions with housing built by the state and/or to cover the costs of formal sales or inheritance (Relli 2018). However, particularly in the CABA and the municipalities bordering it, the possibility for municipal and provincial governments to offer land for the construction of social housing has been very limited, as have their actions in

this area. The most important public initiative in Argentina since 2003 for the production of social housing in the AMBA - such as the federal housing plans - lacked the necessary land to carry it out (Del Río and Duarte, 2012). When it was possible to intervene on public land under municipal, provincial or city ownership, in most cases it was public land already occupied by its inhabitants. The lack of serviced land and of actions aimed at closing the housing deficit undoubtedly constitute clear incentives for informal market dynamics (Di Virgilio, 2015). Although some tensions were identified throughout the regularisation policy cycle, the pattern of action that was consolidated is one that assigns these roles to the state, based on the conception that its obligation is to facilitate access to the registered property for those who do not have the means to do so through the market, subordinating the other aspects of irregularity to the property dimension. However, of the variety of possibilities for dealing with the popular habitat in terms of radication, corrective actions have prevailed. The most privileged dimension, and the one which, due to its complexity, has generated the most instruments, is that of land ownership, while for urban and environmental urban integration, it has been the use of the resource of exception instead of the one of intervention in the material conditions of the neighbourhoods. Finally, I will remark that the enormous variety of regulatory instruments that support regularisation processes (laws, decrees, programmes and plans) at the national and provincial levels either overlap and conflict with each other or are discontinued and reissued without incorporating the progress of previous experiences.

Chapters 6 and 7 are the empirical chapters of this thesis. Through my case studies, I am particularly interested in exposing the relational character of rationalities by offering a transversal reading of the different entities and rationalities at play in popular urbanization. To this end, ANT provided me with tools that allow us to understand these popular neighbourhoods as socio-technical assemblages, to look at the position that actors adopt in different contexts, times and power, and how non-human actors collaborate in the planning process. In both cases, I highlight the positioning and role of the planner as a non-monolithic actor but, through a relational view, how he/she interacts with multiple actors and rationalities in the planning process. The intent of these two empirical chapters is to open the black boxes of predefined entities (the state, the community, the planners) and look at the interface of these rationalities.

In chapter 6 in particular, I analyse my first case study, Villa 20. This chapter aims to reconstruct the process of redevelopment of Villa 20 in terms of governance co-production and is accompanied by a photographic appendix in order to show the materiality of the urban space. To this end, a qualitative methodological strategy is proposed, which triangulates different sources of information, including in-depth interviews with IVC officials and technical teams, representatives of the neighbourhood's technical committee and key informants. Taking into account the diversity of participation and information mechanisms and spaces deployed in the framework of the project of Villa 20, to implement the participation of the actors involved, this chapter focuses particularly on the interrelation between different actors and practices both institutional and non-institutional. Villa 20 is understood as a socio-material assemblage where different rationalities shaped both the materiality and the planning instruments and outcomes. Specifically, the chapter is structured as follows. The first section addresses the characteristics of the socio territorial and material environment. I analyse Villa 20 in terms of localization, socio-demographic data and the materiality of the built environment, analysing particularly lack of access to basic services. The second section, set the historical context and incremental development of Villa 20 since its origin to 2014. In this section, I anal-

use how the current material and spatial conditions of Villa 20 are the result of the juxtaposition of different logics of habitat production in which various actors -both socio-territorial and state-, participated. Therefore, it constitutes a space constructed within the framework of tensions between social practices of appropriation of space through forms of popular knowledge and the urban norms regulated by the state. This will lead me to identify two cycles of governance co-production. The first identified cycle represents a progressive prefiguration of collective action and with the collaboration and alliance of actors accompanying the inhabitants towards the construction of legal instruments and urban planning from below. The second represents a new period with the announcement by the local government of the redevelopment of Villa 20. In this cycle, a series of planning devices are co-produced among all the stakeholders involved. This will allow me to discuss the main findings of this case study analysis addressing my first three research questions. Finally, in the conclusion, I argue that the case demonstrates how inhabitants of Villa 20 actively engage with the tensions arising as co-production bringing together diverse knowledge, expectations and interests, and allowing platforms where these exchanges can take place in a transparent form in the identification of shared goals. The case confirms that popular urbanisation and planning cannot be conceived as separate realms but are interconnected as the achievement of sociotechnical assemblages. The case also illuminates the assemblages which produce both urbanisation and planning and the micropolitics at play in shaping outcomes. Finally, the case reveals that conflating rationalities, as much as conflicting and competing rationalities drive the urbanisation of Villa 20.

In chapter 7, I will analyse my second case study, the Guernica *toma de tierra*. Since July 2020, about 30 attempts of 'land takings' have been registered in Argentina in the areas of Great Buenos Aires and La Plata, concentrated mainly in the outskirts of the metropolitan area. These land invasions -known in the local context as *tomas de tierras*- are shaped as housing responses by popular sectors that struggle with situations of extreme labour and economic precariousness and, as a result of the government's lockdown measures and the socio-economic crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, could not afford to pay rent anymore. Therefore, I intend to analyse the collective action developed in the recent process of occupation of a peri-urban land in Guernica, a locality in the South of Great Buenos Aires, and their informal establishment of a residential neighbourhood. This case-study will also offer a transversal reading of the different rationalities at play that shaped innovative planning practices.

In Chapter 8, I will present the most important key findings related to the first three research questions I developed in the initial chapters. Consequently, the general standpoint of this thesis aims to provide urban planners with tools in order to understand the intrinsic relationships between planning and popular urbanizations through the lens of ANT and the urban governance co-production theoretical framework. There, I will recall my four research questions, which I will seek to address in the detailed description of my findings. This chapter is structured as follows: firstly, I will summarize my key findings. Secondly, I will unpack my findings and show how they contribute to clarifying the hypotheses that answer my research questions. Then, I will compare my results to those of the existing literature, especially the theoretical debates around the formal-informal continuum, the co-production governance framework, and the main texts that address the role of planners in complex urban environments.

In Chapter 9, I will summarize my conclusions. The chapter is structured as follows. First, I will discuss the main key findings, their theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to the field of planning theory and practice and their practical

implications for planning. Then, I will outline a series of recommendations, useful to target changes in urban governance. Besides the knowledge contribution and policy recommendations, I acknowledge four limitations of this research, which can also be a take-off point for future research undertaking. Finally, I will offer a brief closing remark.

