Housing as Commons

Housing Alternatives as Response to the Current Urban Crisis

Edited by Stavros Stavrides & Penny Travlou

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Contents

Figures

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We planned this book before the recent COVID-19 pandemic and we feel very happy that it has now become a reality in spite of the huge problems we all had to face due to this global health crisis. We hoped that more opportunities for collective in-person work between the contributors would have been available, since the idea of exploring aspects of a potential commoning culture needs to be based on practices of knowledge commoning and the sharing of thoughts between those involved. Unfortunately, this did not become possible. We want to thank, however, all the contributors for their support, their enthusiasm and their work that often transcended the difficulties of this period. With most of them, we have collaborated in various occasions in the past, so, this collection is the mature result, we hope, of many intersecting research trajectories.

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(with E. Kotsou, 1996), *From the City-as-Screen to the City-as-Stage* (2002 National Book Award), *Suspended Spaces of Alterity* (2010), and *Towards the City of Thresholds* (in English, 2010, in Spanish, 2016 and in Turkish 2016).

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Introduction

Revisiting the housing question: The potentialities of urban commoning

Stavros Stavrides and Penny Travlou

Experiences of struggle for housing ignited by the lack of social and affordable housing and foreclosure evictions, as well as practices of establishing shared and self-managed housing areas, unfold in a world of harsh inequalities. In such a context, it becomes crucially important to think again about the need to define common urban worlds 'from below' (De Angelis 2012a, 2012b; Stavrides 2016). We need to trace contemporary practices of urban commoning through which people redefine what is to be shared and how (Hardt and Negri 2009), against and beyond the dominant model of the partitioned and exclusionary city. Commoning practices (Linebaugh 2008) importantly produce new relations between people:

> To speak of the commons as if it were a natural resource is misleading at best and dangerous at worst. The commons is an activity and, if anything, it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations nature. It might be better to keep the word as a verb, an activity, rather than as a noun, a substantive. (Linebaugh 2008: 279)

Commoning practices encourage creative encounters and negotiations through which forms of sharing are organized and common life takes shape. They do not simply produce or distribute goods but essentially create new forms of life (Agamben 2000), forms of life in common.

Housing becomes one of the major focal points of urban commoning, especially for those who either are excluded from the official city or actively challenge dominant patterns of inhabiting (e.g. the suburban dream, the alienating housing blocks and the gated community). Reclaiming housing as commons is, thus, an active force for urban and social transformation that needs to be carefully studied by those and for those who seek ways to approach social emancipation (Stavrides 2019).

Friedrich Engels' seminal essay on the housing question (2012 [1872]) is well known as a polemic response to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's suggestion that workers should become owners of their houses so as to avoid the constant threat of becoming homeless. Neither Engels nor Proudhon questions the fact that everyone should have a decent house to live in. What, however, separates them is the relation of relevant struggles for housing to the prospect of an emancipated society. Engels thinks that if workers are bound to a house, that they additionally have to work even harder in order to pay, they lose their power to negotiate their workforce. They cannot move to other places since the house keeps them chained to nearby jobs. Furthermore, Engels accuses Proudhon that in his suggestion he actually paves the way to workers becoming petit bourgeois individualists: in this way, they distance themselves from the collective experiences and interests of cooperation that essentially form the basis of class consciousness.

In this nineteenth-century controversy, one can already discern an important distinction that resurfaces today in a new socio-historical context: Is housing a good to be claimed and distributed in ways dependent upon the characteristics of the corresponding society (capitalism), or is it a set of spatiotemporal relations that crucially shapes social life itself and, therefore, directly affects any challenge to social and urban order?

According to the first approach, housing is one more good to be demanded by all in order to ensure a decent life. However, according to the second one, housing, depending on its form, legal status and relation to the city and to that considered as necessary social services, gives shape to living conditions and, thus, defines to a great extent the conditions of social life. Following the second approach, visionary architects, planners and politicians sought to imagine and implement different social relations by envisioning different ways to conceive a future society's houses.

More connected to the first approach, 'realist' politicians have sought to devise policies that would at times facilitate access to housing for those in need, while actually depoliticizing the demand for housing by disconnecting it from demands for social change. Such a definition of the housing problem has of course become a contested terrain: supporters of social reform have in many cases pushed what started as a distribution issue to the limits of structural changes. Social housing production, affordable housing policies and tenet's protection measures were explicit results of struggles that deeply affected geometries of power, without however destroying the pillars of capitalist (re)production.

What appears to lie beneath the surface of such a contested terrain is a question that challenges the dominant view according to which the house is, after all, a merchandise to be sold and bought. What if, however, the house is

not a container that facilitates life but one of its most crucial preconditions? A focus on natural needs and, therefore, rights would include housing as prime right. A focus on citizen, culturally defined, needs and rights would consider housing as the right that essentially guarantees citizenship (Holston 2008). One way or another, housing is reclaimed from the unfettered action of market laws.

Rethinking housing by theorizing the commons

What the recent discussion about the commons may introduce to the housing question is its disentanglement from the legal economic and political approach that considers it as the locus of the private, the locus of privacy, private ownership and private aspirations. Once this naturalized view is challenged, we may see the central role of cohabitation, of inhabiting together, that has always been the defining force of housing. The housing question could, thus, be reformulated. Instead of asking in which way people may have access to housing (in just ways, in market regulated ways, in ways that reproduce patterns of approved behaviour, etc.), one should ask what kinds of coinhabiting need to be pursued in order to support specific social relations. Following this, one will then have to specify criteria concerning such social relations: egalitarian cohabitation differs, for example, from cohabitation based on social hierarchies (patriarchal, race based, income based, etc.).

If housing is to be reformulated through the lens of commons theory, then, of course, one has to take sides: Which commons theory? What is to be considered as the practice of commoning? Here we can specifically relate commoning with the processes of creating and nurturing communities (see Bollier and Helfrich 2014, 2015). This recognition is a critique of the limited view of the commons as (only) a pool of resources (see Ostrom 1990). As Julie Ristau (2011), codirector of *On the Commons*, suggests:

> the act of commoning draws on a network of relationships made under the expectation that we will each take care of one another and with a shared understanding that some things belong to all of us – which is the essence of the commons itself. The practice of commoning demonstrates a shift in thinking from the prevailing ethic of 'you're on your own' to 'we're in this together'. (On the Commons 2011 online)

From this perspective, the practice of commoning is an activity based on relationality where sharing and caring are integral parts of what Berlant calls

'affective infrastructures' (2016: 399). Berlant speaks specifically about the need to act collectively against a 'broken world' (Berlant 2016: 399) such as the current pandemic crisis.

To discuss housing under this theoretical prism of commoning, then, one needs to directly link the questioning of dominant social relations with an ecosystemic approach. By this, we mean that housing cannot be just defined in relation to tangible infrastructures, for example, buildings. Instead, we should look at a much wider perspective that includes the intangible and affective infrastructures of each specific socio-urban context: the community alliances and the shared spaces produced by those living there. This approach aligns close to what is referred to as 'habitat' in Latin American housing scholarship, an inclusive term that recognizes the participation of different actors in the making of shared spaces for living a life in common (a view explicitly developed in the interview with Catalina Ortiz, Harry Smith conducted by Penny Travlou and included in this volume).

If at the centre of the housing as commons approach lies a problematization of coinhabiting practices, we must explore the ways those practices are shaped. We may distinguish at least three levels of shaping factors: the first level refers to the conditions of production of housing, the second to the design and planning choices and the third to the legal status of housing.

The conditions of housing production that have created potentialities of commoning widely differ, even if we limit ourselves to cases from nineteenth century to today. It seems appropriate to recognize this historical limit since it is during the nineteenth century that we first observe the devastating results of the housing crisis in industrial societies as well as first witness the militant criticism of urban and social injustices which gave rise to many proposals and practices that questioned the housing conditions (usually as part of a broader criticism of society).

As it is well documented, the so-called utopian socialists proposed new ways of social organization, while explicitly connecting them with visions of different inhabitation arrangements. Robert Owen's *New Harmony* proposal may be considered as one of the first such attempts to envision an ideal community based on equality and sharing. His plans for building a multifamily housing scheme were expressed in the form of a huge rectangle of houses that had various common use buildings in the middle (including a huge square). Although his so-called ideal 'township' plans were not realized, it is important to note that his views can be compared to a commoning ethos. He explicitly favoured the establishment of community kitchens, collective childcare and the development of a communal education system aimed at supporting both the children and their parents. Followers of Owen managed to build a few model communities in the United States and explicitly

supported equality between men and women in everyday tasks (including household jobs).

Departing from Owen's focus on a rational calculus of social harmony, Charles Fourier, the other great nineteenth-century utopian socialist, put an emphasis on passion and love. In his highly controversial first work, *Théorie de quatre mouvements et de destinées générales* (1808), he 'offered "glimpses" of a better world – a world organized according to the "dictates" of the passions' (Beecher 2012: 94). Fourier's vision was never really translated to an alternative housing community. Although the most famous Fourierist project, *Familistére*, was constructed by Jean-Baptiste André Godin, its main characteristics were more close to a housing association for workers (actually the workers of Godin's factory) with lots of available-to-all services (primarily related to health and education). Godin kept for himself the right to lead and manage the project, and although he was more or less well intended, he never resigned from a paternalist attitude towards the community (Kontaratos 2014). Fourier's call for a *Nouveau monde amoureaux* would have to wait to be rediscovered in the libertarian experiments at co-living of the 1960s.

We may consider as a crucial stage in the history of collective housing the relevant programmes of Weimar Republic (1919–33). The Social Democratic administration of this period has produced remarkable social housing projects that went beyond a mere set of welfare state policies. Although closely related to local state mechanisms, large housing complexes were meant to be part of a supported workers culture that was to transcend the limitations of capitalist urban life.

Weimar *Siedlungen*, those new housing neighbourhoods usually at the periphery of existing cities, were envisaged as pilot examples of a future urban society. According to M. Tafuri, such plans were intended to express the rationality of 'liberated work'. A 'utopian ethic' connects to 'the myth of the proletariat as standard-bearer of a "new world" and of a socialism founded on a society of *conscious producers*: the phantom of socialization is evoked by "images" of a possible alternative to the capitalist city as a whole' (1990: 214).

Weimar *Siedlungen* were conceived and constructed not simply as a solution to the problem of acute housing shortage but also as a means to create a different kind of sociality, based on the projected values of communal living. Facilities concerning child care and laundry as well as outdoor community spaces were designed as parts of an almost-autonomous urban milieu focused on developing habits of sharing and mutual help. Although Weimar architects especially linked to those projects, as Bruno Taut and Martin Wagner, were leading proponents of modernist functionalism and a rationalist planning culture that aimed at taming or replacing the chaos of industrial metropolis, their proposals and work had a visionary focus that may be compared to

commoning aspirations. They did not mobilize people towards such a focus of social reform, but they definitively contributed to the reformulating of the problem of city life in the direction of an emancipated society. What was perhaps their major handicap is that, being Social Democrats or simply well-intended planning rationalists, they did not recognize the limitations of top-down decision making and of relying on public funding within a predominant market-oriented economy.

The communitarian, socialist or anarchist, ideal inspiring concrete Social Democratic central European housing projects had to confront the reality of the capital city. Tafuri insists that such projects were essentially based on an anti-urban ethos and a nostalgic longing for a non-alienated urban community (1976: 116–24). As in the case of numerous plans of nineteenth-century utopias of collective life, the historical city itself was to be reproduced by a new kind of urban spatiality developed from scratch – as if communal bonds could only be established by abandoning the alienating anonymity of existing big cities. The idea that planning rationality will ensure the functioning of shared life (based on cooperative relations of production as well as of social reproduction) is present in both those periods. What Owen tried to ensure through his paternalistic obsessions, Weimar architects and politicians tried to achieve through the exemplary establishment of a new urban order based on the calculated efficiency of cohabitation patterns that the modernist planning and architecture were supposed to guarantee.

An example that seems to depart from such a dead-end trajectory is the housing projects of Red Vienna (Blau 1999). Building on the pre-existing tradition of Viennese housing blocks arranged around a common use courtyard, the new projects were constructed not outside the city but around the city's historic nucleus. They were conceived in the form of building complexes that were to have at their centre a communal *Hof* (yard). The urban life that unfolded in those large shared yards came very near to an ethos of commoning, albeit supported by choices in which the inhabitants did not participate. Sharing facilities and the use of outdoor space in the yard promoted in those complexes a kind of class solidarity that has been proven present in a dramatic way when in such neighbourhoods workers had to barricade themselves against the Nazi coup attacks (Zednicek 2009).

Interesting experiments of collective inhabiting have unfolded in the first years after the Russian Revolution (Kopp 1970). The idea of *Dom Kommuna* (House Commune), a housing model meant to create cohabiting conditions with extensive shared facilities, was harshly criticized by the party authorities. The modernist rational and 'functional' new Soviet cities would replace such experiments on collectivization, further promoting a state-centred programmed city life to match a state-centred programmed economy. Departing from the mainstream Soviet

housing policies were the Yugoslav plans for new housing areas. As is shown in one of this book's chapters (the contribution of Jelica Jovanovich), in the early days of Yugoslav socialism a possible way towards housing self-management was pursued that came close to a culture of house commoning.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, housing has been an important form of action and thought for visionaries and activists, because it was considered as a crucial means to develop an alternative urban life. As we have seen, at the centre of such alternative views about housing is a rethinking of urban community and urban society. There seems to have been at least two different ways to concretize such views. One way is based on the assumption that alternative housing communities will be established in new pilot urban arrangements (new cities or new city-like settlements) that prefigure a new development of urbanity. The other way is based on the idea that building – like structures of a different arrangement logic – may become condensers of a new sociality. Depending on the history and the choices made in each period, designed or realized utopias of a new collective ethos have been closer to aspirations for a new city or to aspirations for new housing building communities. The common characteristic which transverses this spectrum of actually pursued or possible options was the choice to develop facilities of common use through which habits of sharing would develop (or, even, be created). What, however, may become a criterion through which one may decide how close all those efforts came to an urban commoning culture is the level of participation of inhabitants themselves to practices that collectively define and develop a shared world.

The housing question and the problem of power distribution

Commons literature has focused on conditions of production and distribution as well as on conditions of legal right and property status. Such approaches may indeed help defining in each case the possibilities as well as the actualities of alternative housing projects.

What seems, however, to be at the root of the housing question (and thus of the answers to this question) is the problem of power: What kind of social relations develop in housing areas that establish sharing? Are these relations based on solidarity and equality? What kind of gender, class, age, race and so on hierarchies 'corrupt' the commoning potentialities? And, is the production of different kinds of housing spaces a way to ensure commoning in and through cohabiting?

This leads us to another way of rethinking the history of housing as commons. In line with an extensive literature on the latent everyday resistances to dominant patterns of urban life or to the idea that everydayness contains the seeds of a different urban future, we may explore city life in search of urban commoning practices that develop within existing housing conditions. Some of the chapters of this collection indeed focus on such an endeavour. Thus, Mohamed Magdi Hagras explores the commoning potentialities in informal housing areas in Cairo (and the failures of dominant policies to support them), Himanshu Burte focuses on the importance of commoning in subaltern placemaking in Mumbai, and Lalitha Kamath and Purva Dewoolkar observe the development of commoning-focused 'activist infrastructures' in the Mumbai informal settlement Cheetah Camp.

This approach may be connected to the reappraisal of modern city life in which elements of liberating promises are unearthed (as in the work of Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer). It may be also connected to the complex everydayness of contemporary big cities (as in the work of Henri Lefebvre or Michel de Certeau). But, it may transcend the limits of Western thought tradition, opening possibilities of connecting to different cultural and social worlds. The logic of *Buen Vivir,* for example, summarizes an indigenous Latin American perspective that is based on a view of cohabitation which includes humans, non-humans, more-than-humans and nature as a subject partner (Acosta 2012). Along these lines, *Buen Vivir* is a 'system of life' based on the process of becoming, and on learning how to live well: a way of life that is community-centric, ecologically balanced and culturally sensitive. What seems to quite well align with *Buen Vivir*, nevertheless, is 'commoning': the notion of making/becoming a common.

Although non-Western problematizations of housing as commons are not yet developed, it is extremely important to observe how experiences and examples coming from outside the so-called First World may deeply influence relevant research as well as produce new theoretical arguments. It is not by chance, for example, that the chapter on Salvador de Bahia explicitly shifts the meaning of housing to encompass the plurality of habitat. Likewise, the chapter on Medellin's social urbanism shifts towards the discussion on habitat offering examples of community participation such as *coinvite* and *mingas*, which both translate between communal work, a gathering and celebration. Habitat, thus, becomes an expanded space to include all these shared spaces of commoning practices by the inhabitants. One needs to be attentive, though, when using non-Western examples to avoid the fallacy of romanticizing them, but instead placing them within their actual sociocultural context. For example, in the case of Australian Aboriginal architecture, Western academia has described it as 'vernacular'. Cameron and Travlou, in their

chapter, criticize this characterization as rather derogatory and an imprint of colononization. They question why Aboriginal housing practices do not have equal billing in the architectural discourse but are rather positioned within a very narrow framework. Their research, instead, seeks to situate housing as an important site of engagement for indigenous people and suggest a new reading of ethno-architecture based on decolonizing architectural discourse and practice.

We may also explore the potentialities of housing movements by focusing on the way they explicitly or implicitly make it possible for new subjects of cohabitation to emerge. As is also being shown in some of the following chapters, homeless movements develop in certain cases a commoning ethos shared by their members that is meant to define not only the conditions of struggle but also the future conditions of living together in a housing neighbourhood (provided they manage to be victorious in their struggle). Subjects of housing struggles, thus, may be shaped through their action and forms of deliberation to become commoners, subjects that create themselves as they collectively create the rules, processes and agreed-upon priorities of sharing (Stavrides 2019). Mathias Heyden, being also an activist and participant in the Berlin housing squats movement, reflects in an interview included in this book on the power of collective action and the potentialities of sharing as they unfolded in Berlin struggles for commoning the city. Stavros Stavrides explores the processes of dissident subjectivation that develop in Mexican 'autonomous neighbourhoods' and suggests that they may become exemplary cases of the emancipatory power of commoning. Lucia Capanema Alvares, João B. M. Tonucci Filho and Joviano Maia Mayer analyse the Dandara Community-Occupation in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) by focusing on the formation of countervailing powers, networks and connections, based on communication, cooperation and creativity.

In both ways of approaching the problem of power within urban commoning, issues of established asymmetries arise. We may learn a lot from the fact that many nineteenth-century visionaries questioned the predominance of family relations in housing schemes. For some, this meant detaching housing proposals from the idea of an agglomeration of individuality spaces within an overall communal arrangement with shared kitchens, kindergartens and, in some cases, rural or small handicraft production installations. And, for some, this meant abolishing the family altogether because it was taken to represent the molecule of power asymmetries and developing housing communes of various kinds.

As D. Hayden clearly shows it, radical feminists of the nineteenth century explicitly argued against dominant moralist views that 'proscribed

conventional marriage and motherhood as the ideal for all women' (Hayden 1982: 94). Marie Stevens Case (Howland) was one of them. An admirer of the Fourierist Social Palace, *Familistére*, created by Godin at Guise (France), 'she was one of the first American women in active political life to challenge the nuclear family, sexual monogamy and private child care' (Hayden 1982: 112). Involved in many radical cooperative efforts to house communities based on sharing and mutuality, she actually emblematized an early confluence of feminist struggle for equality with a radical orientation towards collective life based on urban commoning. Explicitly referring to the experience and views of such nineteenth-century feminists, S. Federici suggests:

> If the house is the oikos on which the economy is built, then it is women, historically the houseworkers and house prisoners, who must take the initiative to reclaim the house as a center of collective life, one traversed by multiple people and forms of cooperation, providing safety without isolation and fixation, allowing for the sharing and circulation of community possessions, and, above all, providing the foundation for collective forms of reproduction. (2019: 112)

The ideas that sparked, motivated and sustained efforts of establishing communities of sharing, are many, both in the past and in the present. Researchers have correctly pointed out that religious communities have often produced interesting examples of communes of sharing. Faith and a common identity have been at the root of such endeavours that, nevertheless, often accepted the 'paternalistic' predominance of charismatic religious leaders (Rexroth 1975; Holloway 1966).

Efforts based on socialist or anarchist ideas were and are often envisaged as ways to prefigure a future society. As we see in some of the following chapters, prefigurative practices are not merely exemplary acts of dedicated militants. They are practices that deeply transform subjects of cohabiting and power relations within cohabiting. Not that those efforts are by definition equalitarian and non-hierarchic. Commoning ethos, as is shown, needs to continuously develop the means to establish and reproduce itself against the prevailing individualist values as well as against disputes and confrontations that arise concerning leadership and organization issues.

Focusing on the problem of power relations developed, encouraged or denied and reconfigured in cohabiting practices helps us navigate our way through a contradiction that seems to prevail in problematizing housing conditions: Where should the limits be established between the private and the shared realm, and the limits that define, or even connect while separating areas of common use and areas of privacy? Ioanna Piniara's chapter traces the

roots of a dominant neoliberal approach to urban housing in post-war ideas for urban reconstruction in London. By appropriating the council housing legacy, this policy produced new urban enclosures in which exclusionary privacy may be experienced in the centre of a historic city. To consider housing as essentially an area of commoning means to rethink established boundaries, canonical design and legal directives and individualist as well as collectivist mentalities. And above all, it means to rethink the relation between commoning practices and practices (as well as organized patterns of action) supported by dominant institutions that mark areas of confrontation rather than indicate areas of coexistence. In many cases, the state (local, federal or national), considered as a historical formation of sovereign power, limits or openly opposes commoning perspectives. As we will see in some chapters, though, by negotiating with the state through struggle or 'invited participation' (Miraftab 2009), urban commoning may manage to establish counter-hegemonic conditions in the production and life of alternative housing schemes. Take, for example, the case of housing cooperatives in Zurich where the local municipal authorities play an operative role. Irina Davidovici asks in her chapter whether cooperative housing can be seen as a commons in isolation from state and market forces, and, if so, how we could reconcile the active involvement of official agencies and commercial developers at the various stages of this cooperative history.

The emancipatory prospects of each resulting case can be judged of course according to the stakes at issue in the specific historical period and to the level of mobilization of people themselves that will corroborate their power to affect decisions. Latin American movements, for example, have repeatedly emphasized the role struggles for housing have for reclaiming the 'right to the city'. Let us remember that Lefebvre considers the city as 'the perpetual *oeuvre* of the inhabitants, themselves mobile and mobilized for and by this *oeuvre*. . . . [T]his means that time-spaces become works of art' (Lefebvre 1996: 173–4). Thus, the right to the city is essentially the right to collectively create the city. Reclaiming the city as commons means reclaiming the power of collective creativity: reclaiming the city as oeuvre.

According to J. Holston, demands of marginalized or homeless people for housing represent a 'politicization of the *oikos*' since, in them, dispossessed people 'struggle for rights to have a daily life . . . worthy of a citizen's dignity' (Holston 2008: 313). Struggles that prioritize demands for decent housing (as the confluence point for demands concerning the right to decent living) often explicitly develop forms of popular power. A kind of power, that is, which is not only promoting sharing and equality but is perceived and enacted as an area of commoning too. Many of such struggles are being shaped by efforts to ensure horizontality in decision making, rotation in duties, openness to

collaboration and mutual help and, of course, solidarity. Power, thus, is being shared instead of being accumulated. Such an example of sharing horizontal governance and enacting solidarity and mutual aid is the housing squats for refugees in Athens. City Plaza, a former abandoned hotel turned into a squat to house refugees, has operated for almost four years becoming, as Nicolas Kanavaris suggests in his contributing chapter, a paradigm of co-living where its residents collectively decided on the way they manage the space using assemblies as a tool for decision making. Beyond this, City Plaza has proven that solidarity as a care mechanism is responsible for the longevity of the squat. This is again a reference to 'affective infrastructures' where relations, associations and practices of resistance enable people to enact politics of care and solidarity (Berlant 2016). In the case of Cheetah Camp in Mumbai, affective infrastructures, as well as the solidarity relations developed between the urban poor, are seen indeed as the alternative of sovereignty and power through the prism of activism from below. In this example, the values of shared caring and mutual flourishing, rooted in common struggles, are to create a better place, lived in common.

In the context of neoliberal governance and capitalist economy, housing projects are treated as areas of social control and urban order, as well as opportunities for speculation and profit-making. Welfare state considerations have regressed in the current neoliberal 'state crafting', which, according to L. Wacquant, prioritizes a 'disciplinary social policy' (2017: 72). This amounts to the focusing of social policies on 'corrective workfare' that imposes 'specific behavioral mandates' while expanding, at the same time, penal policies (2017). In such a context, commoning may represent a set of actions and experiences that challenge the integration of housing to current market and governance priorities. Commoning may be expressed in conditions of cohabiting that promote the sharing of services and responsibilities. Depending on the specific socio-urban context, such ways of living in common may acquire an emblematic, paradigmatic or, even, prefigurative character. Can Masdeu and Kan Pasqual rurban squats in the outskirts of Barcelona offer a good example of inhabiting the commons where their governance model is based on self-institutionalization and autonomy. In their chapter, Marc Gavaldà and Claudio Cattaneo suggest that collective autonomy within these eco-squats does not only relate to cohabitation but also to 'the reproductive task of feeding themselves'.

Commoning may also be present in collective resistances to enclosure policies that privatize existing affordable or social housing building stock. S. Hodkinson names such struggles for housing 'strategic and tactical interventions' that develop housing commons as 'forms of protection against the market' (2012: 438). What seems to worry him, though, is the possibility

of 'weakening the protective shield that strategic housing commons provide' when putting an emphasis on experiments of collective 'living in common' (2012: 439). Actually, both perspectives need to be explored and actively pursued. In an effort to study the potentialities of specific struggles to protect the right to housing, several chapters in this book trace the characteristics of relevant movements and implicitly or explicitly connect them to commoning actions. The anti-auction movement in Athens is one among such examples: it has managed to bring together a significant number of local collectives, initiatives and individual activists to successfully stop the auctions in many occasions. The right to housing is in the forefront of this movement as the anti-auction activist, Tonia Katerini, writes in her chapter. She suggests that the movement's activists must act on three levels: first, to provide knowledge to the public on the dimension of the housing issues in Athens; second, to assist and empower people who have been affected; and, finally, to stop any attempt of loss of home through auctions and evictions. Such struggles became exceedingly important especially during the recent economic (and social) crisis in Greece spanning the period roughly from 2008 to 2019. During this period, a country that has one of the highest percentages of home ownership in Europe was explicitly struck by the immense inability of people to pay for their housing loans as well as for the everyday bills and obligations. As Katerini's text explains, an advancing proletarianization struck the lower middle class and further deepened the vulnerability of the urban poor, including the refugees and the immigrants. In such a context, the owned house that has provided (especially from the last world war on) the most important safety net for the dominated classes is becoming less and less affordable. Precarity and the resulting fear for the future becomes the dominant experience for many people who used to consider their life conditions more or less guaranteed not by a welfare state (as in many European states) but by the ownership of a house: a stable locus of family life.

Especially in countries in which home ownership is common for lower and middle classes (including Greece and Spain in Europe), people are used to the idea that owning a house means for them having access to a good that makes them members of the society. Homelessness was the ultimate loss of this right to membership. It is in this way that house is for most a good that everybody should be able to use. Does this mean that house was understood as a common good? This is really debatable. What seems to be more accurate is that house ownership is considered by both the dominant and the dominated as the major proof of living well (with differing priorities depending on the class one belongs to). What possibly opens the path to thinking about housing as a common good or housing as the focus of commoning experience is perhaps the crisis itself and the ways it has shaken

the status of home ownership. Can the – albeit still weak – housing movements of today ignite such collective explorations? And can the prolonged effects of the crisis (especially multiplied by the recent pandemic crisis) become the fertile ground for the emerging networks of cohabitation solidarity?

The only possible solution to Hodkinson's dilemma may come from the experiences of concrete struggles. In certain socio-urban contexts, the struggle of the urban poor for housing is forced to directly confront policies that consider parts of the population as expendable. In such a context, housing commons become both the means and the scope of struggle. The inherent potentiality of commoning in and through housing movement action is, thus, the outcome of the 'politicization of oikos' in the neoliberal cities of acute spatial and social injustices. In order to retain the transformative power of commoning, it is important to always combine experiences of commoning with forms of social organization that resist both the power of the market and the domination of the state.

Many and different ways to understand and protect housing as a decisive area of sharing and living in common have developed throughout the recent urban and social history. Daring experiments, imaginative utopias and fierce struggles have to teach us a lot. It remains to the potential today's commoners to mobilize this knowledge in efforts to restore the creative power of sharing in and through cohabiting.

A final note concerning the production of this book: For the purpose of collecting contributions on the topic of housing considered as an area of commoning, we, as editors, contacted people engaged with this topic not merely as researchers or theorists but also as active participants in efforts to promote and explore the potentialities of commoning. A crucial aspect of such efforts is, we believe, the sharing of knowledge and experiences which we explicitly tried to become a shaping factor of our collaborative project. This volume, thus, attempts to both express and promote a commoning ethos that should characterize any work on the commons. Clearly, beyond any dominant practice of enclosing knowledge or intellectual skills, this collective endeavour, then, is a modest contribution to a research on commoning that reflects the values of commoning.

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Part I

Informal housing, infrastructures and commoning practices